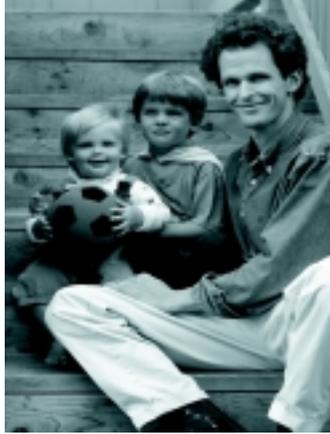


# Gunproofing Your Child

Mary told me, *“I’ve dealt with gun safety for my children. There are no guns in my house. I won’t even allow them to have toy guns, or watch movies with violence”*. I turned to her six year old and asked *“Susie, how do you shoot a gun?”* Susie



snapped her hands into a two handed hold, squinted down an imaginary barrel, and worked her index finger.

**“Bang! Bang! Bang!”**

**Here is a tragedy in the making.** Mary’s children already know enough about guns to hurt themselves and others. Mary’s child, and yours too, already know how to load, aim and fire a rifle, shotgun or handgun. They may not be very skilled at it, but once you have seen something done hundreds of times, you know how to do it. Any child with access to television knows how to handle firearms.

Television and video games teach children that guns are funny. They smoke up in someone’s face without really hurting him. Load the shotgun, shoot the animated character! He will be up and running again in a moment, completely unharmed.

Television dramas and movies do just as badly. The reality of death, blood and the screaming agony of the victim are all conspicuously missing. Like the cartoon character, the actor will return, quite unharmed.

While Mary thought her children were safe because there are no guns in her house. Unless Mary can keep her children out of all other homes, her child, like yours, are going to be in homes with guns.

In 1977 the Canadian government estimated that 40 percent of all Canadian households contained at least one firearm – and firearm ownership has risen since then. There are nearly a million legally owned handguns, likely twenty times that number of rifles and shotguns, and many many illegal handguns out there.

Harry brags about keeping his firearms hidden so that his eight-year-old, can’t find them. Harry is wrong. His little Joey has been in places in their house that Harry has never even seen. Joey has intimate first hand knowledge with the dust bunnies behind the furnace, the assorted junk in the attic, and every other child-accessible place in the house. Children are dedicated, curious explorers.

John keeps his guns locked up, but his daughter Jenny knows where he hides the key, just as she know where the car key is kept.

The moral of all of this is: You can not protect your child by allowing television, video games and the media to do all the training. The results are worse than ignorance, and even ignorance can hurt or kill children.

Guns on television are interesting. When a child sees a real gun, he or she wants to touch it , to handle it, and to play with it. Guns are fascinating.

A familiar object is not fascinating. If you mix firearm safety training with familiarization, you can render your child almost perfectly safe in the presence of firearms — regardless of the situation. Not perfectly safe, but much safer than any media-trained child can ever be in our imperfect world.

***Here is how to protect your child...***

(If you already are a firearm owner)

**Preparation and Materials:**

Gather up several firearms of various types and one cartridge for each, with at least one handgun, one rifle and one shotgun. One firearm, preferable a handgun, should be .22 rimfire, with a detachable magazine.

You will need two identical large bars of good quality beauty soap. Prepare one of them for your training session by shooting a .22 rimfire high-velocity hollow-point bullet through the middle of the bar.

In training, bring out only one item at a time. Do not distract your child.

## **Introduction**

Tell your child that you are going to teach her about firearms and show her firearms. Impress on her that this is very serious and that you are doing it now because she is now smart enough and grown-up enough to learn about firearms.

Children love being regarded as smart and grown-up. They know and love the sensation of newly increased knowledge and the new privileges that are a part of growing up.

Make this a positive experience, and you have enhanced your child's safety for life. Rehearse it with an adult first.

**The rules come first.** Before any firearm or cartridge is within sight. Tell your child, very seriously; ***“Loaded guns can hurt people, hurt them the way you hurt yourself when you cut your finger...(fell off your bike etc.).***

***“Every gun is loaded and dangerous until you have proven that it is empty. Never believe anyone — not even me — who says that a gun is empty, until you prove it by looking for yourself.***

***“Never point a gun where it can hurt someone if it goes off. It is very rude to point a gun at anyone and possibly dangerous.***

***“Never touch any gun without the permission of a safe adult. A safe adult is a person who opens the gun, looks inside and then shows you that it is not loaded — before he does anything else with the gun. Anyone who does not do that is dangerous”.***

## **Danger Training**

Children have no concept of death. They literally cannot understand the meaning of the word “kill”, so don't use that word, or related words. It **weakens** your training if you use words your child does not understand.

