Tips for Provider Messaging on Safe Firearm Storage

**Context:** Patient-provider counseling on safe firearm storage during clinic visits is an important strategy to potentially reduce firearm-related injuries among children and teens. Many families feel comfortable discussing firearm safety with their child’s pediatrician. A combination of just-in time education from a trusted provider and a free safety device to take home can increase confidence of how to use the safety device and likelihood that the safety item will be used.

**Terminology:** We’ve found that use of the term “firearm” is generally preferred over “gun” because it comes across as less political.

1. Make it a practice to **screen all families** about access to firearms.

2. Approach the conversation around safe firearm storage just **like any other injury prevention topic** (e.g., car seats, bike helmets, life jackets) and **provide context** for your questions and recommendations.
   a. Focus on kids being **smart and curious** (but not emotional) and avoid labels.
   b. **Start with an open-ended question** to engage safety interest, and encourage dialogue.
   c. Firearm ownership may be due to longstanding **beliefs and values**; remember everyone will come with **different experiences**.
   d. Remind families that information is **confidential** unless there is an immediate emergency.

3. Assess access to firearms in each relevant household (e.g., a teen may spend time in more than one parents’ or relatives’ household).
   a. **Ask explicitly** if firearms in the home are **safely stored** (i.e., locked up, unloaded, ammunition stored separately). Ask parents/caregivers to consider if firearms are in **other homes** where their child or teen spends time. **Note:** approximately 42% of adults report that there is a firearm in their household (nationally).
      i. Example: “We understand many households have firearms and I’d like to talk about options for storing firearms to help keep your kids safe”.
      ii. Example: “Tell me about the firearms in your home”.
   b. Reminder that hidden or “off-limits” is not safe.
   c. You can share your own family rules as a conversation starter.
   d. If quick access to the firearm is important, discuss there are safe storage options that meet this requirement.
   e. Encourage parents and caregivers to ask about firearm storage in the homes that their kids visit.

4. Temporarily removing firearms from the home is encouraged if a family member is depressed, suicidal or abusing drugs or alcohol.
   a. **Sympathize** with those who find the option of living without a firearm at home, even temporarily, very difficult.

5. When the conversation is approached with **neutrality, privacy, respect and confidence**, it is generally well received by firearm-owning families.

Tips for Provider Messaging on Safe Firearm Storage

1 Simonetti et al., 2018
2 Rowhani-Rahbar et al., 2016
3 Uspal et al., 2020
4 Pallin et al., 2019
5 Baca, 2016
6 Herzog, 2016
7 Nguyen, 2016
8 UC Davis
9 Means Matter
10 Healthychildren.org
11 Pew Research Center, 2017
12 Baxley & Miller, 2006
13 The ASK Campaign, 2015
14 Ruelas, 2019
15 Parent, 2016