

Common Sense Safety Tips –Talk with Your Kids

It is vital that parents talk to their children about guns, but this can be a difficult conversation to have. The discussion must be age-appropriate and offer children clear instructions about avoiding guns without adult supervision.

Young children

Experts advise parents to reassure children that, as parents, they are doing their best to keep children safe. Children can be exposed to a good amount of violence by the media, especially from TV and movies. It is important to teach children that this is not real and that guns cause real injuries. Emphasize to them that they should never touch a gun and should always tell an adult if they come across one. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends repeating this message periodically to keep children from forgetting.

Pre-teens

This is a good time to begin talking with children about ways to solve problems that do not involve violence. With older children, explain to them the consequences of violence and the dangers inherent in the mishandling of guns. Continue to emphasize to children that they should never touch a gun without adult supervision.

Teens

This can be a difficult time to maintain open communication with kids as they become more independent and rebellious. However, maintaining dialogue with your children can help you spot any potential problems. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that, at this point in a child's life, it is easier to keep guns away from teens than to keep teens away from guns, which are often glamorized in the media. It is important that parents watch for signs of depression or changes in behavior, as teens feeling this way are at an increased risk for suicide.

The most important thing a parent can do, according to Betsy McAlister Groves, director of the Child Witness to Violence Program at Boston Medical Center, is to listen to a child's concerns. As she told Newsweek, "allowing kids to voice their worries is very important." Not talking about the problem will not make it go away.

All parents must take common sense steps to protect children both by talking to them about guns and by unloading and locking all guns so that a child or teen cannot access them without direct adult supervision.