RIVALSHOT ACADEMY · COURSE BOOK

Safety Every Time

Firearm Safety Principles for Everyone — companion course book

ORIGINAL COURSE · ACADEMY.RIVALSHOT.IO

Contents

Foreword: How to use this book

Chapter 1. The safety principles, in plain words

Chapter 2. Every firearm has its own manual and needs its own teacher

Chapter 3. Anyone can say stop

Chapter 4. Children and visitors

Chapter 5. Storage is part of safety

Chapter 6. Find hands-on instruction and keep learning

Glossary

Where to go next

Sources

Foreword: How to use this book

This book travels alongside the six lessons of Safety Every Time. The lessons are short on purpose. The book gives each idea more room: more examples, more of the reasoning behind each principle, and more practical words you can borrow for real conversations.

It is written for three kinds of readers at once. If you are a new owner, it gives you a shared language before habits set in. If you are returning after years away, it explains why a refresher is a sign of experience rather than a lack of it. And if you live with firearms you do not own, or you simply spend time in homes where firearms are kept, it is written just as much for you. Safety belongs to everyone in the room, and nobody needs to own anything to notice, speak up or step away.

A few promises about what you will and will not find here.

- **Principles, not procedures.** This book never explains how to operate, load, unload, carry, clean, repair or modify a firearm. Those things differ from model to model and belong with the exact manufacturer's manual and a qualified instructor. When the book reaches the edge of what principles can do, it says so and points you onward.
- **No legal answers.** Laws about owning, carrying, storing and transferring firearms vary from place to place and change over time. Where the law matters, the book says: check the official source for your jurisdiction.
- **No fear.** The book does not use frightening stories to make a point. Its examples are fictional, everyday and calm, and they

come from kitchens, cafés, range lobbies and front desks. No example refers to a real person or a real business.

- **No certificate.** This is an educational reading course, with no saved completion, certification or qualification. It is not a class or a license.

Each chapter follows the same pattern. It develops the lesson's ideas, then offers **In practice** (two short fictional cases), a **Checklist**, **Key terms**, **Talk it through** (questions for a household, a study partner or a group) and a **Journal prompt** that matches the course journal.

You can read straight through or jump to the chapter you need. You can also put the book down at any time. Some of these topics touch on hard experiences for some readers. If a page brings up something heavy, it is fine to stop, step outside, or talk to someone you trust. Support is listed in "Where to go next" at the back.

Finally, a suggestion: read at least one chapter aloud with the people you live with. Safety habits are easier to share when everyone in a household uses the same words.

Chapter 1. The safety principles, in plain words

The same few ideas, in many versions

If you have ever looked up firearm safety rules, you have probably noticed that they come in different lengths and wordings. The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) publishes ten rules of safe handling. SAAMI, a standards body formed by firearm and ammunition manufacturers, publishes its own list of ten. The U.S. Department of Justice repeats the core handling principles at the start of its safe-storage guide. Ranges post their own versions on lobby walls, and instructors often teach a shorter set from memory.

That variety can make safety feel more complicated than it is. Underneath the different numbers sits one small set of ideas. This chapter states them in plain words that anyone can say out loud, including people who have never touched a firearm and never plan to.

It helps to be clear about the difference between a **principle** and a **procedure**. A principle tells you what must always be true. A procedure tells you how to do a particular task with a particular piece of equipment. “Keep it pointed where nothing would be harmed” is a principle. How to hold a specific firearm while doing something with it is a procedure, and it belongs with that firearm’s manual and a qualified teacher. This course deals only in principles. That is not a limitation; it is what makes the principles usable by everyone.

The principles, one at a time

Treat every firearm as if it could fire. The Department of Justice puts it as "treat every firearm as if it were loaded," and NSSF says to treat every gun as if it can fire at any time. This principle exists because of one sentence: "Don't worry, it's not loaded." People say it sincerely. Sometimes they are wrong. The principle removes the question entirely. Whether or not someone checked, whether or not you watched them check, the firearm is treated the same way. Both rule lists also warn against relying on a mechanical safety device to prevent firing; a safety is a mechanism, and mechanisms can fail.

