

It's Never Too Soon

When—not if—to educate children on firearms safety

The issue of how kids should learn about firearms has always been controversial. Some parents think that because they don't have a firearm in their house, it's not necessary to teach their kids about firearm safety. Others believe that simply telling their kids to never touch their gun is teaching them firearms safety. This only makes their kids more curious. Kids are naturally curious and love to explore. Chances are, if you have a firearm in your home, your kids already know where it is and have probably handled it in the most unsafe way possible when you were not home.

When I was a kid, my dad kept his collection of pocketknives in his top dresser drawer, and my brothers and I were taught that we were not to touch his knives. What do you think was the first thing we did when our parents weren't home? We headed straight for that dresser and played with Dad's knives. I'm sure if he hadn't had his guns locked up in a gun cabinet, we would have handled them as well. (Dad, if you're reading this, I'm sorry you had to find out this way.)

I was 21 and had already become involved in law enforcement before

anybody taught me anything about firearms safety. I'm fortunate that I never came across a firearm before being shown how to handle one safely, because I'm sure I would have violated several safety rules. As a parent, even if you don't own a gun it is important that you talk to your kids about gun safety and what to do if they should ever come across a gun, because many others such as family, friends and neighbors, do own them. Just because you don't own a gun does not mean it is not important to teach your kids the danger of firearms.

Several years ago, when I was a police chief, I spoke to the principal of our elementary school and asked her if I could come into the school along with Eddie Eagle of the NRA and teach the kids what to do if they should find a firearm. She thought it was a great idea and we set up dates and times for me and Eddie Eagle to come and talk to the kids. The local newspaper caught wind of what I was doing and printed it in the paper. After it hit the newspaper, I was contacted by the principal and advised that she had just received a call from the superintendent, who didn't think gun safety should be taught in the schools.

He felt that was something parents should teach their kids at home. Unfortunately, approximately five years later, a young man in the school district was killed when he and one of his friends were playing with a loaded gun; the gun discharged, striking him once in the face, killing him. I have always wondered if that accident could have been prevented had that superintendent allowed us to teach these four steps in the public schools on what kids should do if they find a firearm:



As a parent and a law enforcement firearms instructor, these are the steps I've taught my children. I've even gone a step further by offering my kids a \$20 reward for following these steps if they ever come across a gun. My kids are just waiting for me to slip up and leave one of my guns lying around so they can take dear old Dad's money.

I have taken the curiosity of handling a gun away from them by offering to let them handle one of my guns whenever they ask. I would rather be the one to unload it and show them how to visually inspect it to be sure it is unloaded, than leave it to one of their friends—who has probably never been shown how to handle a gun safely. This also gives me the opportunity to teach them the four safety rules that have been adopted by nearly every professional shooting school I have ever attended. Listed below are the four safety rules that I teach my kids, along with every adult that lives in my household.

1. Treat every gun as if it were loaded. By doing so, you will handle it differently than you would if it were unloaded. When a person is told that a gun is



Eddie Eagle teaches a group of elementary school pupils about firearms safety.

unloaded, usually the first thing they want to do is aim it at an object and pull the trigger, without ever visually inspecting it for themselves.

2. Always point your weapon in a safe direction. I learned from an advanced firearms class I attended a couple of years ago that the safest place to point a weapon inside a house is in the corner where the floor and wall meet. This is where the baseboards are the thickest, which helps absorb the bullet. I've spoken to several home builders and found this to be true.

3. Know your target, and what is beyond. Take the time to look beyond your target, before shooting.

4. Keep your finger straight along the frame until you are on target and ready to shoot. Point at where you want to hit your target, and then place your finger on the trigger when you're ready to shoot.

I'm still not sure that educating kids on firearms safety is going to be enough. We educate our kids on the dangers of the use of drugs and alcohol, yet each year thousands of kids die from drugs and alcohol overdoses. We educate our kids each year on sex education, yet each year there are thousands of unwanted teenage pregnancies. The only way to keep our kids safer is by making firearms less accessible to them, by keeping them locked up when they are not on your person.

I know what many of you are thinking: if my gun is locked up, how I am going to get to it fast enough if I hear somebody breaking into my house in the middle of the night? I have an alarm clock that was made by Thousands Oaks, which is a fully functional radio/alarm clock; it is also a quick access gun safe. This metal-lined safe has a 12-digit keypad into which you can program your own four-digit security code, and costs right around \$100, a small price for a safer home.

From the time I perceive danger to the time I have my gun in my hand, less than 2 seconds has passed. If I'm not conscious enough to open my quick access safe, then I'm not going to be conscious enough to make a good judgmental decision on whether to shoot or not shoot. Besides that, numerous courts have ruled that the more accessible your weapon is, the more liable you are.

So by keeping your firearms locked up, you will not only help keep kids safer, you will also reduce your liability



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by helping to prevent your firearms from being stolen. It only makes sense to keep your guns locked up.

Even though sex education and DARE were met with objections from parents and other groups, public schools started teaching them in the mid 1980s. Hopefully someday soon firearms safety can be taught in public schools to help prevent any more firearms related deaths by kids who have never been taught firearms safety. Not all adults have been shown how to safely handle a firearm, and therefore they are unable to show their kids. I believe that education is the key to a safer society. So, if you know a kid that hasn't received any type of firearms safety instruction, see if you can get permission from his or her parents to take them to the range and teach them. While you're there, introduce them to the wonderful sport of shooting. The kid you take today may grow up to be the leader who will mandate firearms safety being taught in schools tomorrow.

About the author: Steve Farmer is from Lima, Ohio, and has more than 20 years experience in law enforcement, 10 of which he served as a police chief. He has also been a police trainer for 15 years, training and certifying numerous officers in the use of the revolver, semi-automatic, shotgun, tactical assault rifle, Oleoresin Capsicum, straight baton, expandable baton, side handle baton, Taser, and radar. He has taught basic police academies at Lima Technical College and Apollo Career Center. He is Insight Firearms Training and Development's lead instructor for Ohio, training citizens on how to legally carry a concealed weapon in the states of Ohio, Florida and Utah.

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