

Children's Defense Fund  
**Protect Children, Not Guns**

# The Truth About Guns



March 2018

- 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,<sup>1</sup> suicide three to five times higher,<sup>2</sup> and accidental death four times higher.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>
- 2. Many children live in homes with loaded and unlocked guns. Every parent and grandparent must be careful where their children play and ask if there is a gun in the home.** One third of all households with children under 18 have a gun and 45 percent of gun-owning households with children do not store all of their firearms safely.<sup>5</sup> Three in 4 children ages 5-14 with gun-owning parents know where firearms are kept in the home and 22 percent have handled a gun in the home without their parents' knowledge.<sup>6</sup> More than half of youths who committed suicide with a gun obtained the gun from their home, usually a parent's gun.<sup>7</sup>
- 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 making anger and violence more deadly.<sup>8</sup> An estimated 41 percent of gun-related homicides and 94 percent of gun-related suicides would not occur if no guns were present.<sup>9</sup> The use of a gun in family or intimate assaults increased the risk of death 12 times.<sup>10</sup>
- 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 — including sales at gun shows, on the internet, and between private individuals — do not require a background check.
- 5. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) can regulate the sale and manufacture of teddy bears and toy guns, but not real 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 gunpowder for guns,”<sup>11</sup> and the restriction continues to be in effect. As a result, the CPSC can regulate teddy bears and toy guns<sup>12</sup> but remains forbidden from regulating real guns, although they are one of the most lethal consumer products. H.R. 5162, the Firearm Safety Act of 2018, if enacted would amend the Consumer Product Safety Act to remove the exclusion of pistols, revolvers, and other firearms from the definition of consume products to permit the issuance of safety standards by the CPSC for such firearms.

- 6. 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 such as stores and pawnshops, did not require such checks for guns bought through private sales. The 1994 Assault Weapons Ban, which expired in 2004, 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 “copycat” assault weapons with only small differences from banned models.<sup>13</sup>
- 7. The NRA has actively prevented the enforcement of current gun safety laws.** Since the 1970s, the NRA and its allies in Congress have worked to make it more difficult for the federal agencies responsible for overseeing firearms dealers to regulate criminal or negligent dealers.<sup>14</sup> By banning public disclosure of data on gun sales (known as trace data), banning electronic storage of firearms sales records, and prohibiting the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) from requiring dealers to inventory their stock of weapons, the NRA has made it incredibly difficult for the government to trace the source of guns used in crimes and identify dealers that sell guns to criminals. By preventing law enforcement from using trace data in legal proceedings and limiting the resources and operating flexibility of the ATF, the NRA has successfully blocked the agency from holding criminal dealers and traffickers accountable.
- 8. 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 effective for 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 to criminals 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.<sup>15</sup>
  - **Requiring background checks for purchases through private sellers as well as licensed dealers.** Evidence shows background checks for purchases through both licensed and private dealers prevent guns from getting into the wrong hands. According to the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, more than 3 million firearm purchase applications have been denied since the implementation of the Brady Law in 1994.<sup>16</sup> California, which also 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.<sup>17</sup>
  - **Firearm prohibitions for high-risk groups.** A study in California suggests denying handgun purchases to people who have committed violent misdemeanors is associated with a decrease in risk of arrest for new gun and/or violent crimes.<sup>18</sup>
  - **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<sup>19</sup> and suicides of adolescents by 8 percent.<sup>20</sup>

- **Well-designed assault weapons ban.** An Australian law banning and buying back assault weapons – including semi-automatic rifles, pump-action rifles and shotguns – was associated with decreased suicide and homicide rates. There were no mass shootings in the decade following the law compared with 11 mass shootings in the prior decade.<sup>21</sup>

**9. Common sense gun safety regulations protect lawful ownership and use of guns.**

The 1994 Assault Weapons Ban protected the rights of gun owners by exempting every shotgun and hunting rifle in use at the time.<sup>22</sup> Background checks do not prevent legal gun purchases, but they could prevent child and teen gun deaths.

**10. The majority of American voters, including gun owners, support common sense gun safety regulation.**

As of February 2018, 2 in 3 American voters (66 percent) indicated support for stricter gun laws, including half (50 percent) of gun owners. Ninety-seven percent of all voters and gun owners support universal background checks. Sixty-seven percent of voters and more than half of gun owners favor a nationwide ban on the sale of assault weapons.<sup>23</sup>

**11. 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 1 in 5 (19 percent) of our nation’s public schools.<sup>24</sup> Columbine and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High Schools both had an armed guard; Virginia Tech had a full campus police force.<sup>25</sup> The presidents of the two largest unions representing teachers and other school staff at all levels resoundingly rejected the proposal set forth by President Trump and the NRA to place armed police officers in every school in this nation and arm educators, calling the idea “ill-conceived, preposterous, and dangerous”<sup>26</sup> and reinforcing that “teachers and school staff need to ensure schools are safe sanctuaries and not armed fortresses.”<sup>27</sup> 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 presence on school grounds leads to the criminalization of our children at increasingly younger ages and the pushing of children, especially Black and Latino males, into the prison pipeline.

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**Sources**

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<sup>11</sup> *United States Statutes At Large, Volume 90, 1976*, at 504. Washington, D.C.  
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