



Every year in the United States, 350 children aged 17 and under gain access to a firearm and unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else. More than 700 more die by suicide with a gun each year. We have the power to prevent tragedies like these from happening. Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund has developed the Be SMART framework to help parents and adults prevent child gun deaths and injuries.

Did You Know

4.6 million children in America live in homes with guns that are both loaded and unlocked.

350 children 17 and under gain access to a firearm and unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else—sometimes fatally.

More than 700 children 17 and under die by suicide with a gun each year.

Safety is Always an Adult Responsibility

Kids will be kids, so it's always an adult's responsibility to keep children safe. Always assume that curious or impulsive kids may find and touch an unsecured gun, even if they've been told not to. If a child handles a gun, a bad decision can quickly become a fatal one. Be SMART adults protect kids by making sure all guns are stored securely, which means they are inaccessible to kids, and by making sure children are never in the presence of unsecured guns.

Our Story

Everytown for Gun Safety launched the Be SMART campaign to take action to promote responsible gun ownership and reduce child gun deaths. The campaign focuses on education and awareness about child gun deaths and secure gun storage. Be SMART volunteers encourage parents and caretakers to "Be SMART" and take these five simple steps to help prevent shootings by children: **Secure** all guns in your home and vehicles; **Model** responsible behavior around guns; **Ask** about the presence of unsecured guns in other homes; **Recognize** the role of guns in suicide; **Tell** your peers to be SMART.

Be SMART

Secure all guns in your homes and vehicles;
Model responsible behavior around guns;
Ask about unsecured guns in other homes;
Recognize the role of guns in suicide;
Tell your peers to Be SMART

What Can You Do?

It's simple. Spread the Be SMART message. Talk to your friends and family about the importance of secure gun storage, and get the word out in your community. Volunteers all over the country are available to deliver a 20-minute presentation entitled "Be SMART: A conversation about kids, guns and safety" to local groups and organizations.

Visit [BeSMARTforKids.org](https://www.BeSMARTforKids.org) to learn more and download resources. When it comes to kids' safety, we're all in this together!

For more information or to get involved
text SMART to 644-33

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Facts and Resources on Child Firearm Suicide

Gun violence has a devastating impact on children in America. **In fact, more than one-third of child gun deaths are suicides**—more than 700 child gun suicides each year.¹ One study showed that over 80 percent of children under the age of 18 who died by gun suicide used a gun belonging to a parent or relative.² For people of all ages, access to a gun increases the risk of death by suicide by three times.³

Most people who attempt suicide do not die—unless they use a gun.⁴ In fact, 90 percent of suicide attempts with a gun result in death—a much higher fatality rate than any other means of self-harm.⁵ This contributes to the fact that 42 percent of child suicides involve a gun.⁶

A national survey of high school students found that 22 percent had seriously considered attempting suicide within the last year.⁷ And one study showed that 41 percent of adolescents in gun-owning households report having “easy access” to the guns in their home.⁸

Signs to look out for when concerned that a loved one may be suicidal:⁹

- Prolonged sadness and depression
- Changes in mood or behavior
- Hopelessness
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Withdrawing/Isolation
- Aggression or agitation
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Talking about killing themselves

Research shows that secure firearm storage is associated with a decreased risk of child firearm suicide. One study showed that households that locked both firearms and ammunition had a 78 percent lower risk of self-inflicted firearm injuries among children and teenagers.¹⁰ The risk of gun violence and self-harm have grown during the COVID-19 pandemic, with kids experiencing increased levels of stress and isolation, and more guns being purchased. These factors make it even more important that firearms are stored securely.

Some additional key steps you can take to support your loved one include: inviting an honest conversation, listening and supporting your loved one, and encouraging them to see a mental health professional or a primary care physician.¹¹

Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call 1-800-273-8255. Available 24 hours a day.

Trevor Project, the LGBTQ youth suicide prevention line

Call TrevorLifeline at 1-866-488-7386.

Text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the United States, anytime, about any type of crisis.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached by calling or texting 988 or chatting on <http://988lifeline.org>.



¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A yearly average was developed using four years of most recent available data: 2018 to 2021. Children aged 0 to 17.

² Renee M. Johnson et al., "Who Are the Owners of Firearms Used in Adolescent Suicides?" *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 40, no. 6, (2010): 609-11.

³ Andrew Anglemyer, Tara Horvath, and George Rutherford, "The Accessibility of Firearms and Risk for Suicide and Homicide Victimization Among Household Members: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 160, no. 2 (2014): 101-10.

⁴ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Firearm Suicide in the United States," December 28, 2021, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/firearm-suicide-in-the-united-states/>.

⁵ Andrew Conner, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller, "Suicide Case-Fatality Rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014: A Nationwide Population-Based Study," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 171, no. 2 (2019): 885-95.

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A yearly average was developed using four years of most recent available data: 2018 to 2021. Analysis includes children aged 0 to 17.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Data Summary & Trends Report, 2011-2021," 2023, <https://bit.ly/3TG6nnd>.

⁸ Joseph A. Simonnet et al., "Psychiatric Comorbidity, Suicidality, and In-Home Firearm Access Among a Nationally Representative Sample of Adolescents," *JAMA Psychiatry*, 72, no. 2 (2015): 152-59.

⁹ American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, "Risk Factors, Protective Factors, and Warning Signs," (2022), <https://afsp.org/risk-factors-protective-factors-and-warning-signs..>

¹⁰ David C. Grossman et al., "Gun Storage Practices and Risk of Youth Suicide and Unintentional Injuries," *JAMA* 293, no. 6 (2005): 707-14.

¹¹ American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, "When Someone is at Risk," (2022), <https://afsp.org/when-someone-is-at-risk>.

UNLOAD, LOCK, AND SEPARATE: SECURE STORAGE PRACTICES TO REDUCE GUN VIOLENCE

Three-year-old Brayden Heath found his mother's handgun in the living room of their home in Anchorage, Alaska. Brayden was playing with the gun when it discharged, shooting him in the head. He was taken to a local hospital and pronounced dead later that day.¹

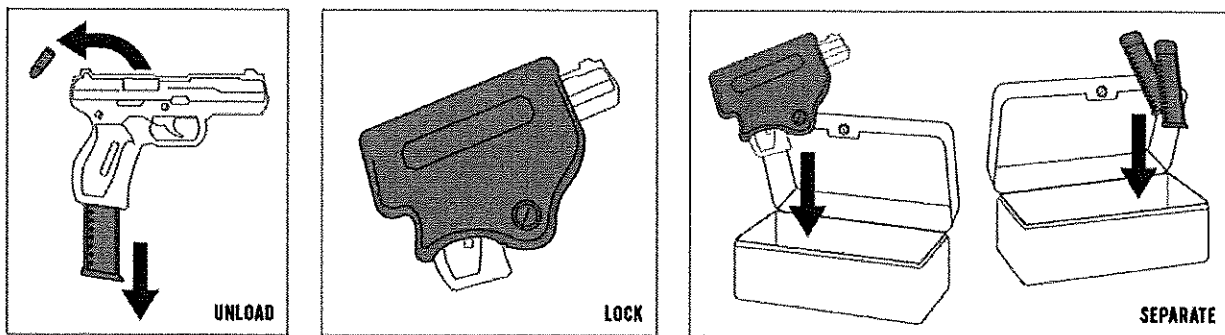
Introduction

There are an estimated 393 million civilian-owned firearms in the United States,² and more than one-third of homes contain at least one gun.³ Responsible gun owners can make our homes and communities safer by storing their firearms unloaded and locked, with ammunition kept in a separate place, to prevent access by children and other people who are at risk of harming themselves or others. Research shows that these storage practices can play a vital role in reducing the risk of gun violence, particularly among children, due to unintentional shootings and gun suicides.⁴

The bottom line is this: Storing firearms unloaded, locked, and separate from ammunition prevents access and saves lives.

What is secure firearm storage?