Keep it pointed where nothing would be harmed. The open end of the barrel, where a projectile would leave, is called the **muzzle**. The Department of Justice describes a safe direction as one where, if the firearm were to fire, no one would be injured. That is a more demanding standard than it first sounds. It means never toward a person, including yourself, and never toward anything you are not willing to see destroyed. Indoors, in a home full of rooms and neighbors, a truly safe direction can be hard to find, which is one more reason firearms in a home stay put away when not in use.

Keep fingers off the trigger until the moment of firing. The finger stays outside the trigger area until someone is in a place designed for firing, following that place's rules, and has decided to fire. A finger resting on a trigger "just because that's where it sits" is one of the easiest things for an onlooker to notice, and it is always worth mentioning.

Know what is in front of and beyond. NSSF reminds readers that a projectile can travel a very long way. The person firing is responsible for where it ends up, not only for what they meant to hit. For

many readers of this book, this principle may matter less as a skill and more as a way of understanding why ranges are built and supervised the way they are.

When not in use, unloaded and secured, with ammunition apart. NSSF tells owners to keep firearms unloaded until ready to use and to store firearms and ammunition separately and securely. Chapter 5 develops this, because storage is where safety does much of its quiet work.

Protect eyes and ears. Both rule lists say to wear eye and ear protection whenever there is shooting. Shooting is loud enough to damage hearing, and eye protection guards against debris. Hearing protection and range health are a related topic of their own.

No home modifications; qualified service. Both lists say not to alter or modify a firearm and to have it serviced by qualified people. A modification can change how a firearm behaves in ways that its manual no longer describes.

Learn each firearm on its own. Both lists end by saying to learn the mechanical and handling characteristics of the specific firearm before using it. Chapter 2 is devoted to this.

To these, the course adds one plain line of its own: **a clear head.** If you are exhausted, very upset, or have taken anything that affects judgment, including alcohol, that is not the time to be around a firearm at all. Nobody needs a rule book to see why.

Why the principles overlap

You may have noticed that the principles seem to repeat each other. If every firearm is treated as able to fire, why also insist on a safe direction? If fingers stay off the trigger, why worry about what lies beyond?

The overlap is the point. Each principle covers for a mistake in another. Someone may honestly believe a firearm is unloaded and be wrong; a safe direction still protects the people nearby. Someone may misjudge a direction; a finger kept off the trigger still matters. Safety does not depend on any single rule being followed perfectly. It depends on several layers holding at the same time. People sometimes ask which principle is the most important. The honest answer is that the question misunderstands how they work. They are a set. They work together, every time, for everyone.

The principles belong to people who don't own firearms, too

Imagine you are a partner, a roommate, a grandparent, a teenager or a guest. You may not know the name of a single part. You can still notice where a firearm is pointed. You can notice a finger resting on a trigger. You can notice that someone is waving a firearm while telling a story, or that people at a party are passing one around. You can say, "Please stop," and you can leave. Chapter 3 is about exactly that.

Knowing the principles gives non-owners something precise to notice. "Something about this felt wrong" becomes "it swung toward the table." That precision makes it easier to speak up and harder for anyone to brush the concern aside.

What this chapter does not mean

Knowing the principles is not the same as knowing how to handle a firearm. This chapter does not teach anyone how to check whether a firearm is unloaded, how to carry one, or how any control works. Reciting the principles does not make anyone "safe with guns." It makes you able to recognize when something is not right and to say so. And if you would rather not be around firearms at all, that is a valid choice; the principles still help you notice, speak up and step away.

In practice

The two cards. Two housemates, one of whom owns a firearm, sit down one evening to write their say-it-back cards. Most lines match. One does not. The owner wrote "Put away when done." The other housemate wrote "Put away unloaded and locked, ammunition separate." They talk it through over tea. The owner realizes his shorthand left out the parts his housemate cared about most, and rewrites his line. Nothing dramatic happened. Two people simply found a gap in shared language while everything was calm, rather than in a tense moment later.

