

Kids and guns. A while back a reader had responded to a column that I had written about my leaving my gun in a backpack. He basically reiterated the same worn rhetoric that has become so politically correct these days about keeping guns locked up and unloaded, especially if I had kids in the house. I view this popular but senseless interpretation of 'gun safety' as so much horse manure.

Locking guns up doesn't teach anyone how to handle them safely, or to not handle them when it's forbidden. If you have guns in the house, whether they are hidden away and locked up or not, and not informing the other members of the household that you have them is the height of negligence. It becomes too easy to accidentally stumble over them unexpectedly and invite trouble.

Let's look at this from another perspective. Everyone puts caps over their electric outlets so the babies won't be tempted to play with them. But, eventually, the child will learn how to pry that cap out. Before that happens, you had better have taught that child not to stick anything into that socket or it could kill him. If you didn't, you are asking for a tragedy.

You also probably keep your matches and lighters out of their reach. But what happens when the curious child finds a lighter or matches somewhere else? If you haven't instilled in him the dangers of playing with fire, rather than deciding to simply rely on restricting his access to matches, you have another tragedy in the making.

Granted, it's easier to just hide the stuff you don't want the kids to see than taking the time and effort to train them how to properly handle potentially dangerous situations and items. It's easier because it's a cop-out.

When I was raising my children, I knew we would have guns in the house. I knew these guns would not be locked up or hidden away. I knew the ammunition would not be stored and locked separately. I knew that any of the guns could be loaded at any time. This sounds like it, too, could be a tragedy in the making. But it wasn't in my home, or in millions - and I reiterate **millions** - of other homes nationwide. I knew kids and guns could cohabitate safely.

The only way it could be a tragedy was if we did not instill the rules of gun safety into the children as they grew up. Our rules were firm and uncompromising:

1 - We told the children where the guns were. They weren't all in the same place; we did keep one in our bedroom. It was no secret that we had guns in the house, or where they were. There was no danger of a child accidentally stumbling over a gun.

2 - They were never allowed to go into our bedroom without us there.

3 - They were never allowed to touch a gun without our permission and without one of us right there to teach them properly. If they ever did, we promised to whup their bottoms like they've never experienced. That was how important this was. They believed us.

4 - They were taught to assume that every gun is loaded; to treat a gun as if it were loaded. Never point a gun at a person. Never point a gun at anything you don't intend to kill.

5 - They were never left home alone until they consistently demonstrated that they had learned gun safety rules.

6 - They were never allowed to have friends over if we, the parents, weren't home. (This rule applied to more than gun issues - unsupervised kids can get into serious trouble.)

7 - They were never allowed to be at a friend's house if their parents weren't home. (Ditto.)

8 - If someone handled a gun around them without an adult present, they were ordered to

leave the scene immediately. Don't laugh, don't argue, don't holler, don't wait for him to point it at you. RUN away immediately. Then tell an adult what happened.

9 - When they demonstrated an acceptable level of general responsibility, we got them a BB gun. We explained that this was a BB GUN not a BB toy. We expected them to ask permission to use it. We stored it in the gun cabinet. They had to handle it at all times as if it were a gun. When they could demonstrate consistent, responsible, safe gun handling, we got them a .22 rifle. They still had to ask permission to use it. It was part of our gun safety rules.

They never tried to touch the guns. They knew they could ask and Dennis would spend time with them answering their questions and teaching them how to handle the guns safely. They only had to ask and we would respond.

That is what gun safety is about. You don't stick a fork in an electrical outlet, you don't play with matches, and you don't play with guns. It should be no secret. Since the educational campaigns to teach children about the dangers of electricity and fire, associated accidental deaths have declined. It's time to do it with guns. Demonstrate the dangers and teach how to be safe. That way, whether you choose to have guns in your house or not; whether you choose to lock them up or not; whether you choose to leave a gun loaded or not; children will know how to be safe around guns. Anything less is irresponsible.