

Firearm Safety: Bullets Astray

Depiction Suggestions

- ◆ Consider incorporating the real-life scenario of a gun accidentally misfiring while being loaded or unloaded by a criminal or other user.

A teenager trying to unload his mother's gun while she was away accidentally fired it, sending a bullet through his bedroom wall. He went to a party, not realizing that the bullet had gone through the wall, killing his sleeping sister. The next morning he was awakened by his mother's screams when she discovered her daughter's body. The distraught teen was acquitted of involuntary manslaughter charges by a judge who believed his claim that he was just trying to make the gun safer because there were kids in the house.

—Philadelphia Inquirer, 3-28-00

- ◆ When appropriate, depict parents being prosecuted for failing to securely store a gun that their child subsequently used to kill or injure others.
- ◆ Consider showing that even so-called "toy" guns, like pellet or BB guns or prop guns, can cause real injuries and even death.
- ◆ If depicting people fooling around or play-acting with a gun, consider showing it accidentally discharging during their horseplay, causing injury and turning a playful situation into a tragic one.

A 22-year-old-man, play-acting to frighten participants in a Halloween hayride, rose from an open casket and, as part of the performance, began shooting as he ran toward the wagon. Unfortunately, the gun held real bullets. A 13-year-old was fatally struck in the head and an eight-year-old was critically injured. The man was criminally charged.

—Birmingham News, 11-12-99

A teenager and his girlfriend found an unloaded gun while walking through a graveyard when taking a shortcut home from school. The next day they bought ammunition for it. While he was playing with it, it went off, fatally wounding his girlfriend in the chest as she stood nearby ironing.

—Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 2-10-00

- ◆ Consider depicting people as feeling less safe, rather than more safe, when they find their neighbors becoming increasingly armed.
- ◆ Look for possible opportunities to portray a family, concerned about a suicidal or homicidal loved one, getting rid of his/her gun or moving it off premises for safety as one of their intervention steps.
- ◆ Bear in mind that there is no consumer safety protection for firearms and that toy guns are better regulated than real ones.

With only a week to go before he would be certified, a reserve Sarasota police officer and his classmate played cops in a routine good-guy-bad-guy training exercise. Their police instructor, playing the bad guy, pulled a gun modified to fire blanks and shot him. The force of the blast shot out the lead plug placed in the barrel to prevent anything from exiting the gun. The lead ricocheted off a car windshield and lodged in the officer's head, fatally wounding him.

—Sarasota Herald Tribune, 9-13-00

- ◆ Consider occasionally having “junk” guns misfiring or jamming at critical times, as these guns are prone to do after a period of use.
- ◆ Consider depicting parents assigning blame for their child's death to easy firearm access by minors or criminals.
- ◆ Consider incorporating pointers on gun safety into scripts by having appropriate characters, such as law enforcement personnel, and teachers cite them.
- ◆ Unless a tragic outcome due to unsafe storage is portrayed, try to show guns in the home as being locked away and unloaded (if they are to be shown at all).

Man's best friend wasn't one on a particular afternoon. A golden retriever shot his master in the foot after stepping on the man's gun, releasing the safety and pulling the trigger. The retriever didn't end up in the doghouse, his owner blamed his own carelessness.

—AP, 11-3-99

- ◆ Whenever guns are used, try to show trigger locks or cable safety locks with them. Consider also making the point that some locks are much more effective than others and that certain locks can easily be disabled.
- ◆ Try showing inadvertent injuries caused by bullets shot into the air by holiday celebrants. What goes up must come down - with great force.

A rookie police officer shot a gun into the air at a party to celebrate the end of her one-year probationary period with the El Monte Police Department. That celebratory shot ended her career as a police officer and got her a felony count of negligently discharging a firearm.

—San Gabriel Tribune, 4-15-00

- ◆ When appropriate, show a careless user being chided by others and warned to treat all firearms as if they were loaded.
- ◆ Where possible, show the tragic consequences of allowing firearms to be accessible to children.
- ◆ Explore legal prosecution or civil action being taken against parents for negligently leaving a gun available to a child who then uses it to either intentionally or unintentionally harm themselves or others.
- ◆ When a character owns a gun kept at home, consider showing it kept in a commercial gun lock-box attached to a bed frame instead of, say, hidden under the pillow.
- ◆ Give thought to showing a gun misfiring and injuring someone after accidentally being dropped.

