

Parents' Guide to Gun Safety

Courtesy of the National Rifle Association

Parents play a key role in developing safe practices and are ultimately responsible for the behavior and safety of their children. Because isolated lessons and concepts can be quickly forgotten, repetition will help children remember standard safety procedures.

Parents can teach their children the Eddie Eagle program at home. Simply call the Eddie Eagle Program at 800-231-0752 and request a sample kit. Each kit includes a copy of the student workbook, instructor's guide, program statistics, a description of materials, an order form, and the Parents' Guide to Gun Safety brochure.

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This text is also available as a brochure. To receive a copy of the "Parents' Guide to Gun Safety" brochure, email eddie@nrahq.org or call (800) 231-0752.

The Parents' Responsibility

In a home where guns are kept, the degree of safety a child has rests squarely on the child's parents.

Parents who accept the responsibility to learn, practice and teach gun safety rules will ensure their child's safety to a much greater extent than those who do not. Parental responsibility does not end, however, when the child leaves the home.

According to federal statistics, there are guns in approximately half of all U.S. households. Even if no one in your family owns a gun, chances are that someone you know does. Your child could come in contact with a gun at a neighbor's house, when playing with friends, or under other circumstances outside your home.

It is critical for your child to know what to do if he or she encounters a firearm anywhere, and it is the parents' responsibility to provide that training.

Talking With Your Child About Gun Safety

There is no particular age to talk with your child about gun safety. A good time to introduce the subject is the first time he or she shows an interest in firearms, even toy pistols or rifles. Talking openly and honestly about gun safety with your child is usually more effective than just ordering him or her to "Stay out of the gun closet," and leaving it at that. Such statements may just stimulate a child's natural curiosity to investigate further.

As with any safety lesson, explaining the rules and answering a child's questions help remove the mystery surrounding guns. Any rules set for your own child should also apply to friends who visit the home. This will help keep your child from being pressured into showing a gun to a friend.

Toy Guns vs. Real Guns

It is also advisable, particularly with very young children, to discuss gun use on television as opposed to gun use in real life. Firearms are often handled carelessly in movies and on TV. Additionally, children see TV and movie characters shot and "killed" with well-documented frequency. When a young child sees that same actor appear in another movie or TV show, confusion between entertainment and real life may result. It may be a mistake to assume that your child knows the difference between being "killed" on TV and in reality.

If your child has toy guns, you may want to use them to demonstrate safe gun handling and to explain how they differ from genuine firearms. Even though an unsupervised child should not have access to a gun, there should be no chance that he or she could mistake a real gun for a toy.

What Should You Teach Your Child About Gun Safety?

If you have decided that your child is not ready to be trained in a gun's handling and use, teach him or her to follow the instructions of NRA's Eddie Eagle GunSafe® Program. If you find a gun:

STOP!

Don't Touch.

Leave the Area.

Tell an Adult.

The initial steps of "Stop" and "Don't Touch" are the most important. To counter the natural impulse to touch a gun, it is imperative that you impress these steps of the safety message upon your child.

In today's society, where adult supervision is not always possible, the direction to "Leave the Area" is also essential. Under some circumstances, area may be understood to be a room if your child cannot physically leave the apartment or house.

"Tell an Adult" emphasizes that children should seek a trustworthy adult, neighbor, relative or teacher - if a parent or guardian is not available.

The NRA's Eddie Eagle GunSafe Program includes an instructor guide, activity books, poster, and an animated video to explain its four-step safety message. For more information about the program, visit Eddie Eagle or call (800) 231-0752.

Basic Gun Safety Rules

Although the NRA has complete gun safety rules available for specific types of firearm use (hunting and competition, for example), the following three rules are fundamental in any situation. Whether or not you own a gun, it is important to know these rules so that you may insist that others follow them.

- Always keep the gun pointed in a safe direction. Whether you are shooting or simply handling a gun, never point it at yourself or others. Common sense will tell you which direction is the safest. Outdoors, it is generally safe to point the gun toward the ground, or, if you are at a shooting range, toward the target. Indoors, be mindful of the fact that a bullet can penetrate ceilings, floors, walls, windows, and doors.
- Always keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot. When holding a gun, rest your trigger finger outside the trigger guard alongside the gun. Until you are actually ready to fire, do not touch the trigger.
- Always keep the gun unloaded until ready to use. If you do not know how to check to see if a gun is unloaded, leave it alone. Carefully secure it, being certain to point it safely and to keep your finger off the trigger, and seek competent assistance.

Where to Get Training

The time may come when you or your family members want to learn how to handle and shoot a gun safely. In the case of a child, his or her attitude, learning ability, and physical and emotional maturity are some of the factors to be weighed before allowing formal instruction to begin. When a parent decides a young person is ready, many training opportunities are available. For more information on Youth Programs, call 877-672-6282.

Providing instruction in the safe handling, use, and storage of firearms is one of the NRA's most important functions. Basic Firearm Training Courses, taught by over 75,000 NRA Certified Instructors, are offered in every state. A program called "FIRST Steps" (Firearm Instruction, Responsibility, and Safety Training) provides a three-hour orientation to your specific firearm. For more information about taking any of these courses, call 877-672-6822.

Gun Owners' Responsibilities

Most states impose some form of legal duty on adults to take reasonable steps to deny access by children to dangerous substances or instruments. It is the individual gun owner's responsibility to understand and follow all laws regarding gun purchase, ownership, storage, transport, etc. Contact your state police and/or local police for information regarding such laws. If you own a gun and do not know how to operate it, do not experiment with it. Point it in a safe direction, keep your finger off the trigger, and store it securely. Seek competent assistance and instruction at once. An untrained adult can be as dangerous as a curious child.

Store guns so that they are inaccessible to children and other unauthorized users. Gun shops sell a wide variety of safes, cases, and other security devices. While specific security measures may vary, a parent must, in every case, assess the exposure of the firearm and absolutely ensure that it is inaccessible to a child.

This webpage is not intended as a complete course in gun safety and is not a substitute for formal, qualified instruction in the handling, use, or storage of firearms. The guidelines herein should be considered options to minimize the chance of an accident occurring in the home. © Copyright 2012 The National Rifle Association of America
<http://eddieagle.nra.org/information-for-parents.aspx>