Show your child the .22 rimfire cartridge. ***“This is what makes a gun work. It's called a cartridge. This is the smallest, weakest cartridge for the smallest, weakest guns. When the gun shoots, the bullet -- this part -- flies away; and the empty cartridge case -- this part -- stays in the gun. The bullet from this cartridge can fly from our front door to [somewhere your child knows about, about 1.5 kilometres away]. Even a tiny weak cartridge like this one can make the bullet go a very long way”.***

Hand your child the unmarked bar of soap. ***“Feel how hard and strong the bar of soap is? Now feel how soft your leg is”.*** Give your child the second bar of soap, the one you shot the .22 bullet through. ***“This bar of soap was shot by this tiny .22 cartridge, and this is the hole the bullet made. If you were shot by this .22 cartridge, it would make a hole this big in your leg. You remember how much it hurt when you made a little hole in your skin -- when you cut yourself, [or fell off your bike, etc.]? Well, how much would it hurt if you were shot by this bullet”? OUCH!***

The “hole in your skin” is something every child can understand. Children are used to small, painful holes in their skin — they are used to the idea that bigger holes hurt more. This hole is so big that it is really impressive -- but it is within their understanding. Do not substitute anything more impressive, such as an exploded cantaloupe, because that can lessen the desired effect. It would get too far outside your child's limited knowledge and experience.

***“There are no people in that direction”.*** Bring out the .22 rimfire gun. ***“See how I am pointing this in a safe direction so no one will be hurt if it goes off? Now I will show you how to make sure there are no cartridges in it. If there are no cartridges in it, so it is unloaded, and safe”.***

If possible, remove the magazine and show your child that there are no cartridges in it; then put it back in the gun. ***“All the cartridges, except one, have to be in the magazine, if there are any in the gun. Checking the magazine tells us there can be only one cartridge in the gun at the most. I can put it back in because we know now that it is empty -- so that is safe. Now we have to look inside to see if there is one cartridge in the chamber of the gun”.***

Then open the gun, look inside, and show your child the inside. Show her where the cartridges fit in the chamber and in the magazine. Show her that both are empty. Explain that if there were a cartridge in either the magazine or the chamber, the gun could make a hole in someone's leg. Put the gun down, pointed in a safe direction.

***“Now we’ve both proven that this gun is not loaded, so we both know it is safe. Look how small this gun is [this is why we suggest a .22 pistol here], and this gun can shoot the bullet that will make such a big hole in your leg. To shoot this gun, you must put cartridges in the magazine, then move one cartridge into the chamber, here, then move this part -- the trigger -- to shoot it at a target”.***

Do not go into elaborate detail about how to load and shoot the firearm; but if the child is capable, put the gun down. Then have her pick a safe direction, point it in that direction, remove and replace the magazine if possible, open the gun, and again prove that it is empty and safe. If she does well, praise her and thank her for paying such close attention. If she does poorly, do not get angry or condemn her. Explain patiently why what she did was wrong. Then try again. If she cannot do it, it is your fault. You overestimated her ability at this age, so drop it after a few words of praise for trying. Under no circumstances allow this training to be anything but positive for the child — or you’ve blown it.

If she does well, repeat the lesson for each type of firearm and cartridge.

End the lesson by putting the guns away. Let her help by carrying one gun, carefully pointed in a safe direction, to your storage area. Show her where you keep your guns and where you keep the ammunition (she knows anyway). Show her how you lock them up, ***“to protect them from people who don’t know how to be safe with guns, like you do.”***

### The New Rules

***“Don’t ever touch the guns or the ammunition unless you have the a parent with you and you have asked permission.***

***“You are allowed to touch the guns and the ammunition and to shoot them under our supervision. You are being trained so that you know how to do***

***things safely, but your friends are not — so they are not allowed — ever — to touch either the guns or the ammunition. You are responsible for making sure they never do that, and the easy way to keep them away from the guns is not to tell them that there are any guns in our house”.***

There are few things children (or adults) enjoy more than the sense of superiority that comes with being able to do something that is forbidden to their friends. If there are rules, then they think it is well worth obeying those rules in order to continue enjoying that sense of superiority.