When a diner at Planet Hollywood bent over to retrieve a broken necklace dropped by a waitress, his .32 caliber derringer pistol fell out of his jacket, hit the floor, and fired a single round. Ironically, that errant bullet struck and wounded two health and safety educators who were in town for a health conference to discuss, among other issues, gun safety.

—Indianapolis Star, 11-12-97

- ◆ If careless gun users are to be portrayed, consider having them accidentally injure themselves or others by their actions.
- ◆ Explore opportunities to depict characters demonstrating safe gun use to others.

- ◆ Consider using gun safety posters in the background on appropriate sets.
- ◆ Consider showing a parent chastising his or her spouse for leaving a gun where their children can find it.
- ◆ Bear in mind that lecturing children about not touching guns has proven ineffective and may give gun-owning parents a false sense of security.
- ◆ Look for an appropriate situation to illustrate the possibility of kids getting into guns that parents thought were secured. Be mindful, however, of influencing young viewers to do the same.

When a Washington couple went to a mall to have the husband's recently acquired concealed weapon permit laminated, they left their sleeping 4-year-old son in the car with their loaded revolver. The boy awoke from his nap, found the gun hidden under the driver's seat, and fired through a window, but fortunately no one was hit.

—Seattle Times, 2-16-99

- ◆ Try to show the person responsible for an unintentional firearm injury or death held legally accountable either by criminal prosecution or civil action.
- ◆ Contemplate the idea of a shooter unintentionally causing self-harm, while withdrawing a gun to use on others.

As the police were trying to break up an altercation, a man ran from the scene and tried to steal a car. Police chased the man down and attempted to detain him. The man tried to pull a gun from his shoulder holster, but in doing so, accidentally and fatally shot himself in the head.

—San Gabriel Tribune, 2-8-00

A technician scuffling with a co-worker grabbed the man in a choke hold and fired a handgun at his head, sending the bullet through the man's cheek and into his own chest. The shooter died from the inadvertent self-inflicted gunshot wound.

—LA Times

- ◆ Consider portraying a gun manufacturer making the right decisions of choosing to design safer guns.
- ◆ Attempt to illustrate how safely-designed firearms, like the new "personalized" guns can be a deterrent of misuse by children or criminals who might somehow access them.
- ◆ Try highlighting the chance that even the presence of fake guns can instigate or provoke very real death by inadvertently drawing fire.

A Halloween reveler at a costume party - an actor and Buddhist who hated violence - reportedly pointed his toy gun at police officers investigating noise complaints. The officers, mistaking the gun for a real one, shot and killed him in what they claim was self-defense.

—LA Times, 10-29-00

- ◆ Demonstrate parents making gun safety inquiries of other households where their children visit, asking about storage, accessibility, and so on.

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Unintentional Shootings

Fact Sheet

- ◆ 31% of unintentional firearm deaths occur in youths under 20 years old.¹
- ◆ At close range, projectiles from many BB and pellet guns can cause tissue damage similar to that inflicted by bullets fired from low-velocity conventional firearms.²
- ◆ Persons aged 10 to 29 account for 58% of all unintentional firearm deaths.³
- ◆ There were estimated 87,844 non-fatal gun injuries treated in U.S. hospital emergency departments during 1994-1995. Of these, 16,091 were unintentional.⁴
- ◆ In 1996, about 3% of firearm fatalities were unintentional, claiming the lives of approximately 1,134 people.⁵
- ◆ In 1991, 71% of weapons involved in unintentional injuries were handguns.⁶
- ◆ It is estimated that over 17,000 persons per year are treated for unintentional, nonfatal gunshot wounds in hospital emergency departments.⁷
- ◆ Children are most often the victims of unintentional firearm deaths. In 1996, nearly 400 children age 19 and younger died in the U.S. from unintentional shootings.⁸
- ◆ In a 10-city study of accidental shootings, the ratio of nonfatal injuries to death was over 100 to 1.⁹
- ◆ From 1966 to 1995, about 56,000 Americans lost their lives in fatal gun accidents - about as many Americans as were killed in our longest war, the Vietnam War.¹⁰

Sources

1. Firearm Injury Center, University of Pennsylvania Medical Center.
2. Journal of Trauma, 1983.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1994 data.
4. Annals of Emergency Medicine, 1998.
5. National Vital Statistics Reports, 1998.
6. U.S. General Accounting Office, 1991.
7. Sinauer, N. et al., Journal of the American Medical Association, 1996; 275.
8. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 1998.
9. U.S. General Accounting Office as cited by Hemenway, D. et al., Guns and the Constitution, 1995.
10. Hemenway, D., et al., Guns and the Constitution, 1995.

