



## STATE OF CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

### THE SIX BASIC GUN SAFETY RULES

There are six basic gun safety rules for gun owners to understand and practice at all times:

1. Treat all guns as if they are loaded. Always assume that a gun is loaded even if you think it is unloaded. Every time a gun is handled for any reason, check to see that it is unloaded. If you are unable to check a gun to see if it is unloaded, leave it alone and seek help from someone more knowledgeable about guns.
2. Keep the gun pointed in the safest possible direction. Always be aware of where a gun is pointing. A "safe direction" is one where an accidental discharge of the gun will not cause injury or damage. Only point a gun at an object you intend to shoot. Never point a gun toward yourself or another person.
3. Keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot. Always keep your finger off the trigger and outside the trigger guard until you are ready to shoot. Even though it may be comfortable to rest your finger on the trigger, it also is unsafe. If you are moving around with your finger on the trigger and stumble or fall, you could inadvertently pull the trigger. Sudden loud noises or movements can result in an accidental discharge because there is a natural tendency to tighten the muscles when startled. The trigger is for firing and the handle is for handling.
4. Know your target, its surroundings and beyond. Check that the areas in front of and behind your target are safe before shooting. Be aware that if the bullet misses or completely passes through the target, it could strike a person or object. Identify the target and make sure it is what you intend to shoot. If you are in doubt, DON'T SHOOT! Never fire at a target that is only a movement, color, sound or unidentifiable shape. Be aware of all the people around you before you shoot.
5. Know how to properly operate your gun. It is important to become thoroughly familiar with your gun. You should know its mechanical characteristics including how to properly load, unload and clear a malfunction from your gun. Obviously, not all guns are mechanically the same. Never assume that what applies to one make or model is exactly applicable to another. You should direct questions regarding the operation of your gun to your firearms dealer or contact the manufacturer directly.
6. Store your gun safely and securely to prevent unauthorized use. Guns and ammunition should be stored separately. When the gun is not in your hands, you must still think of safety. Use a California-approved firearms safety device on the gun, such as a trigger lock or cable lock, so it cannot be fired. Store it unloaded in a locked container, such as a California-approved lock box or a gun safe. Store your gun in a different location than the ammunition. For maximum safety you should use both a locking device and a storage container.

### ADDITIONAL SAFETY POINTS

<https://oag.ca.gov/firearms/tips>

The six basic safety rules are the foundational rules for gun safety. However, there are additional safety points that must not be overlooked.

- Never handle a gun when you are in an emotional state such as anger or depression. Your judgment may be impaired.
- Never shoot a gun in celebration (the Fourth of July or New Year's Eve, for example). Not only is this unsafe, but it is generally illegal. A bullet fired into the air will return to the ground with enough speed to cause injury or death.
- Do not shoot at water, flat or hard surfaces. The bullet can ricochet and hit someone or something other than the target.
- Hand your gun to someone only after you verify that it is unloaded, and the cylinder or action is open. Take a gun from someone only after you verify that it is unloaded, and the cylinder or action is open.
- Guns, alcohol and drugs don't mix. Alcohol and drugs can negatively affect judgment as well as physical coordination. Alcohol and any other substance likely to impair normal mental or physical functions should not be used before or while handling guns. Avoid handling and using your gun when you are taking medications that cause drowsiness or include a warning to not operate machinery while taking this drug.
- The loud noise from a fired gun can cause hearing damage, and the debris and hot gas that is often emitted can result in eye injury. Always wear ear and eye protection when shooting a gun.

## **GUNS AND CHILDREN--FIREARM OWNER RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Summary of Safe Storage Laws Regarding Children**

You may be guilty of a misdemeanor or a felony if you keep a loaded firearm within any premises that are under your custody or control and a child under 18 years of age obtains and uses it, resulting in injury or death, or carries it to a public place, unless you stored the firearm in a locked container or locked the firearm with a locking device to temporarily keep it from functioning.

### **You Cannot Be Too Careful with Children and Guns**

There is no such thing as being too careful with children and guns. Never assume that simply because a toddler may lack finger strength, they can't pull the trigger. A child's thumb has twice the strength of the other fingers. When a toddler's thumb "pushes" against a trigger, invariably the barrel of the gun is pointing directly at the child's face. NEVER leave a firearm lying around the house.

Child safety precautions still apply even if you have no children or if your children have grown to adulthood and left home. A nephew, niece, neighbor's child or a grandchild may come to visit. Practice gun safety at all times.

To prevent injury or death caused by improper storage of guns in a home where children are likely to be present, you should store all guns unloaded, lock them with a firearms safety device and store them in a locked container. Ammunition should be stored in a location separate from the gun.

