

Tips for Provider Messaging on Safe Firearm Storage

Context: Patient-provider counseling on safe firearm storage during clinic visits is an important strategy to potentially reduce firearm-related injuries among children and teens.⁴ Many families feel comfortable discussing firearm safety with their child’s pediatrician.¹ A combination of just-in time education from a trusted provider and a free safety device to take home can increase confidence of how to use the safety device and likelihood that the safety item will be used.^{2,3}

Terminology: We’ve found that use of the term “firearm” is generally preferred over “gun” because it comes across as less political.⁵

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1. Make it a practice to **screen all families** about access to firearms.⁴
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2. Approach the conversation around safe firearm storage just **like any other injury prevention topic** (e.g., car seats, bike helmets, life jackets) and **provide context** for your questions and recommendations.^{5,6,7}
 - a. Focus on kids being **smart and curious** (but not emotional) and avoid labels.⁷
 - b. **Start with an open-ended question** to engage safety interest, and encourage dialogue.
 - c. Firearm ownership may be due to longstanding **beliefs and values**; remember everyone will come with **different experiences**.⁸
 - d. Remind families that information is **confidential** unless there is an immediate emergency.
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3. Assess access to firearms in each relevant household (e.g., a teen may spend time in more than one parents’ or relatives’ household).⁹
 - a. **Ask explicitly** if firearms in the home are **safely stored** (i.e., locked up, unloaded, ammunition stored separately). Ask parents/caregivers to consider if firearms are in **other homes** where their child or teen spends time.¹⁰ *Note: approximately 42% of adults report that there is a firearm in their household (nationally).*¹¹
 - i. *Example:* “We understand many households have firearms and I’d like to talk about options for storing firearms to help keep your kids safe.”
 - ii. *Example:* “Tell me about the *firearms* in your home.”

- b. Reminder that hidden or "off-limits" is not safe.^{9,12}
 - c. You can share your own family rules as a conversation starter.
 - d. If quick access to the firearm is important, discuss there are safe storage options that meet this requirement.
 - e. Encourage parents and caregivers to ask about firearm storage in the homes that their kids visit.¹³
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4. Temporarily removing firearms from the home is encouraged if a family member is depressed, suicidal or abusing drugs or alcohol.⁹
- a. **Sympathize** with those who find the option of living without a firearm at home, even temporarily, very difficult.⁹
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5. When the conversation is approached with **neutrality, privacy, respect and confidence**, it is generally well received by firearm-owning families.^{14,15}
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Authors: Bennett E, Greer Phillips A, Jinks-Chang S, Sakamoto I. 2020.

References:

- ¹ Simonetti et al., 2018
- ² Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2016
- ³ Uspal et al., 2020
- ⁴ Pallin et al., 2019
- ⁵ Baca, 2016
- ⁶ Herzog, 2016
- ⁷ Nguyen, 2016
- ⁸ UC Davis
- ⁹ Means Matter
- ¹⁰ Healthychildren.org
- ¹¹ Pew Research Center, 2017
- ¹² Baxley & Miller, 2006
- ¹³ The ASK Campaign, 2015
- ¹⁴ Ruelas, 2019
- ¹⁵ Parent, 2016