



**PROTECT**  
*Minnesota*

## **Kids and Guns**

A Guide for Keeping your Children and Teens Safe



## Gun Injuries and Deaths Are Preventable

Many children grow up in homes where guns are present and a normal part of life, where families engage in hunting or shooting sports. Other children are raised in homes where no guns are present. Some children grow up in families where the presence of guns is associated with violence in the home and/or community. All children, regardless of the status of guns in the home, are exposed to gun violence through the media. Gun violence in American schools has shocked the nation and shaken the feelings of safety and security of both parents and students. Parents should consider all of these influences as they make decisions about how to talk with their children about guns.

### **Other reasons why you, as a parent, should be concerned about gun violence:**

- The homicide rate in the United States is higher than in any other industrialized country. Most homicides are committed with firearms.
- Guns are the leading method of suicide for teens, and they most often commit the act in their own homes. Every day, three children or teens take their own lives in the United States.
- Almost every day, one person is shot unintentionally in Minnesota. More than half of those people injured or killed are children and teens.

## Guns in the Home

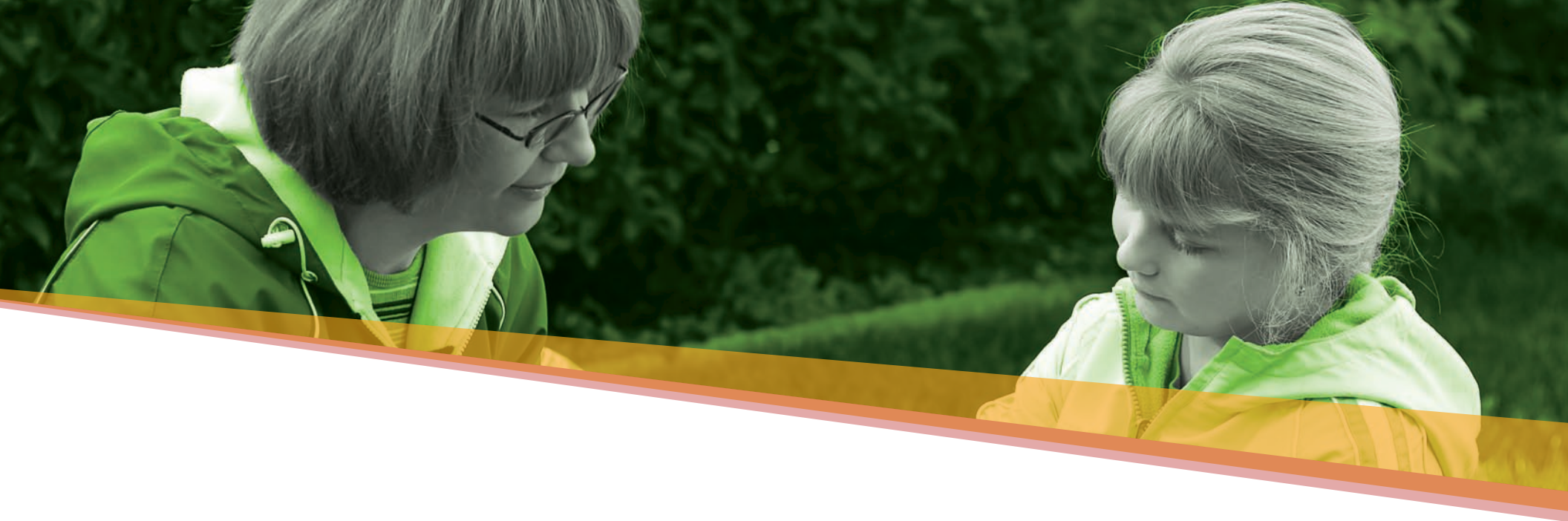
About 40% of Minnesota homes have guns, and research shows many people with young children or teens do not keep their guns securely stored.

**Make sure your home and the homes where your children play are as safe as possible.**

### **Kids are fascinated by guns and are naturally curious.**

Research shows that children who live in homes where guns are hidden are almost always aware of where those hiding spots are located even if the parents think the children don't know.

Parents of teens tend to become more lax about storing their guns safely as their children get older. **But this is a mistake.** Teens are at greater risk than are young children from being injured or killed by guns, due in large part to suicide attempts.



