

Firearm Safety Guide

for Connecticut Schools



CONNECTICUT STATE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Connecticut State Department of Education

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In accordance with Public Act 19-5: ***An Act Concerning the Safe Storage of Firearms in the Home and Firearm Safety Programs in Public Schools***, codified in Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-18b-c and Section 29-37i, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has developed this guide to assist schools and districts in developing curricula and instruction concerning firearm safety. While the issues associated with ownership and use of firearms are currently highly debated topics, the safety and wellbeing of students and their families is of foremost priority and has directed the content of this guide.

It is the intention of the CSDE that this guide be used to develop curricula and instruction ensuring that students and their families are fully informed of safe practices when in the presence of firearms while acknowledging the constitutional rights of firearm ownership. All instruction should include discussion and sharing of the school and district policies regarding weapons in school or on school grounds; school emergency plans and lock-down/shelter protocols for students; reporting safety concerns to adults in the school building; and understanding the importance of and everyone's role in maintaining the safety of the school community.

Schools should consider developing several approaches to sharing this information. Student-based curricula should be developed to highlight the potential dangers of firearms to oneself and others when not handled appropriately, but also to focus instruction along developmental, age-appropriate competencies.

- Elementary aged instruction should be focused on, and intended to ensure, avoidance and protection against accidents.
- Middle school curriculum should also include information about safe handling, as there is increasing likelihood that some students may be engaged in hunting, target shooting or have had other exposure or experiences with firearms.
- High school students should be introduced to discussions examining constitutional and safety concerns, as well as other related societal issues raised during firearm debates.
- Additionally, schools should make available parent information sessions and additional supports, such as resources and materials, to inform and encourage family discussions concerning firearms.

Critical Points to Include with **Elementary School Students**

1. If you see an unattended firearm, leave it alone/do not touch it and get an adult to put it away.
2. Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.
3. Never point a firearm at another person.
4. Never touch a firearm unless an adult you trust supervises and assists you, and you have your parents' or guardians' permission.
5. Firearms are not toys - never play with a firearm.
6. If your family has firearms in the house, your friends may find it an irresistible temptation. Never show a firearm to another child.
7. Firearms are not illegal, nor is legally possessing a firearm any indication of a person's character.
8. Some professions require having firearms: Police and School Resource Officers carry firearms to protect us.

Additional Points to Include with **Middle School Students**

1. Understanding appropriate steps toward ensuring personal safety and responsibility in the presence of firearms.
2. Firearms may be used responsibly and legally by some people participating in organized outdoor sporting clubs such as shooting/gun clubs, fish and game clubs, and hunting.
3. Firearms may be legally owned by individuals and families for purposes of self-protection.
4. Some students in the classroom may have fired, received training in safe firearm use or joined family members in hunting or target shooting.
5. Firearm ownership and responsible use is a right that people should not be criticized for exercising; just as people who believe there should be more restrictions placed on firearm ownership should not be criticized for their views.
6. The effect of firearm use is not how it is often depicted in movies and video games. The damage that firearms cause is often misrepresented. A single gunshot will cause serious injury and/or death. The image of a hero being shot multiple times and continuing with power and strength does not represent reality. Media often glamorizes the use of firearms; implying that a weapon imbues the owner with greater power.

Additional Points to Include with **High School Students**

1. High school students are at a transitional age approaching young adulthood. For that reason, it is important to provide them with information and facilitate discussion wherein they are guided in developing their own and reason while expanding understanding of the issues, as well as their personal responsibility for safety.
2. A primary goal should be to help students with diverse views participate in discussions to inform and debate one another with respect, tolerance and understanding.

3. The legality and validity of gun ownership, target practice and hunting as cultural activities should be communicated. This discussion can lead to other points students may be interested in examining, such as:
 - a. Animal husbandry and conservation of natural resources;
 - b. Examination of constitutional rights and prior efforts to impose or excuse particular rights (e.g., 18th Amendment introducing prohibition of alcohol sales and use vs. the 21st Amendment which repeals the 18th); and
 - c. The difference between the freedoms identified in the Bill of Rights (identifying essential rights and civil liberties) and later amendments that expand the scope and interpretation of the original Bill of Rights.
4. Identifying skills and actions ensuring personal safety and developing prosocial behaviors, including safe storage and appropriate use of weapons, responsible actions in the presence of unattended weapons, and facilitating the students' own critique of messages concerning firearms as they are represented in the news and popular media.
5. Ensure that students are informed of appropriate steps for personal safety if someone enters the school with a firearm.

