



# **Save A Child's Life - Lock Up Guns In The Home**

by Dr. E. John Wipfler III  
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Every day in America, 13 kids die from gun-related injuries. Every day, eight kids are shot by accident.



Firearm-related injuries are now the leading cause of death in kids ages 1 to 19, surpassing for the first time, motor vehicle accidents, according to the most recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

As an attending emergency room physician for OSF HealthCare, I've seen the aftermath of accidental shootings involving children – the physical injuries, the emotional impact on all involved and the loss of life.

I can't forget two instances when boys ages 9 and 7 were brought into the emergency room just six days apart. Both boys were at the homes of a relative or friend and were asked by another young boy, "Do you want to see my daddy's shotgun?" The gun accidentally went off in both incidents, inflicting gunshot wounds to the abdomen. Very graphic, very severe traumas. One boy recovered and went home. The other boy was in surgery for hours, receiving 30-40 pints of blood. He died despite efforts to save his life. Both of these accidental shootings could have been prevented.

A Journal of the American Medical Association survey estimates 4.6 million kids in the U.S. live with unlocked, loaded guns in the home. We take steps to protect our children from all kinds of harm, making sure they wear seatbelts or are placed in car seats, wear life jackets or floatables while in the water ... so, why are we not making sure guns in the home are locked up? When we drop our children off at a play date or a friend's birthday party, why aren't we asking about potential dangers in the home they are visiting – including whether there are unsecured, unlocked firearms in the house?

I'm a certified firearms instructor who's taught firearms safety for decades. I'm also a father. After the incidents with the two young boys, I made it my mission to educate the world on how to better store and child-proof firearms. It's my passion to teach parents why doing this is so important to keep their kids safe. My own experience and the experience of others shows it's necessary to not only teach our children about gun safety in the home, but to understand the importance of practicing safe storage of guns.

Many Americans own firearms for sporting purposes and also for their family's protection. There are important, safe ways to store firearms securely, yet still keep them accessible for self-defense and family safety. Locking up guns and ammo properly can reduce the risk of self-inflicted or unintentional injury to kids by 85%. Having conversations parent to parent about whether guns in the home are locked and secure is a crucial step.

To encourage parents to take action by asking about guns in the home, OSF HealthCare has joined more than 170 other health care organizations representing thousands of hospitals and health systems in a nationwide public awareness and education campaign, called "Doesn't Kill to Ask."

The campaign is not intended to shame or embarrass gun owners, or remove weapons from people's homes. Its goal is to reduce risk, by putting the danger of unlocked guns front and center while stressing the importance of educating our communities about proper gun safety and talking with friends, family and neighbors about gun access.

Get educated, learn the facts and keep our children safe from firearms. Holding each other accountable and asking simple questions regarding guns in the home and whether they're locked up can save a life. It most definitely "Doesn't Kill to Ask." I urge you to visit [hospitalsunited.com](http://hospitalsunited.com) for tips on getting the conversation started.

*John Wipfler III, MD, is an attending emergency department physician at OSF HealthCare, clinical professor of Emergency Medicine at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria, served in the U.S. Armed Forces, is a certified firearms safety instructor and co-author of the book, "Keeping Your Family Safe - The Responsibilities of Firearm Ownership." He and his wife, Diane, a certified NRA firearms instructor and Illinois State Police certified concealed carry instructor, have taught multiple firearms safety classes together.*