Experts agree: In order to prevent access, secure gun storage practices should include three methods employed in combination—unloading the ammunition, locking the firearm, and storing the firearm and ammunition in separate locations.⁵



UNLOAD

Gun owners should remove all ammunition from the firearm, including removing any chambered rounds

LOCK

Unloaded firearms should be secured with a firearm locking device, such as a cable lock, or in a locked location, like a safe or lock box. Locking devices, safes, and lock boxes are equipped with keys, combinations, or biometric technology that limit access. *Remember: Firearm locks do not prevent gun theft.*

SEPARATE

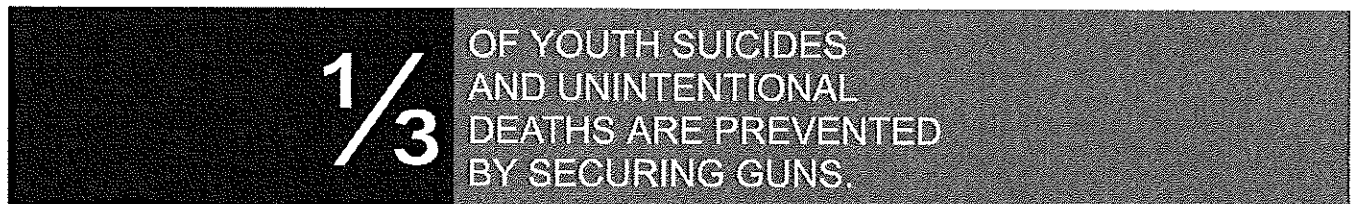
Ammunition should be stored separately from the firearm in a secure location.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) concludes that the absence of guns from homes is the most reliable and effective measure to prevent suicide, homicide, and unintentional firearm-related injuries to children and adolescents. But if there are guns in the home, AAP notes that storing guns unloaded and locked, with ammunition kept in a separate place, can mitigate the risk of child firearm injury.⁶

Key Findings

Access to unsecured firearms contributes to gun violence among children and teens. Brayden's tragic story is all too common.⁷ Every year, 350 children under the age of 18 unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else. That's roughly one unintentional shooting per day, and 72 percent of these incidents take place in or around a home.⁸ More than 700 children die by gun suicide each year,⁹ most often using guns belonging to a family member.¹⁰ Unsecured firearms also fuel gun violence outside the home. In incidents of school violence, the US Secret Service found that three-quarters of school shooters acquired their firearm from the home of a parent or close relative.¹¹

We are all safer when guns are stored unloaded, locked, and separate from ammunition. One study found that households that locked both firearms and ammunition were associated with a 78 percent lower risk of self-inflicted firearm injuries and an 85 percent lower risk of unintentional firearm injuries among children, compared to those that locked neither.¹² Another study estimated that if half of households with children that contain at least one unlocked gun switched to locking all their guns, one-third of youth gun suicides and unintentional deaths could be prevented, saving an estimated 251 lives in a single year.¹³



Despite the risks to safety, the majority of gun owners do not practice secure gun storage.

While millions of responsible gun owners follow recommended storage practices, an estimated 54 percent do not lock all of their guns, let alone store them unloaded, locked, and separate from ammunition.¹⁴ Gun owners with children in the home are slightly more likely to lock all of their guns,¹⁵ but an estimated 4.6 million American children live in households with at least one loaded and unlocked firearm.¹⁶

Contrary to popular belief, gun storage devices do not prevent owners from readily accessing their guns.

There is a common myth that storage devices negate the self-defense purpose of owning a gun by putting time-consuming barriers between the gun owner and their means of defense.¹⁷ The reality is that there are many affordable options for secure gun storage that provide owners with access to guns in a matter of seconds while still preventing access by children and people at increased risk of harming themselves or others.¹⁸ Further, it is possible that unsecured guns may actually *increase* the likelihood of crime and violence through an increased risk of gun theft.¹⁹ Each year, an estimated 200,000 to 500,000 guns are stolen, and many are funneled into the underground market, where once-legally-owned firearms can be transferred to people with dangerous histories.²⁰

Recommendations

Gun owners understand that with rights comes responsibility, and promoting secure firearm storage is integral to public safety. Community members should work together to encourage recommended firearm storage practices.