**As a parent, you are responsible for the safety of your children.**

You must also be responsible for the safety of children and teens who visit your home.

Along with gun ownership comes the responsibility to recognize that guns are deadly weapons and to keep them safely stored away from children, teens and thieves. **All guns in a home should be safely secured and stored in such a way as to prevent children and teens from having unsupervised access to them.**

If there are guns in your home, it is your responsibility to make sure they are:

- Unloaded
- Locked in a safe or lock box, out of sight. Only adults should have the ability to open the safe.
- Stored separately from ammunition. (Ammunition should also be locked up.)

**Never lend your gun to a teenager whose parent is not present.**

Any transfer of a firearm should involve responsible adults. Even if you know a teen well, you may not know all there is to know about his or her mental health status.

**Ask your neighbors and relatives.**

Before you allow your child to play at someone's home, ask the adult if there is a gun in the home, the same way you would ask if there is an unsupervised trampoline or a dangerous pet. If you find out a gun is present in the home, ask if it is kept safely stored—that is, unloaded and locked up. Some parents may choose not to allow their children to play in a home when a gun is present at all. **Do not allow your children to visit a home where a gun is accessible to them.**

**Remove guns from the home if someone in your household is depressed or suicidal.**

People who attempt suicide often choose to use a gun because it is the most lethal method, and because they have access to a gun. If a gun is used in a suicide attempt, the individual is more likely to complete the act of suicide.



## Keep Your Children Safe

Talking with children about important topics can sometimes be difficult. Depending on their developmental stage, they may have very different levels of understanding and also different attitudes about what they claim they want to hear from parents. But it is very important to have conversations about difficult topics. Children need to hear from you about matters that relate to their safety.

It is impossible to completely protect your children from things that can harm them, but there are steps you can take to keep them safer.

- 1. Start out by listening.** Ask your children questions.
- 2. Share your values with your children.** Let them know how you feel about the use of guns, the use of violence to solve problems and the value of human life.
- 3. Monitor what your children are exposed to in the media** (movies, TV, video games, etc.). Pay attention to the parental rating guides. If you're not sure if something is appropriate for your child, watch it first or sit with your child to watch. Parents are often quite surprised at the graphic nature of the violence in the video games their children want to play.

- 4. Do not allow your children or teens unsupervised access to guns** in your home or the homes of others.
- 5. If you own a gun, keep it securely stored.** Educate family members to keep guns securely stored at all times. Especially remind those who do not have children living in their homes, such as grandparents, that the children who visit them need to be protected from access to guns.
- 6. Talk to your elected officials** about laws that would make our communities safer from gun injuries and deaths. Loopholes in current Minnesota law make it easy for teens and criminals to illegally get guns.



## Ask Your Children Questions

According to the National Institute of Media and the Family, the average American child will see over 200,000 violent acts on TV by the time he or she graduates from high school. This number is compounded further when other media forms, such as movies and video games, are included. When children see violent acts on TV, they do not see all the consequences—the permanence of the act nor the physical and emotional impact on the victim, the victim’s family, and the shooter.

Conversations about guns should be open and honest, setting the stage for ongoing open discussion. Children’s opinions and feelings change over time, as they mature and gain life experience, so it is important to keep the lines of communication open and bring up the topic every now and then.

Children may have had experiences with guns or violence of which parents are unaware. Ask your children if they have seen or handled guns when not in your presence.

**The first step to talking with your children about an important topic is to listen to what they have to say. Ask questions such as:**

- Has anyone ever shown you a real gun (or a real handgun?)
- Have you ever been asked by a friend if you want to see or play with a real gun?
- What do you think about guns?
- Have you heard about someone who has gotten shot?
- What’s the difference between seeing someone shot on TV and real life?
- Have you ever been pressured to join a gang?
- What would you do if you saw a suspicious-looking person carrying a gun?

**In addition:**

- Ask your children what they have heard about stories in the news or events in their community.
- Discover what they think and feel about violence on TV, and in music, movies and video games.
- Ask your children if they feel safe.
- Find out how realistic their understanding is of guns and if they understand that guns used for hunting or sports can be misused or mishandled.



## Talking with Young Children

### Make sure your children understand:

- Guns are real.
- All guns, including those used for hunting and sport shooting, can kill or injure people.

