



DISCUSSING SAFE STORAGE EFFECTIVELY: STRENGTHENING GUN-OWNER RELATIONSHIPS

Before the coronavirus, a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 67 percent of gun owners in the United States reported that protection is a major reason why they own a gun. While we don't have polling post-coronavirus, accounting for the surge in gun purchasing, anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of families owning firearms for protection has only increased since the pandemic has begun.

For some Americans, owning a gun is seen as a preventative measure to protect their families, much in the same way others may install a security system or have a German shepherd. If we are going to work together to ensure that our kids are kept safe from gun injury and fatality, we must understand where each other is coming from, breaking down stigma to ensure that we can have conversations about safe storage in the same way we talk about pool safety or peanut allergies. Unlike peanut products or pools, guns can be more unknown (and scary) to our kids, making the conversations that we have together about safe storage more important.

1. JUST ASSUME

While assuming without knowing does not always end well, in this particular instance, we suggest otherwise. Assume that guns are a part of everyone's life. When bringing your child to a friend's home, ask how their guns are stored, not just whether or not they have them. Families can say they don't own guns, but, if they do, your question can open the conversation into a larger discussion about the family's storage practices, and you won't make them feel potentially stigmatized for their decision to own guns.

2. DON'T BLAME OR ACCUSE

Most people know themselves well enough to understand that if someone appears to be blaming or accusing them of something, they will shut down. Especially when talking about guns, accusing someone of not being responsible enough could end the important conversations about safe gun storage that we know saves lives through reducing incidences of family fire. Make sure to come to the conversation with curiosity to learn, and offer solutions rather than judgement.

3. FOCUS ON THE SUCCESS STORIES

Kids are curious and get into everything. Be sure to commend gun-owning families for taking the necessary steps to ensure their kids' safety, and continue to have discussions about the ever-changing disposition of young people (and their friends). If we are to keep our kids safe from gun injury, all firearms must be locked, unloaded, and with ammunition stored separately. A simple gun lock that may have prevented a toddler's access to guns will not necessarily prevent a teenager's. Emphasize the success of families safe storage, but also acknowledge the changing landscape.

4. DO YOUR RESEARCH

We can all agree that practicing responsible gun ownership and safe storage prevents family fire, whether it's the Marine Corps, the Heritage Foundation, or Safer Homes. The differences often come down to language – the way in which we frame these critical conversations. Be culturally aware of who you are speaking to – learn how safety is discussed in other communities, culturally framing for someone who is a veteran, hunter, or owns a firearm for protection. Do your research.

5. ASK FROM A PLACE OF HONESTY AND RESPECT

These conversations will be worthwhile when each person is engaged and genuinely willing to listen to one another. We all have a vested interest in protecting our children but we need to meet each other where we are at. When engaging in conversations about safe gun storage with family and friends, set the tone. Give the honesty and respect that can help to prevent family fire.