

# ***THE SAGA POCKET GUIDE TO GUN SAFETY***

## **The parents' responsibility**

The prime responsibility for a child's safety rests squarely on his or her parents. In a home where guns are kept, good parents must be careful to display (and insist that others display) safe gun-handling, responsible use and good gun manners. Whether gun owners or not, all caring parents have the great responsibility of ensuring their children's safety by teaching them about the dangers they may encounter – whether from a stranger, a hot stove, medicine, a bottle of paraffin, fire, electricity, swimming pool, ... or a firearm.

## **Talking with your child about gun safety**

A good time to introduce the subject may be the first time he or she is old enough to show an interest – even if in toy pistols or rifles. Talking openly and honestly about firearm safety is much more effective than simply ordering your child to “Stay away from guns”. Such statements may just stimulate a child's natural curiosity to investigate further. Explain the rules and answer his or her questions to promote proper understanding and respect – the core of safety. Any rules set for your own child should also apply to any visitors to the home – your friends as well as your child's visitors. This will help keep your child from being pressured into showing a gun to a friend. These same rules also apply when you and your family visit friends and family at their homes.

## **Toy guns vs. real guns**

It is also advisable, particularly with very young children, to discuss the difference between real life and ‘acting’. Firearms are often handled carelessly in movies and on tv, and so many ‘shot and killed’ actors reappear on screens that children can be forgiven for thinking that gunshot wounds and ‘deaths’ are not permanent. Make sure your child knows the difference between being “killed” on tv and in reality.

If your child has toy guns, you may want to use them to demonstrate safe gun handling and to explain how they differ from genuine firearms.

## **Safe storage**

Make sure your ‘real’ guns (including BB and pellet guns) and ammunition are inaccessible to unsupervised children and all unauthorised persons. All gun owners have a statutory duty in terms of the Firearms Control Act to safeguard in a locked prescribed safe, any firearm that is not worn on the owner's person or is not under her or his direct control. The law also prescribes that the keys to the safe must be under control and not accessible to unauthorised persons. Gun owners must ensure that should they keep a firearm ready for self-defence, such firearm must at all times be under their direct control. Often children are very responsible and would not touch their parents' firearm but the temptation might be there to show a “real gun” to visiting friends. A greater problem is when a visiting friend wants to “see with his hands”. Depending on the particular circumstances, it might be best to place the **unloaded** firearm in a drawer while the owner carries the ammunition on her or his person. Never underestimate the ingenuity of children in finding a hidden gun.



It goes without saying that gun owners have a moral and legal responsibility to prevent guns from landing in the hands of criminals and any unauthorised persons. They must ensure that at all times they have effective control over their firearms, irrespective of whether the firearm is at home or on the person. A firearm on the person must be carried concealed in a holster or other suitable container and, at home (or the office), unless it is under your direct control, it must be locked away in a prescribed safe. It may not be left unattended in a vehicle.

## **Be a good role model**

Set the right example for your children by making your good gun manners and safety procedures clearly obvious even to the casual onlooker. 'Slick handling' by an experienced gun owner may be all very well (and safe) but your first objective when in the presence of others – especially your children – should be to show them that you respect your firearms and that there are no exceptions to safety rules.

## **Pellet guns and air guns**

Pellet guns have been the traditional 'first gun' of many a child but now that air guns have been 'deregulated' you may be considering the more powerful option. Whichever 'first gun' your child handles, please make sure that it is treated with the same caution and respect as your own hunting rifle or handgun. Safety begins with the first gun.

# **TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL**

## **BB and pellet gun shooting**

BB and pellet guns provide hours of enjoyment. They are also a good way to get started in a lifetime of shooting recreation and sport. Through air guns, boys and girls can safely learn the basics of good shooting. These basics can take you into any number of other shooting activities, including all the way to the Olympics.

## **Always with an adult**

Before handling any gun, always get permission from your parents or another responsible adult. If this is your first BB or pellet gun, sit down with your parents and discuss under what circumstances the gun can be handled.

## **Always learn how first**

Before you start shooting, learn what it takes to shoot safely and successfully.

**Study the gun operations guide** with your parents or another adult. Be sure you understand all of the manufacturer's instructions.



**Always find a knowledgeable adult** to teach you safety and proper shooting techniques.

## Always follow the safety rules

Gun safety is a simple but continuous process. You develop safe handling skills only through proper, supervised practice. The most important safety element is your *attitude* - knowledge and skills are of little value unless you really use them. Being safe means that you always consciously keep your gun under control.

Remember too that a gun's mechanical safety device is never foolproof – nothing can ever replace safe gun handling.

