

NEWSLETTER

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ASK ABOUT GUNS!

All parents want to keep their children safe. We all want to ensure that our children grow up healthy and in possession of all the body parts they came into the world with.

Most parents realize the importance of accident prevention in the home and automobile. They child-proof the house and never fail to buckle up the kids.

What about other peoples' houses? How many of us ask parents about the presence of guns in their home?

I certainly didn't. It never occurred to me to ask, before I allowed my child to attend a sleep-over or just hang out at another family's house, two simple questions: Do you have a gun in your home? How it is stored?

I now know how important these two little questions are.

Hard Facts about guns:

- o There are OVER 2 MILLION GUNS IN AMERICA.
- o Guns are EVERYWHERE.
- o There is a gun in 43% OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN.
- o There is a LOADED GUN IN ONE OUT OF 10 HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN.
- o There is an UNLOCKED GUN IN ONE IN EVERY 8 HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN.

True facts about children:

- o Kids are CURIOUS.
- o Kids are FASCINATED WITH GUNS.
- o Kids--even little ones--KNOW OR CAN FIGURE OUT HOW TO FIRE A GUN.

So it's not enough to tell your kids that guns are dangerous. It's not enough to tell your kids never to touch a gun. As a matter of fact, one study videotaped children who were instructed never to touch a gun and who could repeat the safety rules to the teacher. But when the adults left the room most of the kids DID PICK UP THE GUN.

An organization called ASK--Asking Saves Kids (www.AskingSavesKids.com) recommends a three-step safety approach:

- 1) Before you allow your child to someone's house (friend, relative, neighbor) ASK IF THEY HAVE A GUN IN THE HOME.
- 2) IF THERE IS A GUN MAKE SURE THAT THE GUN IS SAFELY STORED (unloaded, locked, ammunition locked separately).
- 3) If you have any doubts don't let your child go to that house--invite the children to your house instead.

ASK suggests concerned parents be respectful, not confrontational when ASKING.

I am in fervent opposition to guns in homes where there are children because there is a high risk that the gun will be involved in accidents and suicide while the likelihood that the gun will be a successful "protector" is low. In 1996, there were only 176 justifiable handgun murders compared to 9,390 handgun murders in the US.

But if guns and children are to coexist in homes the safety rules must be rigorously obeyed: UNLOADED, LOCKED UP, AMMO LOCKED UP SEPARATELY.

Every time I write about putting kids' safety before what many perceive as their right to keep loaded guns in their home, I get angry responses from the "gun lobby." The thrust of these letters is that I am soft on crime and don't know beans about guns or the Constitution.

Not true. I don't care for shooting but my husband hunts and target shoots. There are guns in our home. My husband has never broken a gun safety rule. Our kids, and our neighbors' kids always came first.