

## Gun Safety

By now, you probably know what guns are and what can happen if they fall into the wrong hands. Even though guns are featured in many television shows, video games, computer games, and movies, it's important to know that real guns are dangerous. Guns are so dangerous that they can hurt or even kill someone you know — including other kids.

Being safe can keep kids, teens, and even adults from getting hurt. Many times, guns are fired by accident. All kids should know what to do if they find a gun or if they are with someone who finds a gun.

Read on to learn what to do if you come into contact with a gun. Because whether you live in a big city, in the suburbs, a small town, or on a farm, it could happen.

### Why Guns Aren't Fun

Even though you've seen cartoon characters get up and walk around after being shot by a gun, it's important to remember that this could only happen on TV, in movies, or video games. A real gun is never a toy, and life is not a video game. Real guns use bullets that hit actual targets. If that target is an animal or a person, the bullet can rip through skin, muscles, bones, and organs, doing a lot of damage. A gunshot can permanently injure or even kill someone.

That's why you must **never play with a real gun**. Even if you think you're safe, anything can happen once you put your finger on the trigger. Most kids in gun accidents later say they didn't fire the gun wanting to hurt anyone, yet someone got badly hurt. So never show a gun to a friend and *never, ever* point a gun at anyone — including yourself — even as a joke. You or your friend could end up in the hospital or worse.

It's also never funny to say you have a gun or threaten to shoot someone. These words are taken seriously and the police may be called. These pranks don't end up being fun for anyone involved.

### Gun Safety at Home

Most gunshot injuries happen after kids discover loaded guns at home. In the United States, there is great debate over gun control. No one seems to agree on who should be allowed to own guns and under what conditions. But experts on all sides believe that keeping a gun in the house is a serious decision, and the gun must be kept locked up where kids can't get to it. You can tell your parents that Project ChildSafe ([www.projectchildsafe.org](http://www.projectchildsafe.org)) provides free gun locks at special fairs and they also can be picked up at your local police department.

Experts say that the best way to prevent gun-related injuries and deaths is to remove guns from homes. However, the decision to own a gun is up to each family. Your family may have decided to keep guns in the house. Your dad may hunt, for example, or your mom may be a police officer or work in another profession where guns are required. Some families use guns for protection. But any gun can be dangerous if a kid tries to play with it.

If you come across a gun at home, you may be tempted to check it out — but DON'T! Instead, follow these important safety rules:

- Stop what you're doing.
- Don't touch the gun.
- Leave the area where the gun is.
- Tell an adult right away.

Not touching the gun is very important, but don't forget to also leave the area and tell an adult. By leaving the area, you can keep yourself safe in case someone else decides to touch the gun before an adult can remove it.

Remember, a baby sister or brother may be strong enough to pull a trigger!

## **At a Friend's or Neighbor's House**

Most people don't advertise the fact that they own guns. Before you visit your friend, make sure your parents check with your friend's parents to see if they own a gun.

You may already be playing at a friend's house when you learn that a gun is nearby. If your friend wants to show you the gun, say "no" and leave right away if you are close to home. Or call your parent for a ride and talk about what happened as soon as you're picked up. Don't worry about getting your friend into trouble — you will be helping to keep him or her safe.

## **At School**

Sometimes what you hear on the news can be scary, especially if you hear about kids getting hurt at school. Once in a great while, a kid who has access to guns may use one to express anger. When that happens, no one feels safe.

One thing to remember about gun violence at school is that it doesn't happen very often. School is actually one of the safest places for you to be. Most schools never experience serious violence.

But if someone at your school threatens you or talks about bringing a gun to school, speak up! Tell an adult like a teacher, a guidance counselor, or the principal as soon as possible. If you feel awkward doing this in front of other students, ask your teacher for private time or go to the school office to talk to the principal or counselor. And tell your mom or dad. They can get in touch with the right person at your school.

Don't feel that you're being a tattletale if you tell an adult that someone is threatening you. You will not get into trouble for reporting that you don't feel safe or that another kid is doing or saying something that scares you. You may even be a hero and prevent a tragedy from happening.

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