### Tell them if they see a gun at a friend's or relative's house to:

- Get away from the gun—DO NOT TOUCH IT.
- Tell an adult.
- Call your parents and/or go home.

### Tell them if they are inside and hear gunshots nearby to:

- Duck and cover.
- Stay away from windows.
- Call 911 and wait for help to arrive.

### Teach young children this pledge:

- Guns can hurt or kill me, my friends, and my family.
- If I see a gun, I won't touch it.
- I will remember that any gun I see may be loaded.\*
- I know how important it is to keep myself safe.

\*Gun safety trainers teach students to treat every gun as if it is loaded.

## Talking with Teenagers

Talking with teens about guns is just as important as talking with young children. Recent information about brain development in teens has shown them to be more impulsive than adults and unable to think through consequences of their actions as clearly as can an adult. Concerns about teens having unsupervised access to guns include: potential use in suicide attempts, mischief-making, experimentation, or violence against others. In addition, while you may consider your own teens responsible, remember you cannot know for certain if other teens who visit your home are responsible or emotionally stable.

### Tell your teens:

#### **Guns used for hunting or sport shooting or safety training should not be carried when not engaged in those activities.**

- About 80% of people killed with a gun know the person who pulled the trigger.

#### **If someone you know carries a gun outside of the above activities:**

- Immediately get away from someone with a gun if you know of no good reason for that person to be carrying one.
- Immediately get away from someone with a gun if drugs or alcohol are present.
- Immediately get away from someone with a gun if there is an argument.



**If you feel unsafe and are thinking about getting a gun for protection.**

Consider protecting yourself using a non-lethal method, such as pepper spray, a personal alarm, or learning self defense moves. Take sensible precautions, such as not walking alone after dark.

**Make safe choices.**

Avoid people and places where you suspect violence might flare up easily, such as parties where there will be drugs or alcohol, or areas where violence has taken place before. Try to avoid confrontations, especially with someone who has, or can easily get a gun. Walk away from arguments that become heated.

**Speak up if you hear someone making violent threats or talking about suicide.**

Teens who are contemplating violent acts against themselves or others almost always mention it to someone in advance. Take it seriously if a friend says something to you about hurting him or herself or others. Teens often do not feel comfortable telling adults about things other teens do or say.

**Do not conform to the 'Code of Silence' when lives are in danger.**

**Encourage your teen to take the Student Pledge Against Gun Violence and to introduce it to others at school:**

- I will never bring a gun to school;
- I will never use a gun to settle a personal problem or dispute;
- I will use my influence with my friends to keep them from using guns to settle disputes.\*
- My individual choices and actions, when multiplied by those of young people throughout the country, will make a difference. Together, by honoring this pledge we can reverse the violence and grow up in safety.

\* Make certain your teens understand that this part of the pledge does not mean they must in any way place themselves in danger.



For more information about the Student Pledge Against Gun Violence, go to [www.pledge.org](http://www.pledge.org).



**If you hear of someone having a gun at school, tell an adult or call anonymously to Speak Up:**

Call 1-866-SPEAKUP.



## PROTECT *Minnesota*

Gun Injuries and Deaths are Preventable

PROTECT Minnesota is a campaign run by both non-gun owners and gun owners. Our group recognizes hunting and shooting sports are legitimate activities in Minnesota. We further recognize that many law-abiding individuals keep guns in their homes. We work to educate gun owners about ways to prevent unintentional shootings, teen suicides and firearm theft. We also work toward sensible gun laws that keep our communities safer and keep guns out of the hands of those who are not responsible enough to safely handle them.

### Web Site Resources

- **Common Sense About Kids and Guns**  
[www.kidsandguns.org](http://www.kidsandguns.org)
- **Minnesota Department of Natural Resources**  
[www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us)
- **PAX – ASK and Speak Up Campaigns**  
[www.paxusa.org](http://www.paxusa.org)
- **Student Pledge Against Gun Violence**  
[www.pledge.org](http://www.pledge.org)
- **Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE)**  
[www.save.org](http://www.save.org)

Please note: PROTECT Minnesota and its endorsing organizations do not necessarily endorse all content stemming from the links provided in this page. All resources in these web pages are provided for information purposes only and should not be construed as professional advice. Advice and opinions on mental health and other medical issues should be obtained through consultation with a licensed and trained professional.

**For more brochures or information about PROTECT Minnesota,  
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