## **Talking to Children About Guns**

Children are naturally curious about things they don't know about or think are "forbidden." When a child asks questions or begins to act out "gun play," you may want to address his or her curiosity by answering the questions as honestly and openly as possible. This will remove the mystery and reduce the natural curiosity. Also, it is important to remember to talk to children in a manner they can relate to and understand. This is very important, especially when teaching children about the difference between "real" and "make-believe." Let children know that, even though they may look the same, real guns are very different than toy guns. A real gun will hurt or kill someone who is shot.

## **Instill a Mind Set of Safety and Responsibility**

The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that adolescence is a highly vulnerable stage in life for teenagers struggling to develop traits of identity, independence, and autonomy. Children, of course, are both naturally curious and innocently unaware of many dangers around them. Thus, adolescents as well as children may not be sufficiently safeguarded by cautionary words, however frequent. Contrary actions can completely undermine good advice. A "Do as I say and not as I do" approach to gun safety is both irresponsible and dangerous.

Remember that actions speak louder than words. Children learn most by observing the adults around them. By practicing safe conduct, you will also be teaching safe conduct.

## **Safety and Storage Devices**

If you decide to keep a firearm in your home, you must consider the issue of how to store the firearm in a safe and secure manner. California recognizes the importance of safe storage by requiring that all firearms sold in California be accompanied by a DOJ-approved firearms safety device or proof that the purchaser owns a gun safe that meets regulatory standards established by the Department. The current list of DOJ-approved firearms safety devices and the gun safe standards can be viewed by visiting <http://oag.ca.gov/firearms/fsdcertlist>.

There are a variety of safety and storage devices currently available to the public in a wide range of prices. Some devices are locking mechanisms designed to keep the firearm from being loaded or fired, but don't prevent the firearm from being handled or stolen. There are also locking storage containers that hold the firearm out of sight. For maximum safety you should use both a firearm safety device and a locking storage container to store your unloaded firearm. Two of the most common locking mechanisms are trigger locks and cable locks. Trigger locks are typically two-piece devices that fit around the trigger and trigger guard to prevent access to the trigger. One side has a post that fits into a hole in the other side. They are locked by a key or combination locking mechanism. Cable locks typically work by looping a strong steel cable through the action of the firearm to block the firearm's operation and prevent accidental firing. However, neither trigger locks nor cable locks are designed to prevent access to the firearm.

Smaller lock boxes and larger gun safes are two of the most common types of locking storage containers. One advantage of lock boxes and gun safes is that they are designed to completely prevent unintended handling and removal of a firearm. Lock boxes are generally constructed of sturdy, high-grade metal opened by either a key or combination lock. Gun safes are quite heavy, usually weighing at least 50 pounds. While gun safes are typically the most expensive firearm storage devices, they are generally more reliable and secure.

**Remember: Safety and storage devices are only as secure as the precautions you take to protect the key or combination to the lock.**

## **RULES FOR KIDS**

Adults should be aware that a child could discover a gun when a parent or another adult is not present. This could happen in the child's own home; the home of a neighbor, friend or relative; or in a public place such as a school or park. If this should happen, a child should know the following rules and be taught to practice them.

**1. Stop**

The first rule for a child to follow if he/she finds or sees a gun is to stop what he/she is doing.

**2. Don't Touch!**

The second rule is for a child not to touch a gun he/she finds or sees. A child may think the best thing to do if he/she finds a gun is to pick it up and take it to an adult. A child needs to know he/she should NEVER touch a gun he/she may find or see.

**3. Leave the Area**

The third rule is to immediately leave the area. This would include never taking a gun away from another child or trying to stop someone from using gun.

**4. Tell an Adult**

The last rule is for a child to tell an adult about the gun he/she has seen. This includes times when other kids are playing with or shooting a gun. Please note that, while there is no better advice at this time for children or adolescents who encounter a gun by happenstance, the California Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians reports that such warnings alone may be insufficient accident prevention measures with children and adolescents.

## **METHODS OF CHILDPROOFING YOUR FIREARM**

As a responsible handgun owner, you must recognize the need and be aware of the methods of childproofing your handgun, whether or not you have children. Whenever children could be around, whether your own, or a friend's, relative's or neighbor's, additional safety steps should be taken when storing firearms and ammunition in your home.

- Always store your firearm unloaded.
- Use a firearms safety device AND store the firearm in a locked container.
- Store the ammunition separately in a locked container.

Always storing your firearm securely is the best method of childproofing your firearm; however, your choice of a storage place can add another element of safety. Carefully choose the storage place in your home especially if children may be around.

- Do not store your firearm where it is visible.
- Do not store your firearm in a bedside table, under your mattress or pillow, or on a closet shelf.
- Do not store your firearm among your valuables (such as jewelry or cameras) unless it is locked in a secure container.
- Consider storing firearms not possessed for self-defense in a safe and secure manner away from the home.