Community members and local leaders should encourage secure firearm storage through outreach to gun owners and general public awareness campaigns. Researchers, clinicians, and gun owners should work together to develop messaging and recommend storage options that are relevant to local values and context.²¹

Research suggests that clinicians can positively influence secure storage practices, especially when they provide free storage devices.²²

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3. Gun ownership reported in 34 percent of households. *General Social Survey, 2018*, Data Explorer. <https://bit.ly/2BZhtky>.
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Talking To Your Children About Guns

Every year, 350 children unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else when they find unlocked, loaded guns.¹ More than 700 American children die by gun suicide each year.² One study showed that over 80 percent of children under the age of 18 who died by gun suicide used a gun belonging to a family member.³ The Be SMART program, designed to prevent these shootings, recognizes **that secure storage by adult gun owners is essential to preventing unauthorized, unsupervised access to firearms by children.**

It is always an adult's responsibility to prevent unauthorized access to guns, not a curious child's responsibility to avoid guns. That means always keeping all firearms unloaded, locked, and stored separately from ammunition.

And yet research shows that approximately 4.6 million American children live in homes with guns that are not stored securely.⁴ We recognize that until every gun is securely stored, children are still at risk of finding unsecured guns, and parents need guidance on how to talk to their children about what to do if that happens. The suggestions below, developed in collaboration with Marjorie Sanfilippo, Ph.D., a professor and expert on children's behaviors around firearms, are a good place to start:

Tips for Talking to Young Children:

- Make it part of the normal safety conversation you have with your children.
- Keep the language simple; for example: "If you see a gun, don't touch it. Tell an adult right away."
- Tell children not to touch a gun, even if it looks like a toy.
- Assure children they will not get in trouble if they tell an adult they've seen a gun.
- Repeat it on a regular basis.

Tips for Talking to Adolescents:

- Include it in your general safety conversations about topics like drugs, alcohol, and drunk driving.
- Tell them to immediately leave any situation where an unsecured gun is present.

- Tell them not to listen to a friend who says a gun is unloaded or otherwise safe.
- Give your teen strategies to get out of a situation where a gun is present—or brainstorm them together. For example, you could agree that your teen would say: "Mom just texted me that I have to get home right now."
- Assure them that it's OK to ask people about the presence of unsecured guns in other homes they may be visiting, but offer to do it for them if they don't feel comfortable.

Tips for All Ages:

- Don't have the conversation only once. Talk to them frequently, just as you would about other crucial safety issues.
- Make sure they understand that any situation where there's an unsupervised gun is a dangerous situation.

It is important to remember that **talking to children about guns is a precaution, not a guarantee of safety.** One study found that young children who go through a week-long gun safety training are just as likely as children with no training to approach or play with a handgun when they find one.⁵

This is one reason we take issue with the National Rifle Association's program to reduce unintentional shootings by children, Eddie Eagle, as it focuses solely on educating children not to touch guns without permission and to alert an adult if they find a firearm. That alone is not nearly sufficient to reduce unsupervised access to guns by children.

¹ Everytown for Gun Safety, "#NotAnAccident Index: Unintentional Shootings by Children," <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/notanaccident/>. A yearly average was developed using data from 2015 to 2022. Incidents from the index are collected from media reports of unintentional shootings by children under the age of 18 that result in injury or death.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics, WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A yearly average was developed using four years of most recent available data: 2018 to 2021. Analysis includes children aged 0 to 17.

³ Renee M. Johnson et al., "Who Are the Owners of Firearms Used in Adolescent Suicides?" *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 40, no. 6 (2010): 609-11.

⁴ Matthew Miller and Deborah Azrael, "Firearm Storage in US Households with Children: Findings from the 2021 National Firearm Survey," *JAMA Network Open* 5, no. 2 (2022): e2148823.

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