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# ***Parent Guide to Gun Safety:***

Key conversations to have with your children from a comprehensive mental health approach.



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# *What is the Context?*

The US CDC data shows that deaths from firearms in Texas generally began to increase about two decades ago after a dramatic decline in the 1990s.

As state laws such as the 2007 Stand Your Ground law, the 2016 open carry law, and the 2021 Permitless Carry Act were passed, firearm violence has increased in Texas (Texas Tribune).

It is natural to feel helpless regarding gun violence, however, there are ways to get involved in preventing an incident from occurring.

Parents have a unique role in reducing firearm-related deaths of young children and teenagers.

# ***Why Should we Care?***



**Firearms are the number one leading cause of death in young children. [New England Journal of Medicine]**



**In Texas, an average of 430 children and teens die by guns every year, 36% of these deaths are suicides [every stat]**



**Gun deaths among children and teens rose 50% in just two years [Pew Research]**



**Mental illness contributes to 4% of deaths by gun violence [Nami California]**

- **Note: Mental illness alone is not a predictor for gun violence.**

# ***Mental Health Edition :***

## **Role of Parents in Protecting their children**

If a child is at risk, exhibiting specific behaviors of stress, or experiencing suicidal thoughts, **it is important to take the proper steps:**

Make **988** (the suicide prevention hotline) a known number in your household. Ensure to empathize with the concerns of your child, do not make them feel criticized.

The **specific gun storage problems** that are linked to suicide are: unlocked guns (doubles risk), loaded guns, storing ammunition for guns in close proximity to the firearms etc.

# ***Behaviors/ Events that can be Trigger Factors:***

**Substance use disorders**

**Romantic breakups**

**Firearm in the household**

**Social or peer conflict**

**Impulsive behaviors and tendencies**



# ***Warning Signs to Watch Out for:***

**Withdrawal  
from friends  
and family  
members**

**Abnormal  
sleeping or  
eating  
behaviors**



**Alcohol or  
substance  
use**

**indicating  
plans of  
self-harm**

**prolonged  
sadness**



# ***How Should Parents Approach Talking About Safety?***

The best way to talk about gun safety with younger children is to have regular and normalized conversations about the presence of guns, and the ways to ensure that your children are safe.

Here are some conversational tips:



Ensure that you calm any feelings of unrest and anxiety, keeping an understanding and empathetic attitude



Be straightforward, direct and truthful about the topic and the dangers that can be posed, leaving out graphic or uncomfortable details



Validate any fears that may arise with the topic, and encourage open and safe dialogue



# ***What Are Some Steps Parents can Take?***

**1**

Be understanding of any anxiety that may arise surrounding firearms, and be sure to keep an empathetic attitude.

**2**

Explain that guns are not toys, and should not be touched.

**3**

Make 988 a known number in your household, empathize with the concerns of your child, and ensure they feel accepted.

**4**

Before sending a child to the house of another family, ask if their guns are stored securely (locked, unloaded, and separate from ammunition).

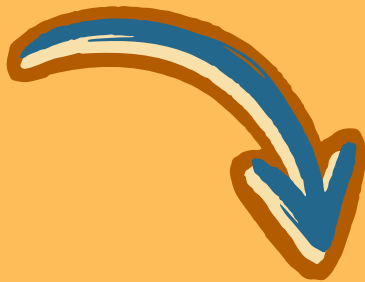
**5**

It is your responsibility to secure your guns safely. If you are a family with firearms in the house explain: You should never touch a gun in the house without a parent or guardian figure present, and be sure to go through the common safety measures.

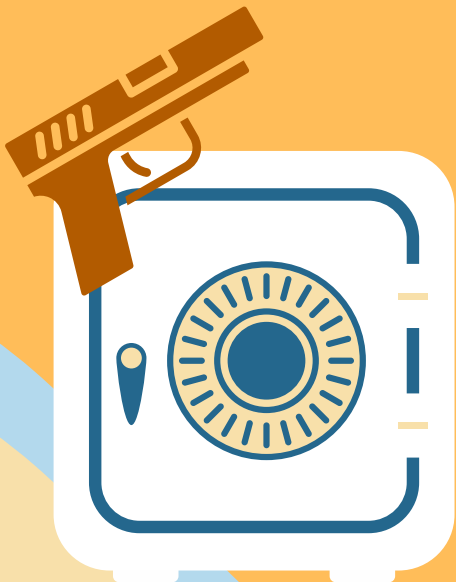


# ***How Does Safe Storage Play a Role?***

Research has shown that risk of suicide decreases among the adolescent age group when guns are properly stored.



Check out the comprehensive toolkit created by Texas Gun Sense that covers safe storage, and the various ways that it is a critical step in preventing unnecessary deaths. (Find on resources page)



## **Policy goals:**

- **Strengthening Child Access Prevention laws**
- **Requiring that adults secure firearms safely**



# ***Local Contacts to Familiarize Yourself With:***

**Supervisor for Licensed Mental Health Professionals of your district, for AISD: [kimberly.wilson@austinisd.org](mailto:kimberly.wilson@austinisd.org)**

**988- Suicide prevention hotline (For Death + Hard of hearing, dial 711 then 988)**

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas-  
[1-888-628-9454](tel:1-888-628-9454) (for responder in Spanish)**

**Care Solace- an AISD partnered organization; website:  
<https://caresolace.com/site/austinisd>**

**Tip: put these  
on a sticky  
note on your  
fridge!**



# ***Resources to check out***

## **Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Bullying Prevention Toolkit:**

[https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/Bullying\\_Prevention\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/Bullying_Prevention_Toolkit.pdf)

## **Texas Gun Sense Safe Storage Toolkit:**

<https://txgunsense.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Safe-Storage-Toolkit.pdf>

## **Texas Gun Sense Youth Advocacy Toolkit:**

<https://txgunsense.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Texas-Gun-Sense-Youth-Advocacy-Toolkit.pdf?emci=96674789-b867-ee11-9937-00224832eb73&emdi=1776faa0-be6d-ee11-9937-00224832eb73&ceid=240862>

## **Youth Action Board School Toolkit:**

[https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/Bullying\\_Prevention\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/Bullying_Prevention_Toolkit.pdf)

**Visit the Youth GVA website at [www.youthgva.com](http://www.youthgva.com) for ways that students can get more involved in efforts of advocacy + public policy.**



# *My sources*

Toolkit made in coordination with Suzanna Guyton from SFG counseling and Sherri Patton Grubb, Austin High School Wellness Counselor: [sherri.patton-grubb@austinisd.org](mailto:sherri.patton-grubb@austinisd.org)

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