

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

No. 37

(Updated 7/2001)

CHILDREN & FIREARMS

Parents, professionals and many others are concerned about the increasing numbers of children and adolescents killed by firearms. According to recent statistics:

- 46% of all homes contain guns
- The majority of guns are stored unlocked, and 34% are stored unlocked and loaded
- Nearly all accidental shootings occur in and around the home
- For every gun death, there are at least 4 gun related injuries
- Most suicides and accidental gun injuries involve guns which have been kept loaded and accessible

We cannot gun-proof our children and adolescents. Children are playful and active. Adolescents are curious and impulsive. Such healthy traits when mixed with guns can cause death.

The best way to protect children against gun violence is to remove all guns from the home. If guns are kept in the home, there will always be dangers. The following actions are crucial to lessen the dangers:

- Store all firearms unloaded and uncocked in a securely locked container. Only the parents should know where the container is located
- Store the guns and ammunition in separate locked locations
- For a revolver, place a padlock around the top strap of the weapon to prevent the cylinder from closing, or use a trigger lock; for a pistol, use a trigger lock
- When handling or cleaning a gun, never leave it unattended, even for a moment; it should be in your view at all times

Even if parents don't own a gun, they should check with parents at other places where their children play, to make sure safety precautions are followed. In a study of accidental handgun shootings of children under 16, nearly 40% of the shootings occurred in the homes of friends and relatives. The tragedies occurred most often when children were left unsupervised.

When youngsters use alcohol and also have a gun available, the risk for violence rapidly increases. In a youth suicide study, victims who used firearms were about five times more likely to have been drinking than those who used other means. In a study of

Children and Firearms, "Facts for Families," No. 37 (7/2001)

firearm-associated murders among family members, almost 90% of the offenders and victims had used alcohol or drugs before the killings.

The average American child witnesses an increasing number of acts of violence each day on TV, in movies, and through computer games. Most involve firearms. Children often imitate what they see, and are more aggressive after extensive viewing of violence on TV, in movies and videos, and/or playing violent computer video or arcade games. Parents should help protect their children from the effects of media violence. For example, they can watch TV, movies, and videos with children; ration TV; and disapprove of the violent episodes in front of the children, stressing the belief that such behavior is not the best way to resolve a problem.

Children and adolescents with emotional or behavioral problems may be more likely than other children to use guns, against themselves or others. Parents who are concerned that their child is too aggressive or might have an emotional disorder may wish to seek an evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist.

More information about gun safety issues and guidelines is available from the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, 1225 I Street, N.W., Suite 1100, Washington, D.C. 20005 or at their website <http://www.handguncontrol.org>.

For more information see *Facts for Families*: #10 Teen Suicide, #13 Children and TV Violence, #40 The Influence of Music and Music Videos, #55 Understanding Violent Behavior in Children, and #65 Children's Threats: When Are They Serious. **See also: *Your Child* (1998 Harper Collins)/*Your Adolescent* (1999 Harper Collins).**

###

The Development of the Facts for Families series is a public service of the AACAP. If you would like to support expanded distribution of the series, please make a tax deductible contribution to the AACAP Campaign for America's Kids. By supporting this endeavor, you will support a comprehensive and sustained advocacy effort on behalf of children and adolescents with mental illnesses.

Please make checks payable to AACAP, and send to: AACAP, Campaign for America's Kids, P.O. Box 96106, Washington, D.C. 20090

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 6,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

Facts for Families is developed and distributed by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP). Facts sheets may be reproduced for personal or educational use without written permission, but cannot be included in material presented for sale. To purchase full sets of FFF, contact the AACAP Publications Clerk at: 1.800.333.7636, ext. 131.

Nelson A. Tejada, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Operations Department, Phone: 202-966-7300 ext. 131, Main Fax: 202-966-2891, Publication Fax: 202-464-9980