

One Question Every Parent Should Ask

Written by Kathleen Kelly, M.D., M.P.H. candidate with Lyse Deus, Julie Belkowitz, M.D., M.P.H. and Oneith Cadiz, M.D.

Children are naturally curious.

Infants and toddlers explore their surroundings by rattling, throwing, and chewing on objects. As children grow, they start to explore their environments in new ways – a new hobby, a sports team, a new friend – and their curiosity continues to grow. As youth enter adolescence, their interests, dreams, talents, and those around them help shape their developing identity.

As children explore new areas with excitement and wonder, it is important to keep their safety in mind, even while in the homes of friends and family. In these different places, children focus on the fun and not on the danger of household objects. While at home, parents can keep the environment safe by covering outlets for infants, locking doors with access to cleaning supplies and pill cabinets, removing access to or locking doors with alcohol, and keeping firearms unloaded, locked, and safely stored. However, when children leave their parent's homes, the safety of the new location, including access to weapons, is often unknown.

A question as simple as, "Is there an unlocked gun

in your house?" can save your child's life.

Whether a toddler or teenager, one way to keep your child safe while away from home is to always ASK about firearms. According to Gallup, 44% of Americans report living in a house with at least one gun present, and 48% of those living in a household with a gun report having a child under 18 in the home. A recent study from the journal, Pediatrics, found that just over one-third of all firearm injuries seen in the emergency department were unintentional injuries.

ASK Day, held on June 21st, stands for Asking Saves Kids. It is an opportunity at the start of summer to remind parents and caregivers of the importance of ASKing about guns in the home to prevent unintentional firearm injuries.

Talking about firearms can be difficult.

Using phrases that focus on your concern for your children can help alleviate tension. Other ways to ASK include:

- "I'm always worried about my child's safety. What do you do with the guns in your home?"
- "We saw a campaign online and I've started asking everyone, how do you store the guns in your home?"
- For moving a child into their first apartment at college or elsewhere: "I've been concerned about (child's name) 's safety since they were little, I just wanted to ASK, are there guns in the apartment? How do you store it?"

While the effects of unintended firearm discharge can be deadly, they can be prevented. Information on the safe storage of guns is available from the American Academy of Pediatrics. For those who own guns, safe storage of guns is critical and

includes:

- Keeping the gun unloaded
- Keeping the gun locked
- Storing ammunition separate from the gun
- Keeping ammunition locked

Firearms are common in American homes.

Start summer with a question - not a bang. Focusing on your concern for your child can help reduce some tension when discussing firearms with friends and family. Children should remain curious about their surroundings and have the opportunity to keep exploring them safely when caregivers remember to ASK, "Is there an unlocked gun in your house?"

For more information about how to keep your child safe, call the Injury Free Coalition for Kids, a program of the Children's Trust at 305-243-9080 or visit www.injuryfree.org.

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