

## Firearm Safety For Families

‘Firearms’ is a term that includes handguns and rifles. In Canada, these products are regulated by the Firearms Act.

‘Non-powder’ firearms are BB guns and air guns. Paint ball guns shoot small balls containing paint and are used for the sport of paint ball.

Although injuries from firearms are completely preventable, many Canadian youth are injured or killed by guns each year.

Canada has one of the highest rates of youth death from guns in the developed world.

The Canadian Pediatric Society recommends that firearms be kept out of homes where children and teens live and play.

### Did you know?

More 15- to 19-year-old Canadian boys die from firearm injuries than from cancer.

Among boys in this age range, firearm injuries cause more deaths than fires, falls and drownings combined.

Most gun deaths among teens are suicides. If a teenager is depressed, it is essential to remove all firearms from the home.

Most gun deaths in Canada are caused by rifles, not handguns.

### How can guns be kept safely in the home?

If a gun must be kept in the home, it should be stored according to the rules set out in the Canadian Firearms Act.

The decision to keep a gun or a firearm in the home is not one that should be taken lightly, and a decision that comes with a wide range of responsibilities to you as a parent.

There is a serious risk of gun related injury or death when children are around guns, and when one is in their own home that risk escalates substantially.

Children particularly are especially curious when it comes to guns and gun safety.

As a parent, do not lull yourself into a false sense of security when it comes to gun safety.

Experts at the National Rifle Association caution parents to not only speak to their children about guns and gun safety, but to make the inherent assumption that if a child sees a gun, their instinct is to pick it up, and pull the trigger.

The media does not help us in this matter, making action and adventure look fun, nor do today’s toy makers with a bevy of play weapons on the market.

Parents are urged not to purchase a firearm or a gun at all if they are not willing to take on the standard responsibilities of child gun safety.

### Ensuring child gun safety

How can you ensure your children are safe when you have a gun in the home? The two basic responsibilities you have as a parent and as a gun owner, are to:

- > Store your gun appropriately and safely. (Gun Safety Cabinets)
- > Talk to your children about guns, gun safety, and what they should or should not do around guns.

### The Safest Ways to Store Your Gun or Firearm in a Home with Children:

Keep your gun unloaded, and keep it locked up. A loaded gun is an immediate weapon.

Lock your gun and your ammunition in separate locations.

If ammunition is easy to get to, children will learn very fast how to load an unloaded gun.

Hide the keys to your gun or firearm safe or location, or better yet, keep them on you at ALL times.

Some parents even wear them on a necklace to ensure maximum safety.

Ask your neighbors who may also own guns if their weapons are stored in similar fashion, this is especially important if homes that your child frequents.

Talk with your children about guns and firearm safety.

### Talking to your children

You may be wondering what is the appropriate way to talk to your children about child gun safety.

How you talk to your children about gun safety will depend on their age and what they can or can not relate to or understand.

### **Here are some tips:**

#### Very Young Children:

The younger your children are, the more important it is to teach them that what they see on TV or in the movies is not real and that real guns can really hurt people, even themselves.

Young children need to be taught never to touch guns under any circumstance.

This message needs to be repeated periodically in order to keep kids from forgetting.

A simple 4-step rule as proposed by the Eddie Eagle Gun Safe program teaches children from pre-kindergarten through Grade 4 important gun safety steps.

These include, “If You See A Gun:”

**STOP!**

**DON'T TOUCH!**

**LEAVE!**

### **TELL AN ADULT!**

This system is easy to remember for children of this age group.

#### Preteens:

Preteens are at the perfect age to start learning and being taught that guns and violence do not solve problems, and in fact, can create even more.

This age group needs to learn that there are serious consequences when it comes to handling guns poorly.

They need to be emphasized that they should never touch guns unless they have permission to do so.

#### Teens:

Teens are actually the most difficult group to talk to about gun safety, as they are generally more rebellious and independent.

Maintain a steady dialog with your teen and see if you can spot any possible problems.

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that it is more difficult to keep teens away from guns, than it is to keep guns away from teens, so at this stage, you may want to keep the gun out of your home if your teen poses a risk to gun safety.

The parent of a teen that owns a gun needs to be more vigilant towards signs of depression or isolation as these are signs of an increased risk of suicide. A gun will only

make it easier for your teen.

The tips here may seem simple but even one step alone can dramatically decrease the number of kids that are hurt by guns every year.

The most effective measure of child gun safety that you can implement in your home is to not have one at all.

However, if you do decide to maintain a firearm in your home, ensure you take every responsibility of gun ownership, and parenting, very seriously to prevent gun related deaths and injuries to your most valuable assets – your children.