




EXPECT SUCCESS

TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT GUNS

“I know it is a real problem, and I’m not sure of the solution, but here is one thing we can do now.” Henry Ford



In the wake of the mass school shooting in Parkland, FL, quickly followed by two more school shootings in Alabama and Maryland, we find ourselves wondering who’s next. Are schools no longer safe? Will our children be safe? Voices cry out for change and raise the concern of mental health, gun control, and stricter laws. The issues are complex and the solutions even more complicated with no quick fix. So what can we do now?

Parents are worried about school safety, as they should be, but our biggest fear shouldn’t be the adult stranger coming into the building unnoticed. Research shows it is most often a teen, typically a current student, with access to a gun in his/her own home. The Brady Center reports that 68% of school shooters acquired the guns from their own home, or that of a relative, and more astonishing is that a reported 1.7 million children live with unlocked, loaded guns. The reality is that many of these terrible tragedies could be avoided if we did a better job of ensuring that guns are not accessible to our children.

That thought causes my mind to drift to a teenage drinking poster I have seen frequently over the years. It depicts a refrigerator with beer bottles sitting on the shelf near the milk, eggs and lettuce. The message is something to the effect of children having access to alcohol is as easy as reaching for the milk. Two out of three teens say that they can easily access alcohol in their own home without a parent noticing, so what has been our response? We have spent over two decades focusing on ways to limit accessibility and better educate our children on the dangers of early alcohol and drug use. We have encouraged parents to talk with their children, be clear on the rules and expectations related to drug and alcohol use and asked them to be proactive in keeping those items away from children. The good news is that it’s working. The 2017 Monitoring the Future Study found that 23.1% of 8th graders reported ever trying alcohol, which is a 60% drop from the peak of 55.8% in 1994. It takes time and repeated conversations with our children, but they are listening.

At the end of the day, we are not senators or lobbyists in Washington DC. We cannot put in place gun control laws or require teachers to come to school armed. We are a school and community aiming to prevent a tragedy that has left so many like our own stricken with grief. We can work together to prevent children from having unwanted access to firearms by addressing gun respect/safety at the most crucial level: the home, not by taking sides on ownership, but focusing on accessibility. Here are a few things we can do now. If you have a gun of any type in your home, talk to your children regularly about what it means to be a responsible gun owner. Take steps to ensure that the gun is unloaded and in a secure location at all times which only you can access. If you don’t own a gun, still talk to your children about responsible behavior around guns and what you expect them to do if they are someplace where a gun is present. It takes time and repeated conversations with our children, but they will listen.

Resources: <http://www.bradycampaign.org> and <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/monitoring-future-survey-high-school-youth-trends>