***“Guns are a part of growing up. People can be hurt by guns, so there are rules to make sure no one gets hurt. Real guns don’t work like the guns you see on television or in the movies. They can really hurt people. The guns you see on TV don’t shoot real bullets. The people are actors who never really get hurt by bullets. Television, movies, and video games are not the real world”.***

### The Shooting Range Demonstration

If your goal is to teach your child how to shoot she (or he) must be properly trained in position, holding, breathing, aiming and trigger control, before the first range practice.\* Right now, we are working on familiarization, not shooting training. Familiarization ends fascination.

### When using any firearm, always follow these NFA rules:

- 1. Always treat every firearm as if it were loaded — even when you think it is not.**
- 2. Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.**
- 3. Always keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot.**
- 4. Keep the action of the firearm open** except when actually shooting or storing the firearm.
- 5. Use only the right ammunition for your firearm.** Carry only one type of ammunition to be sure you can not mix up different types.

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\* *The NFA has a “Shooting Sports Primer for New Shooters” which is an excellent starter piece for starting new shooters.*

6. **Be sure of your target** — and beyond your target. Identify your target, and then look at what is past the target — **BEFORE** you shoot.

7. **Alcohol and drugs do not mix with firearms.** Alcohol and drugs can impair your judgement. Keen judgement is essential to safe shooting.

8. **Know how to use the firearm you are shooting safely.** If you are not sure, find out more about that firearm from someone competent.

Those are the basic rules of firearm safety. Those rules have been used by generations of hunters and shooters. Keeping those rules in mind whenever you are around firearms or using firearms can ensure not only your safety, but the safety of everyone around you.

Do not schedule your child's first range session as part of your regular shooting practice. This is a very special day for your child, and it must be totally oriented toward her.

Again, you should have a variety of firearms, including a .22 rimfire and the most powerful firearm she can handle without being hurt. Do not overestimate your child's limits. You can give her a permanent dislike of shooting by letting her fire a lightweight 12 gauge shotgun once.

There is no minimum legal age for a child to be allowed to shoot under supervision. You must exercise judgement. Is the gun too long for her? Is there a fore-end rest for the gun that she can use if it is a bit too heavy? Is the recoil too severe for her at this age and size? Does she understand what to do, how to do it, and all the effects? Plan everything carefully!

### **Firearms Away from Home**

***“You might run into a firearm somewhere when you are away from our home one day. What should you do about it? It is not safe to decide when that happens. You should decide what to do now, so you will know exactly what to do if that ever happens.***

***“You might be visiting a friend, and your friend may bring out a firearm belonging to his parents. You know how it can hurt you, so you have to do what you can to be safe. Do not yell at your friend. He might get angry or try to prove the gun is safe by pulling the trigger! There is no way for you to***

***be sure that firearm is safe; you do not know that gun. If you try to open it to check it, you might make it go off. The best thing you can do is to stop anyone from handling it. Ask him very quietly to put it away. If he will not do that, then leave at once and come home.***

***“You should tell us (your parents) what happened. You don't want to see your friend get hurt by playing with a real firearm, do you? He is not trained to be safe — like you are — so he can get hurt, or he can hurt someone else.***

***“Firearms are not dangerous, if they are left alone, but untrained people with firearms can be very dangerous. If you can keep untrained people and firearms apart, no one can be hurt.***

***“Trained people are safe with firearms, but you do not know if that person is really safe. Never believe anyone who tells you he knows about firearms unless the first thing he does with a firearm is what I always do:***

***“I point the gun in a safe direction. Then, if possible, I remove the magazine to get out all but one of the cartridges out of the firearm. I show you that there are no cartridges in the magazine. Then I put it back in the gun.***

***“Next, I open the gun, look inside, and show you the inside. I show you there are no cartridges inside. I show you that both the chamber and the magazine are empty. Then I put it down pointing in a safe direction.***

***“Anyone who picks up a firearm and does not do all of those things is dangerous. Get away from that person as fast as you can”.***

Other Firearm and Safety information available from the National Firearms Association:

- ☞ Shooting Sports Primer for New Shooters
- ☞ Gunproofing Your Child;  
If You don't own Firearms!
- ☞ Two Inches at Seven Yards
- ☞ The Lioness Method of Rape Prevention

Call (403) 640-1110 to get copies of this material.

Visit the NFA on the Internet at [www.nfa.ca](http://www.nfa.ca)