## Always on a safe shooting range

Whenever you shoot a BB or pellet gun it is essential that you use a safe shooting range. A safe range can be set up in many places: in your home, community hall, recreation center, etc; or outdoors in a backyard or farm - provided animals or people cannot cross your line-of-fire. It is an offence to discharge a firearm or airgun in a built-up area or any public place without good reason to do so. Accordingly, unless the municipality and police have authorised it, the discharge of an airgun in one's backyard is not allowed.

To have a safe range three things must be present:- a safe area, a safe distance and a safe backstop.

A local gun shop can usually tell you how to contact a nearby shooting club.

### **FIREARM SAFETY DEPENDS ON YOU!**

#### **What should you teach your child about gun safety?**

If you have decided that your child is not yet ready to be trained in gun handling and use, you should explain that he or she must never touch a gun unless you are present and have given permission. As it is possible that your child could come across a gun outside her or his home, you should also teach him or her to adhere to the following basic safety instructions:

- STOP!
- Don't Touch
- Leave the Area
- Tell an Adult

The initial steps of “**STOP!**” and “**Don't Touch**” are the most important. To counter the natural impulse to touch a gun, it is imperative that you impress these steps of the safety message upon your child.

In today's society where adult supervision is not always possible, the direction to “**Leave the Area**” is also essential. Under some circumstances, “area” may be understood to be a room if your child cannot physically leave the flat or house.

“**Tell an Adult**” emphasizes that children should seek (or phone) a trustworthy adult – neighbour, relative, teacher – if a parent or guardian is not available.



## ***ALL SHOOTERS MUST KNOW THESE BASIC SAFETY RULES***

The three rules below are fundamental in any situation. Whether or not you own a gun, it is important to know these rules so that you may insist that others follow them.

- **Always keep the gun pointed in a safe direction**

Whether you are shooting or simply handling a gun, never point it at yourself or others (or animals). Common sense will tell you which direction is safest. Outdoors, it is generally safe to point the gun toward the ground, or, if you are on a shooting range, toward the backstop. Indoors, be mindful of the fact that a bullet can penetrate ceilings, floors, walls, windows, and doors.

- **Always keep your finger out of the trigger guard until ready to shoot**

When handling a gun, people have a natural tendency to put their finger on the trigger. Do not touch the trigger unless you are actually ready to fire the gun.

- **Always keep the gun unloaded until ready to use (obviously not applicable to self-defence guns)**

If you do not know how to check to see if a gun is unloaded, leave it alone. Carefully secure it, being certain to point it safely and to keep your finger off the trigger, and seek competent assistance.

### ***More Basic Shooting Safety***

- **Be sure of your target, and what's beyond it**

Be sure that your bullet will not injure anyone or anything beyond or adjacent to your target. Firing at a movement or a noise without having positively identified it as a legal and legitimate target could have tragic consequences.

- **Use correct ammunition**

It takes only one improper or incorrect cartridge to wreck your gun and cause you serious personal injury.

- **If your gun fails to fire ...**

If the trigger is pulled and the gun fails to fire, WAIT for a full ten seconds. Exercise EXTREME care. With the gun pointed in a safe direction and your face away from the breech, carefully open the action, unload the firearm and dispose of the cartridge in a safe way. Wear safety glasses.

- **Always wear ear and eye protection**

Shooting noise can permanently damage your hearing. Shooting glasses guard against escaping gases, ruptured cases, ricochets and other hazards.

- **Be sure the barrel is clear of obstructions**

Check that the barrel is clear of any obstruction – sand, twigs, mud, gunge – the smallest of which can cause dangerously increased pressures causing the barrel to bulge or burst. Before inspecting the gun (especially from the muzzle) ensure that it is not loaded.



# BE SMART, BE SAFE!

## Ten Commandments of Firearm Safety

- Make safety a habit – you can't recall a speeding bullet.
- Point firearms only at your target or in a safe direction.
- Check the barrel and action for obstructions, after having ensured the gun is unloaded.
- Treat all firearms as if they are loaded and cocked.
- Store weapons unloaded in a safe place.
- Firearms are not for playing games.
- Know and use only the right, clean and dry ammunition.
- Ricochets can be dangerous – don't shoot at hard flat surfaces or water.
- Think clearly before pulling a trigger – never handle a gun during or after alcohol use.
- Teach your family the proper use of firearms – knowledge breeds respect.

This booklet is not intended as a complete course in gun safety and is not a substitute for formal, qualified instruction in the handling, use, or storage of firearms. If adhered to, the guidelines herein should minimize the chance of accidental discharges and the abuse of firearms.

*Issued in the interest of public safety by:*

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