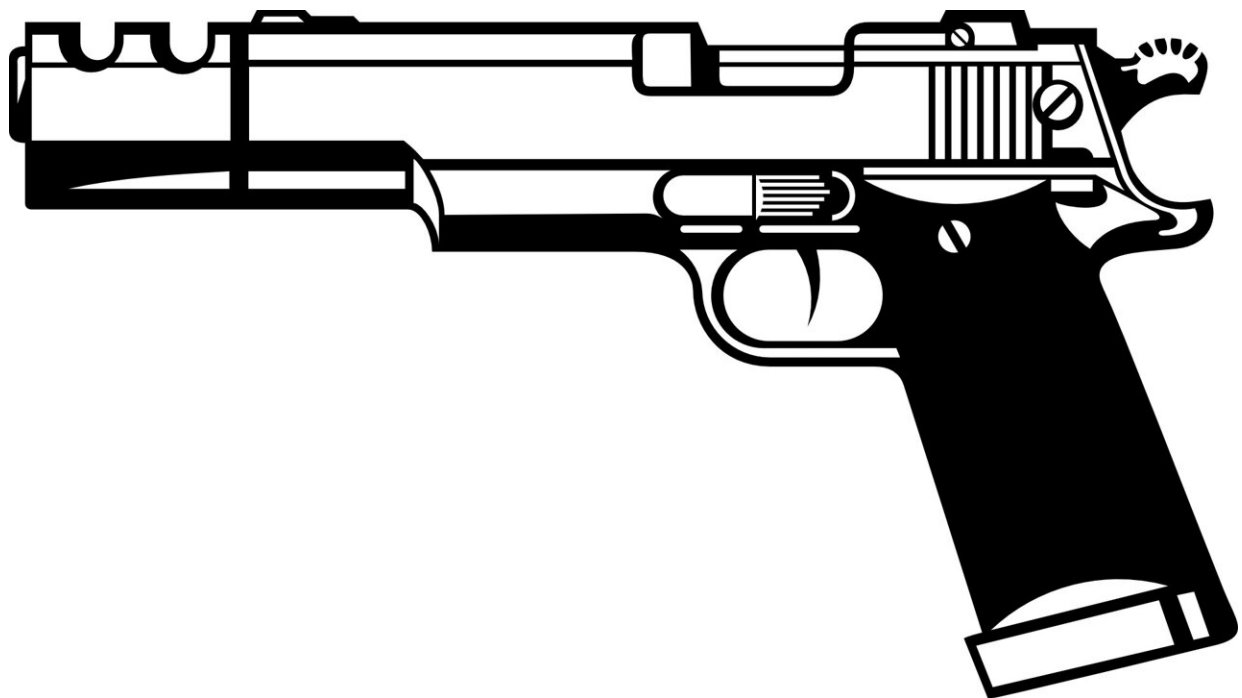


Study finds how to reduce risk of kids playing with a found gun

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In a lab at The Ohio State University masquerading as a playroom, pairs of kids ages 8 to 12 participating in a study found a variety of toys and games to play with—as well as a mysterious file cabinet.

Inside one of the drawers of the unlocked cabinet were two disabled 9-mm handguns.

As they played in the room, nearly all the [children](#) eventually found the [guns](#). But some kids in the study were much more likely to tell an adult they found a gun, less likely to touch the gun, and were less reckless if they did touch it—and they were the kids who had watched a one-minute gun [safety](#) video a week earlier.

The study may be the first to randomly assign some children to watch a gun safety video to determine if it had a protective effect, said Brad Bushman, co-author of the study and professor of communication at Ohio State.

"It was pretty remarkable to see that this one-minute video had such a powerful impact a week after the kids saw it," Bushman said.

Bushman conducted the study with Sophie Kjærviik, a doctoral candidate in communication at Ohio State. Their results were published (July 17, 2023) in the journal *JAMA Pediatrics*.

"Firearms are the [leading cause of death for American children](#). These results point to a way that may help reduce the toll," Kjærviik said.

The study involved 226 children whose parents or guardians gave permission for their participation. They were tested in pairs of kids who knew each other, including siblings, cousins and friends.

A week before the lab portion of the study, the children watched one of two one-minute videos created especially for the study. Both videos were of The Ohio State University police chief delivering a message in full uniform.

Half of the participant pairs saw the chief in a car safety video, while the other half saw her in a gun safety video. All of the kids watched the videos in their own homes.

A week later the children came to the lab and were told they could play with any of the toys and games in the room—including Legos, Jenga, nerf guns, foam swords and others—for 20 minutes.

The researchers and the children's parents watched the children play from another room via a hidden camera.

Out of the 226 children, 216 (96%) opened the drawers of the filing cabinet and found the guns, which were disabled but rigged with a device that counted how often the kids pulled the trigger.

"Kids are naturally curious, so we were not surprised that they opened the drawers and found the guns," Bushman said.

The researchers asked parents informally if they thought their kids would report the gun to adults and not touch the firearm. "That's what most parents in our study thought their child would do," Kjærvik said. "But that is not what happened."

Over half of the children (53%) touched the gun and fewer than a quarter (23%) told an adult. But the key finding was the difference between those who watched the gun safety versus the car safety video.

Those who watched the gun safety video were more than three times more likely to tell an adult (34% vs. 11%) and less likely to touch a gun (39% vs. 67%).

Even those who did touch the gun were somewhat less reckless if they had watched the gun safety video. They held the gun for fewer seconds (42 versus 100 seconds), were less likely to pull the trigger (9% versus 30%) and pulled the trigger fewer times (four versus seven times).

"These are strong results, especially given that the video was so short and

the children watched it a full week earlier," Bushman said.

The video may have been effective because it featured an authority figure—a police chief—in full uniform. [Previous research](#) has shown that younger children find authority figures in uniforms to be especially persuasive.

In contrast, a firearm safety video by the National Rifle Association [has been found to be ineffective](#), perhaps because it features a cartoon bird called Eddie Eagle rather than an authority figure, Bushman said.

Which video the children saw wasn't the only risk factor linked to playing with the gun and not reporting it to adults. Being a boy was a risk factor, as was watching more age-inappropriate movies (which may include violence) and having an interest in guns.

Kids who had previously received firearms training were less at risk, as were those who had negative attitudes about guns.

Another protective factor was having a gun in the home, the study found.

"Research shows that [gun owners talk to their children](#) more often about gun safety than non-gun owners," Kjærviik said.

The researchers also had children in the study watch a short clip of a violent PG-rated movie either with guns, or with the guns digitally removed, before they went into the playroom. The researchers had theorized that kids who watched the movie clips with guns would be more likely to play with the gun in the lab, but there was no effect.

"But the fact that kids who watched more age-inappropriate movies—which often include violent use of guns—were more at risk of playing with the gun makes us believe that media use does have an

effect," Bushman said.

Overall, the study provides a realistic and relatively easy way to help stem gun injuries and deaths among children, Kjærviik and Bushman said.

"We recommend that adults teach children about gun safety and reduce their exposure to age-inappropriate media," the authors wrote.

More information: A Gun Safety Video Can Reduce Children's Unsafe Behavior Around Real Guns: A Randomized Clinical Trial, *JAMA Pediatrics* (2023).

Provided by The Ohio State University

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