Spotlight on Depiction of Health and Social Issues

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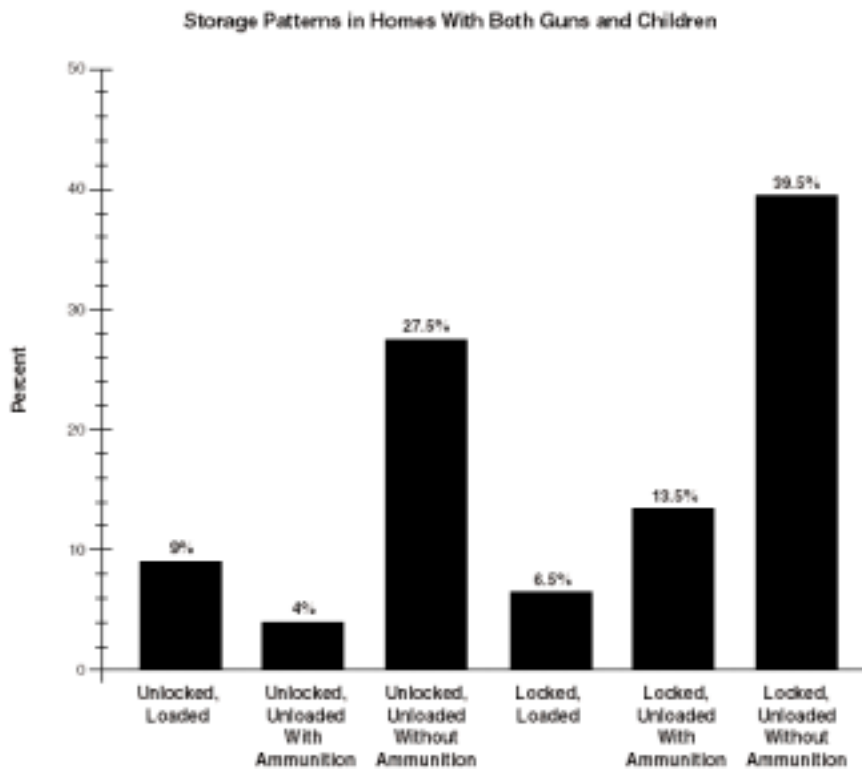
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Firearm Safety: Bullets Astray Safety and Storage

Fact Sheet

- ◆ 37% of persons surveyed reported having a firearm in or around the home and 7.2% of survey respondents said the firearm was stored loaded and unlocked.¹
- ◆ Of homes with children and firearms, 55% were reported to have one or more firearms in an unlocked place.²
- ◆ 9% of gun owners with children in the home kept their guns unlocked and loaded.³
- ◆ 43% of homes with children and firearms kept one or more guns in an unlocked place and without trigger locks.⁴



Source: American Journal of Public Health, Vol. 90, No. 4, 2000.

- ◆ 67% of adolescents who committed suicide between 1991 and 1993 used a gun obtained in their home.⁵
- ◆ About 1.4 million homes with about 2.6 million children kept firearms in a place very accessible to children.⁶
- ◆ Parents significantly underestimate the risk of injury that improperly stored guns can pose to their children.⁷
- ◆ The United States is among only 22% of responding nations that do not have regulations regarding storage of firearms.⁸

Sources

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999.
2. Shuster, M. et al., American Journal of Public Health April 2000.
3. Shuster, M. et al., American Journal of Public Health April 2000.
4. Shuster, M. et al., American Journal of Public Health April 2000.
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6. Shuster, M. et al., American Journal of Public Health, April 2000.
7. American Academy of Pediatrics, study in Atlanta, Ga., 1999.
8. United Nations study, 1997.

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