



# HALL COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

## CRIME PREVENTION UNIT



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### CHILD SAFETY BULLETIN

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**DATE:** November 23, 2009  
**SUBJECT:** FIREARMS SAFETY IN THE HOME

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Most of us are probably already familiar with the recent tragedies here in Hall County involving children and firearms, the most recent of which resulted in the death of a toddler. This bulletin is not intended to comment on either of those cases or the pursuant investigations, but let's take from these tragedies the opportunity to highlight some necessary precautions to ensure our children's safety. The decision to keep firearms in the home is a deeply personal one, and this is in no way an attempt to influence citizens one way or another on that issue. While the below information is excerpted from the NRA's "Eddie Eagle" child safety program, these rules apply across the board, whether you support their views or not. Let's all take a few minutes to talk to our kids about the basic rules; the consequences of not doing so are far too great.

#### The Parents' Responsibility

In a home where guns are kept, the degree of safety a child has rests squarely on the child's parents. Parents who accept the responsibility to learn, practice and teach gun safety rules will ensure their child's safety to a much greater extent than those who do not. Parental responsibility does not end, however, when the child leaves the home. According to federal statistics, there are guns in approximately half of all U.S. households. Even if no one in your family owns a gun, chances are that someone you know does. Your child could come in contact with a gun at a neighbor's house, when playing with friends, or under other circumstances outside your home. It is critical for your child to know what to do if he or she encounters a firearm anywhere, and it is the parents' responsibility to provide that training.

#### Talking With Your Child About Gun Safety

There is no particular age to talk with your child about gun safety. A good time to introduce the subject is the first time he or she shows an interest in firearms, even toy pistols or rifles. Talking openly and honestly about gun safety with your child is usually more effective than just ordering him or her to "stay out of the gun closet," and leaving it at that. Such statements may just stimulate a child's natural curiosity to investigate further. As with any safety lesson, explaining the rules and answering a child's questions help remove the mystery surrounding guns. Any rules set for your own child must also apply to friends who visit the home. This will help keep your child from being pressured into showing a gun to a friend.

#### Toy Guns vs. Real Guns

It is also advisable, particularly with very young children, to discuss gun use on television and video games, where firearms are often handled carelessly, as opposed to gun use in real life. Children see TV and movie characters shot and "killed" with well-documented frequency, only to see that same actor reappear in another movie or TV show, sometimes creating confusion between entertainment and real life. It may be a mistake to assume that your child knows the difference between being "killed" on TV (or in video games where players have multiple "lives") and in reality. If your child has toy guns, you may want to use them to demonstrate safe gun handling and to explain how they differ from genuine firearms. Even though an unsupervised child should not have access to a gun, there should be no chance that he or she could mistake a real gun for a toy.



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### What Should You Teach Your Child About Gun Safety?

If a child finds a gun anywhere, whether it's in their own home or somewhere they are visiting, make sure they understand these four basic instructions:

**STOP!**  
**Don't Touch.**  
**Leave the Area.**  
**Tell an Adult.**

The initial steps of "**Stop**" and "**Don't Touch**" are the most important. To counter the natural impulse to touch a gun, it is imperative that you impress these steps of the safety message upon your child. In today's society, where adult supervision is not always possible, the direction to "**Leave the Area**" is also essential. Under some circumstances, area may be understood to be a room if your child cannot physically leave the apartment or house. "**Tell an Adult**" emphasizes that children should seek a trustworthy adult, neighbor, relative or teacher -- if a parent or guardian is not available.

### Basic Gun Safety Rules

While there are variations on gun safety rules for specific types of firearm use (hunting, competition, or law enforcement, for example), the following rules are fundamental in any situation. Whether or not you own a gun, it is important to know these rules so that you may insist that others follow them.

- **Treat every gun as if it is loaded.** Never assume that a gun is unloaded unless you have personally inspected it and know this to be true.
- **Always keep the gun pointed in a safe direction.** Whether you are shooting or simply handling a gun, never point it at yourself, others, or anything you do not intend to shoot. Common sense will tell you which direction is the safest. Outdoors, it is generally safe to point the gun toward the ground, or if you are at a shooting range, toward the target. Indoors, be mindful of the fact that a bullet can penetrate ceilings, floors, walls, windows, and doors.
- **Always keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot.** When holding a gun, rest your trigger finger outside the trigger guard alongside the gun. Until you are actually ready to fire, do not touch the trigger.
- **Always keep the gun unloaded until ready to use.** If you do not know how to check to see if a gun is unloaded, leave it alone. Carefully secure it, being certain to point it safely and to keep your finger off the trigger, and seek competent assistance.

### Gun Owners' Responsibilities

Store guns so that they are inaccessible to children and other unauthorized users. A wide variety of safes, cases, and other security devices are available. While specific security measures may vary, ***a parent must, in every case, assess the exposure of the firearm and absolutely ensure that it is inaccessible to a child.*** Failure to do so can not only result in tragedy, but may also bring with it legal consequences.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact

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