Leading Discussions with **Parents and Community Members**

1. If you have firearms in your home (with minors under the age of 18), Connecticut Public Act 19-5 requires that the weapons be kept in a securely locked box or other container or in a manner that a reasonable person would consider secure.
2. Children and youth under the age of 18 may have contact with and responsibly use firearms under the supervision of an adult who is licensed to possess firearms.
3. A person is guilty of criminally negligent storage of a firearm if a minor or other ineligible person obtains the firearm and causes the injury or death of any person. Criminally negligent storage of a firearm is a class D felony punishable by a state prison term of one to five years and a fine of up to \$5,000.
4. C.G.S. Section 53a-217b: (a) A person is guilty of possession of a weapon on school grounds when, knowing that such person is not licensed or privileged to do so, such person possesses a firearm or deadly weapon, as defined in section 53a-3, (1) in or on the real property comprising a public or private elementary or secondary school, or (2) at a school-sponsored activity as defined in subsection (h) of section 10-233a.
(b) The provisions of subsection (a) of this section shall not apply to the otherwise lawful possession of a firearm (1) by a person for use in a program approved by school officials in or on such school property or at such school-sponsored activity, (2) by a person in accordance with an agreement entered into between school officials and such person or such person's employer, (3) by a peace officer, as defined in subdivision (9) of section 53a-3, while engaged in the performance of such peace officer's official duties, (4) by a person while traversing such school property for the purpose of gaining access to public or private lands open to hunting or for other lawful purposes, provided such firearm is not loaded and the entry on such school property is permitted by the local or regional board of education, or (5) by a motor vehicle inspector, designated under section 14-8 and certified pursuant to section 7-294d, while engaged in the performance of such motor vehicle inspector's official duties.
(c) Possession of a weapon on school grounds is a class D felony, punishable by a state prison term of one to five years and a fine of up to \$5,000. (Conn. Gen. Stat. § § 53a-35a, 53a-41.).

5. C.G.S. Section 29-37i: No person shall store or keep any firearm, as defined in section 53a-3, on any premises under such person's control if such person knows or reasonably should know that (1) a minor is likely to gain access to the firearm without the permission of the parent or guardian of the minor, (2) a resident of the premises is ineligible to possess a firearm under state or federal law, or (3) a resident of the premises poses a risk of imminent personal injury to himself or herself or to other individuals, unless such person (A) keeps the firearm in a securely locked box or other container or in a manner which a reasonable person would believe to be secure, or (B) carries the firearm on his or her person or within such close proximity thereto that such person can readily retrieve and use the firearm as if such person carried the firearm on his or her person. For the purposes of this section, "minor" means any person under the age of eighteen years.
6. No student will be required to participate in any firearms safety program. A written notification by the parent to the local or regional board will be sufficient to establish exemption. During such exemption, the student(s) in question will be provided with other study or academic work.
7. Basic safety instructions:
 - a. Research has shown that a very high percentage of young people who have received firearm safety instruction will pick up an unattended weapon. One study found that slightly more than 60% of boys participating (30 of 48 boys) in the study picked up a weapon upon finding one. More than half of the boys that picked up the weapon (16 of 30) pulled the trigger¹. A mere conversation does not, in itself, ensure safe practices.
 - b. Make sure that all firearms are stored securely and separately from the ammunition for that weapon.
 - c. Keep any keys for secure storage on your person or in a location inaccessible to children and youth.
 - d. If your child visits another home, it is important to ask the hosts if there are firearms in the house and if they are adequately secured. If the host is unwilling to secure appropriately all firearms, do not leave your children in the home, regardless of other assurances (e.g., my son doesn't know where I keep it, the ammo isn't accessible, etc.).
 - e. Plan with your children how to leave a residence (exit strategy) where the child observes unsecured firearms before an incident occurs. Just as the child would if there are drugs or dangers at the residence of a friend.
 - f. Make sure your own children understand:
 - Treat every firearm as if it is loaded
 - Firearms are not toys
 - Never touch a firearm unless your parents, or an adult trusted by your parents to supervise what you're doing, give permission. Likewise, if you find unattended ammunition for a firearm, let a trusted adult know.
 - If you do touch a firearm, never point it at any person or living thing

1. *Seeing is believing: what do boys do when they find a real gun?* Division of Pediatric Emergency Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, Emory University School of Medicine and the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

- If you see an unattended firearm, tell a responsible adult (parent, teacher, etc.)
 - Firearms that are believed to be unloaded or have the safety mechanisms engaged should still be treated as loaded weapons.
- g. If you or a family member own a firearm and it is kept in your home, secure the weapon(s) and the ammunition separately from each other in locked locations to make unauthorized access to a functioning weapon more difficult.
- h. Help your child understand the context of the national debate around the constitutional right to own firearms, gun-control advocacy, intentional and unintentional firearm injuries and deaths, and other issues that illustrate the division while examining all sides of the debate.

