



# How to talk with kids about gun violence

Gun violence is an unfortunate part of kids' lives today. It's more common in some communities than others, but kids throughout the United States participate in active shooter drills at school and hear about community tragedies on the news.

Gun violence takes a toll not only on kids' physical safety but also impacts their mental health for years to come.

Talking about gun violence in an age-appropriate way can help keep children and teens safe and help them process related stress and anxiety.

## When to start the conversation

Kids may come to you with questions after hearing about a gun-related tragedy, participating in a safety drill, or seeing gun violence in the media.

If you're a parent, don't wait for your child to bring up the topic. Find a moment when you both have time to talk, and raise the topic yourself.

# How to talk with kids about unintentional shootings

Some children play with toy guns or video games that involve guns, but may not understand the risks associated with real guns. Talk with kids in an age-appropriate way about gun safety, why unlocked guns are dangerous, and how unintentional shootings can cause injuries or death.

If an unintentional shooting occurs in your community, kids may want to talk about it to understand what happened and process their feelings. Adjust what you say based on their age level and emotional state, and reassure them they are safe.

**"If you ever see a real gun, tell a grownup right away. Guns can seriously hurt people, so it's not safe to touch one."**

**"If another child tells you they have access to a gun, tell a trusted adult right away."**

**"People can hurt each other with guns without meaning to. This is why it's important that guns are always kept locked and unloaded."**

## Why this works

Talking with children about unintentional shootings can help them stay safe, even when you're not with them.

# How to talk with kids about intentional shootings

Many young people worry about intentional shootings, such as mass shootings and community violence. They may raise the subject after a school safety drill or in response to something they see on the news or on social media. Let them guide the conversation if you're talking with a child about a specific event. Explain that their fears and concerns are normal. Answer their questions, but avoid including graphic details they may find upsetting.

**"One person made a bad choice and other people got hurt. It's very sad, but lots of grownups are working hard to keep everyone safe."**

**"If you hear someone make a violent threat or talk about having access to a gun, tell a trusted adult as soon as possible."**

**"Sometimes people use guns to hurt others on purpose. This can be hard to understand, but talking about it can help us process our feelings."**

## Why this works

Talking about gun violence with young people helps to normalize these conversations. If the child ever hears someone threaten gun violence, they'll know they can talk to you about it.

## Community violence

The team behind Sesame Street share tips for talking with kids of different ages about violent events that occur in their community. [Visit SesameWorkshop.org/topics/violence to learn more.](https://www.sesameworkshop.org/topics/violence)

# How to talk with kids about a gun suicide

Have open conversations with young people about their emotions and mental health, including healthy ways to cope with stress and anxiety. Check in regularly, and encourage them to tell you if they ever feel sad or lonely. Talk with older kids and teens about the signs that someone may be in crisis and what they can do to help.

If someone the child knows uses a gun to attempt suicide, talk with them about it in an age-appropriate way.

**If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, call or text 988 to be connected with the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.**

**"Sometimes, if someone is very sad or angry, they may use a gun to try to hurt themselves. If you ever feel that way, tell me or another trusted adult so we can help you find support."**

**"If someone you know is feeling hopeless, depressed, or talks about hurting themselves or someone else, they may need urgent help. Let a trusted adult know what you heard and they can get help."**

**"Anyone can experience a moment of crisis. One way to prevent that temporary moment from becoming a permanent tragedy is making sure that people who are struggling don't have access to a gun."**

## Why this works

Having frequent conversations about emotions and mental health will make it easier for young people to open up to you if they are struggling or have questions.

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# Encourage kids to lead conversations about gun violence

Every child processes things in different ways. Instead of trying to anticipate a child's fears and concerns around gun violence, ask if they have any questions. Let young children know that you and other grownups will do everything you can to help them stay safe. With older children, you can talk about gun violence in the context of current events.

**"Gun violence can be scary and confusing. Do you have any questions?"**

**"I'm always willing to talk about this with you. Is there anything specific you want to know?"**

**"It's normal to feel scared or worried about gun violence, but it can be helpful to have a plan in place if someone uses a gun near you. Let's talk about how you might react if you're ever in that situation."**

## Why this works

When a child comes to you with questions, you can provide an age-appropriate answer that addresses their concerns.

## After the chat

- Revisit the topic on a regular basis. Kids may have new questions and concerns.
- Avoid watching or listening to violent news reports near young children. Even if they are busy with something else, they may hear things that upset them.
- Be alert for any behavior changes. If a child has recurring nightmares, becomes unusually clingy, or seems more withdrawn, they may need professional help.
- Be mindful of your own mental state when talking about gun violence with kids and teens. If you are stressed or anxious, they may pick up on that. Approach these conversations with a calm, caring mindset, and validate their emotions. If you are feeling similar emotions, acknowledge that.

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**Learn how to have the conversation at [AgreeToAgree.org](https://AgreeToAgree.org)**

**AGREE  
TO  
AGREE**

