

Guns in your house? Time for a talk with your kids

By SUZANNE KENNEDY

If your children are anything like mine, they are constantly asking for playdates or wanting to go to their friends' houses. When they were younger, I'd make the call or chat with the other parent to find a time, place, etc. We might discuss food allergies or drop off times, but there is one question I've never asked: "Do you have guns in your home?" I just never thought of it! And ... I was a little embarrassed to ask. We have guns in our home, yet no one has ever asked us about them.

According to federal statistics, about 40 percent of American households have guns. In Eastern Oregon, I bet the average is even higher. My husband and boys came home with four pheasants just the other day. Now that it's a fairly



common occurrence to use the guns for hunting, we have to be much more careful about storing them and being safe with them.

We have a gun safe in our house. The boys have BB guns and pellet guns. My husband has taught the

kids how to hold the guns – barrel down or straight up – and to respect them as deadly weapons.

However, it seems as though we've missed the mark (pun intended) when it comes to guns in other people's homes. What are we missing when it comes to gun safety?

The responsibility of firearm safety lies directly in the hands of the parents and the gun owner. If you own a gun (or guns), keep them locked up in a place inaccessible to children. The key should be stored separately, as well as the ammunition.

If you plan on allowing your children to hunt or be around hunters, a hunter safety course is a must. Gun safety is included in what's covered in these courses.

And how do you talk to your kids about guns? They're in video games and all over TV and movies. It's never too early to start, so as soon as your children see them, that's the time to start talking, whether or not you keep them in your house. Talk about the differences between real and toy guns, about the difference between pretend and real life. Some readers may try to keep toy guns out of your home. Frankly,



Strategies

my boys can make a gun out of a peanut butter sandwich, so that's a losing battle for us. When you set up a play date, and you don't know if they have guns, just ask. And don't be afraid to check if they're locked up.

Make sure toy guns look like toys and teach gun "etiquette." We never point guns at faces or heads, and never at someone who isn't playing. If they're handling real guns, they should always act like they are loaded and act as though the safety can fail at any time.

Be sure your children know what to do if they come across a gun in someone else's house or at the park (or anywhere). For younger kids, start online by visiting eddie-eagle.nra.org. It's a politics-free zone that teaches kids about gun safety with a cute video. They've created a catch phrase similar to stop, drop, and roll. It's Stop, Don't Touch, Run Away, Tell a Grown-up.

When the kids get to be middle school or high school age, keep talking. Ask about their friends and their friends' parents. Be clear with your expectations. Tell them what you expect them to do if their friends talk about guns or show them a gun. Removing the mystery makes them far less curious and more likely to follow the rules.

Time for me to get back to the nerf gun war in my hallway!

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