Children’s Defense Fund
Protect Children, Not Guns
The Truth About Guns

January 11, 2013

1. **A gun in the home increases the risk of homicide, suicide, and accidental death.**
   Contrary to what many people believe, having a gun in your home doesn’t make you safer but instead endangers you and your loved ones. A gun in the home makes the likelihood of homicide three times higher,\textsuperscript{1} suicide three to five times higher,\textsuperscript{2,3} and accidental death four times higher.\textsuperscript{4} For every time a gun in the home injures or kills in self-defense, there are 11 completed and attempted gun suicides, seven criminal assaults and homicides with a gun, and four unintentional shooting deaths or injuries.\textsuperscript{5}

2. **Many children live in homes with loaded and unlocked guns. Every parent and grandparent needs to be careful where their children play and ask if there is a gun in the home.** One third of all households with children younger than eighteen have a gun and more than 40 percent of gun-owning households with children store their guns unlocked.\textsuperscript{6} Twenty-two percent of children with gun-owning parents handled guns in their homes without their parents’ knowledge.\textsuperscript{7} More than half of youth who committed suicide with a gun obtained the gun from their home, usually a parent’s gun.\textsuperscript{8,9}

3. **Guns make violence more deadly.** Contrary to what the gun industry says, guns do kill people. Guns make killing easy, efficient, and somewhat impersonal, thereby increasing the lethality of anger and violence.\textsuperscript{10} An estimated 41 percent of gun-related homicides and 94 percent of gun-related suicides would not occur if no guns were present.\textsuperscript{3} On the same day as the Newtown massacre a man attacked children with a knife at an elementary school in China. Twenty-three children were injured, but none died.\textsuperscript{11} In family and intimate assaults the use of a gun increased the risk of death 12 times.\textsuperscript{12}

4. **Virtually anyone can buy a gun without a background check.** Federal law requires that anyone purchasing a firearm from a federally licensed dealer submit to a background check. But private sales, like many sales at gun shows and increasingly on the internet, do not require a background check. A 1997 National Institute of Justice survey found that around 40 percent of all firearm sales are private sales and therefore take place without any kind of background check.\textsuperscript{13} This is a loophole used by many people who could not pass a background check. In 2009, undercover stings at gun shows in Nevada, Ohio, and Tennessee revealed that 63 percent of private sellers sold guns to purchasers who stated that they would be unable to pass a background check.\textsuperscript{14} And a 2011 study of internet gun sales found that 62 percent of sellers agreed to sell a gun to a buyer who said he probably couldn’t pass a background check.\textsuperscript{15}
5. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is forbidden from regulating the sale and manufacture of guns. A 1976 amendment to the Consumer Product Safety Act specifically states that the Commission “shall make no ruling or order that restricts the manufacture or sale of guns, guns ammunition, or components of guns ammunition, including black powder or gun powder for guns.” As a result, the CPSC can regulate teddy bears and toy guns but not real guns, despite the fact that they are one of the most lethal consumer products.

6. Common sense gun safety laws help reduce gun violence while protecting the legal use of guns. The following gun safety laws have all been found to be effective in reducing gun violence and factors associated with gun violence. None of these regulations prevent law-abiding citizens from owning guns.

- **Tighter regulation and oversight of gun sellers.** A study using crime gun trace data from 54 U.S. cities found that diversion of guns for use in crimes is much less common in states:
  - that license retail gun sellers;
  - that require careful record keeping that can be reviewed by law enforcement;
  - that require potential gun buyers to apply for a license directly with a law enforcement agency; and
  - where law enforcement agencies conduct regular compliance inspections.

- **Requiring background checks for purchases through private sellers as well as dealers.** California, which regulates private gun sales, has substantially fewer illegal straw sales (where a purchaser buys a gun for a person who isn’t eligible to buy it) than states that do not regulate such sales.

- **Firearm prohibitions for high-risk groups.** A study in California found that denial of handgun purchase to people who have committed violent misdemeanors was associated with a decrease in risk of arrest for new gun and/or violent crimes.

- **Child access prevention laws.** Studies of child access prevention laws, which require gun owners to store their guns so that children and teens cannot access them unsupervised, have found these laws reduce accidental shootings of children by as much as 23 percent and suicides of adolescents by eight percent.

- **Well-designed assault weapons ban.** An Australian law banning semi-automatic and pump-action rifles and shotguns and buying back banned weapons was associated with decreased suicide and homicide rates and with the absence of any mass shootings in the decade following the law (compared to 11 mass shootings in the prior decade).

7. **Loopholes in prior gun safety laws prevented them from being as effective as necessary.** The 1993 Brady Law, which required federal background checks for guns purchased from licensed retailers, did not require such checks for guns bought through private sales. Today, 40 percent of guns are bought from private sellers. The 1994 assault weapons and large capacity magazine ban did not apply to weapons and magazines manufactured prior to the ban, allowed importation of rifles that could accept large capacity magazines, and allowed the manufacture and sale of “copy cat” assault weapons with only small differences from banned models.
8. **Common sense gun safety regulations protect lawful ownership and use of guns.** The 1994 Assault Weapons Ban that expired in 2004 protected the rights of gun owners by exempting every shotgun and hunting rifle in use at the time.\(^{25}\) Senator Dianne Feinstein’s proposed 2013 legislation reinstating the ban specifically exempts over 900 sporting weapons.\(^{26}\) Background checks do not prevent legal gun purchases.

9. **The majority of Americans, including gun owners and NRA members, support common sense gun safety regulation.** Almost three-quarters of NRA members (74%) and more than four out of five gun owners (82%) believe that all potential gun buyers should be subject to a criminal background check.\(^{27}\) Fifty-eight percent of Americans favor strengthening laws covering the sale of guns.\(^{28}\) Nearly two thirds of Americans (65%) and half of gun owners (50%) believe that allowing people to own assault weapons makes the country a more dangerous place.\(^{29}\) A majority of Americans support banning high capacity ammunition clips (53%) and bullets designed to explode or penetrate bullet-proof vests (56%).

10. **Armed school guards and teachers will not necessarily make children safer but will jeopardize the futures of some children.** Armed guards or officers are already in about one-third of our nation’s public schools.\(^{30}\) Columbine High School had an armed guard,\(^{31}\) and Virginia Tech had a full campus police force. There is no evidence that armed guards or police officers in schools make children safer.\(^{30}\) The presidents of the two largest unions representing teachers and other school staff at all levels resoundingly rejected the NRA’s December 21\(^{st}\) proposal to put armed police officers in every single school in this nation and to arm educators, calling the ideas “staggeringly misguided” and “mind-boggling,”\(^{32}\) and reinforcing instead that “schools must be safe sanctuaries, not armed fortresses.”\(^{33}\) While there isn’t clear evidence about armed security guards or police officers keeping children in schools safer, there is very troubling evidence that their large presence on school grounds is leading to the criminalization of some children at increasingly younger ages and the feeding of children, especially Black and Latino males, into the prison pipeline.

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**Sources:**

26 http://www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/assault-weapons
32 http://www.usnews.com/debate-club/should-there-be-more-armed-guards-in-schools/improve-access-to-mental-health-services-not-guns-to-prevent-shootings
33 http://aft.org/newspubs/press/2012/122112.cfm