

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

No. 37

(Updated December 2008)

CHILDREN AND FIREARMS

Parents, professionals and many others are concerned about the large numbers of children and adolescents killed by firearms. In order to prevent further deaths, it is important to remember the following:

1) We cannot gun-proof our children and adolescents. Children are playful and active. Adolescents are curious and impulsive. Such healthy traits when mixed with guns can cause death.

2) The best way to protect children against gun violence is to remove all guns from the home. If guns are kept in the home, there will always be dangers.

The following actions are crucial to lessen the dangers:

- Store all firearms unloaded and uncocked in a securely locked container. Only the parents should know where the container is located
- Store the guns and ammunition in separate locked locations
- For a revolver, place a padlock around the top strap of the weapon to prevent the cylinder from closing, or use a trigger lock; for a pistol, use a trigger lock
- When handling or cleaning a gun, never leave it unattended, even for a moment; it should be in your view at all times

Even if parents don't own a gun, they should check with parents at other places where their children play, to make sure safety precautions are followed. Research shows that a large percentage of accidentally shootings occur in the homes of friends and relatives. The tragedies take place most often when children are left unsupervised.

When youngsters use alcohol and also have a gun available, the risk for violence rapidly increases. Research reveals that youth suicide victims who used firearms were about five times more likely to have been drinking than those who used other means. Additionally, with regard to firearm-associated murders among family members, almost 90% of the offenders and victims had used alcohol or drugs before the killings.

The average American child witnesses many acts of violence each day on TV, in movies, and through computer games. Most involve firearms. Children often imitate what they see, and are more aggressive after extensive viewing of violence on TV, in movies and videos, and/or playing violent computer video or arcade games. Parents should help protect their children from the effects of gun violence portrayed in the media. For example, they can watch TV, movies, and videos with children; ration TV; and

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disapprove of the violent episodes in front of the children, stressing the belief that such behavior is not the best way to resolve a problem.

Children and adolescents with emotional or behavioral problems may be more likely than other children to use guns, against themselves or others. Parents who are concerned that their child is too aggressive or might have an emotional disorder may wish to seek an evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist or other qualified mental health professional.

More information about gun safety issues and guidelines is available from the:
The Brady Center to Prevent Handgun Violence
1225 I Street, N.W., Suite 1100
Washington, D.C. 20005
or at their website www.bradycenter.org

For more information see *Facts for Families*:

#10 Teen Suicide

#13 Children and TV Violence

#40 The Influence of Music and Music Videos

#55 Understanding Violent Behavior in Children, and

#65 Children’s Threats: When Are They Serious.

See also: *Your Child* (1998 Harper Collins)/*Your Adolescent* (1999 Harper Collins).

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The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 7,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

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