Resources

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO): *Preventing Firearm Injury and Death* provides a number of links to resources addressing preparedness, mental health and safety.
<https://www.astho.org/Prevention/Preventing-Firearm-Injury-and-Death/>

Children’s Safety Network *Firearm Safety: Resource Guide 2013* — This website provides downloadable resource guides and access to fact sheets concerning firearm injuries, infographics and policy statements through other links on the website.
<https://www.childrendefensivenetwork.org/guides/firearm-resource-guide-2013>

The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (*Brady Act*) — This resource describes the development of the Brady Act and links to related documents.
<https://www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/brady-law>

Gun Safety and Violence Prevention — National PTA — This position statement identified recommended policies and practices for gun safety.
<https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/advocacy/position-statements/gun-safety-and-violence-prevention-ps.pdf>

Kids Health — Gun Safety — This website provides suggestions for adults and young people for safe storage, risk factors associated with gun ownership and other helpful information.
<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/gun-safety.html>

Project ChildSafe — A program of the [National Shooting Sports Foundation](#).
<https://www.projectchildsafesafe.org/>

Safe Kids Worldwide — This link goes directly to the resource page specifically for firearms but the website has additional information concerning general child safety.
<https://www.safekids.org/tip/gun-safety-tips>

Sample Curricula

Elementary School Gun Safety Guidelines and Curriculum — Guidance developed by the Virginia State Department of Education.
http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/guidance/safety/school_gun_safety_elementary.pdf

McGruffâ Talks to Students About Gun Safety — Animated videos with activity sheets for grades K-6.
<http://ymiclassroom.com/lesson-plans/mcgruff-gun-safety/>

Research Articles

JAMA Pediatrics: “Love Our Kids, Lock Your Guns”: A Community-Based Firearm Safety Counseling and Gun Lock Distribution Program is a research study on the impact of firearm safety counseling and a gunlock distribution program.
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/190712>

JAMA Pediatrics: “They’re Too Smart for That”: Predicting What Children Would Do in the Presence of Guns is an article about the expected and surprising reactions and behaviors of youngsters in the presence of a firearm.

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/111/2/e109.long>

JAMA Pediatrics: Are Household Firearms Stored Less Safely in Homes With Adolescents? Analysis of a National Random Sample of Parents is a study examining the best practices for firearm storage. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/205373>

JAMA Network: Association Between Youth-Focused Firearm Laws and Youth Suicides is an article that looks at youth suicide rates and the relative impact of laws restricting access.

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/199194>

State Statutes

Public Act 19-5: An Act Concerning the Safe Storage of Firearms in the Home and Firearm Safety Programs in Public Schools.

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2019/ACT/pa/pdf/2019PA-00005-R00HB-07218-PA.pdf>

C.G.S. Section 10-18b. Development of curriculum guides for firearm safety programs.

https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_164.htm#sec_10-18b

C.G.S. Section 10-18c. Firearm safety programs. Exemption from participation.

https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_164.htm#sec_10-18c

C.G.S. Section 10-233d. Expulsion of pupils.

https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_170.htm#sec_10-233d

C.G.S Section 53a-217b. Possession of a weapon on school grounds: Class D felony.

https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_952.htm#sec_53a-217b

Federal Laws and Regulations

Gun-Free Requirements (Gun-Free Schools Act) SEC. 4141 — Requires expulsion for gun possession in school — subject to superintendent discretion.

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg54.html>

National Firearms Act (1934) — Identifies weapons requiring registration.

<https://www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/national-firearms-act>

Federal Firearms Act (1938) — Prohibits transfer of weapons to certain persons. Dealers are required to be licensed to sell. (see also National Firearms Act 1934)

Omnibus Crime Control & Safe Streets Act (1968) — Bans interstate handgun trade; Increases minimum age to purchase a handgun to 21.

https://transition.fcc.gov/Bureaus/OSEC/library/legislative_histories/1615.pdf

Gun Control Act (1968) — Prohibits interstate gun transfers except for dealers.

<https://www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/gun-control-act>

Firearm Owners Protection Act (1986) — Prohibits sale of automatic weapons to civilians.

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-100/pdf/STATUTE-100-Pg449.pdf#page=1>

Undetectable Firearms Act (1988) — Bans sale, possession of firearms with less than 3.7oz metal content.

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-102/pdf/STATUTE-102-Pg3816.pdf#page=1>

Gun Free School Zones Act (1990) — Prohibits possession of firearm in school zone.

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg54.html>

Brady Handgun Violence Prevention act (1993) — Requires background checks for gun purchases.

<https://www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/brady-law>

Federal Assault Weapons Ban (1994) — Banned large capacity magazines, **expired 2004**.

Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (2005) — Dealers and manufacturers of firearms exempt from negligence claims.

<https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title15/chapter105&edition=prelim>

History of Gun Control Legislation

The Washington Post

https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/history-of-gun-control-legislation/2012/12/22/80c8d624-4ad3-11e2-9a42-d1ce6d0ed278_story.html