The heirloom at the holiday table. At a family holiday, an elderly relative brings out an old firearm that has been in the family for decades and says, "It hasn't been loaded in fifty years." He holds it up for everyone to admire, and it drifts across the table. His adult granddaughter says gently, "Let's treat it like it could fire, Grandpa. Could you point it away from all of us and put it back in its case?" He chuckles, does so, and the conversation moves on to the family story behind it. The granddaughter did not need to know anything about old firearms. She needed the first two principles and the confidence to say them kindly.

Checklist

- I can say each principle in my own words without reading it.
- I have written a say-it-back card, eight words or fewer per line.
- I understand the difference between a principle and a procedure.
- I know that "it's not loaded" never changes how a firearm is treated.
- I know that I can notice direction and finger position without any handling skill.
- I have compared my card with the people I live with.
- I know where model-specific handling is learned: the exact manual and a qualified teacher.

Key terms

- **Principle:** a rule about what must always be true, whatever the equipment.
- **Procedure:** model-specific steps for a task; learned from the manual and a qualified instructor, not from this course.
- **Muzzle:** the open end of the barrel, where a projectile would leave.
- **Safe direction:** a direction where, if the firearm fired, no one would be hurt.
- **Layered safety:** several overlapping principles, so that one mistake does not become an injury.

Talk it through

1. Which principle do you think people most often forget in casual settings, and why?
2. How could someone who does not own firearms use the principles at a family gathering without seeming rude?
3. Why might “Which rule is most important?” be the wrong question?

Journal prompt

Write your say-it-back card: each principle in eight words or fewer, in your own language. Then describe, in general terms, an occasion where a firearm might be present in your life, and what you would want everyone there to know.

Chapter 2. Every firearm has its own manual and needs its own teacher

Same principles, different firearms

The principles in chapter 1 travel everywhere. Firearms do not. Designs differ in where controls sit and what they do. Some have mechanical safety devices and some do not, and the devices that exist do not all work the same way. They differ in how they are loaded and unloaded, in the ammunition they are built for, and in what kind of care they need. NSSF ties the right ammunition directly to a firearm's manual and the markings on the firearm itself.

That is why both the NSSF and SAAMI rule lists end the same way: learn the mechanical and handling characteristics of the specific firearm before you use it. Notice the word specific. Not "firearms in general." Not "one like it." This one.

The experience trap

Experience is valuable. It is also the reason careful people sometimes get caught out. Someone who has used one firearm for years carries habits built for that design. Those habits feel automatic, which is exactly what makes them hard to notice when the next firearm works differently. A control might sit in a different place, or a feature might be missing that the person's hands expect to find.

This is why a beginner and an experienced shooter can be in a similar position with an unfamiliar firearm. Both need to learn it. The experienced person may learn faster, but they also have more to unlearn. A healthy attitude is the one heard from careful people at rental counters: “I haven’t used this exact model. Please walk me through it.”

What the manual is for

A manual is the manufacturer’s own account of how that model is meant to be handled. It contains warnings specific to the design, the ammunition it is built for, how it should be stored, and when it needs professional service. NSSF notes that a manufacturer can usually supply a copy if the original is lost. Matching a manual to the exact model, and keeping documents organized, are related topics of their own.

Reading a manual for the first time can feel like reading a contract. A few habits help:

- Read the warnings first. They are there because someone, somewhere, needed them.
- Keep a list of words you do not understand, and bring it to a qualified instructor.
- Note anything about storage, ammunition or service that surprises you.
- Do not use the manual as a self-teaching script. Its job is to inform, not to replace supervision.

Why a teacher matters

A manual can describe what a control does. It cannot watch your hands. It cannot notice that you are holding your breath, that your grip is drifting, or that you pointed a little too close to someone while concentrating on something else. It cannot stop you one second before a mistake matters.

A qualified instructor can do all of those things. NSSF recommends hunter or shooting safety courses and says beginners should be closely supervised. Supervision gives you a feedback loop: try, get corrected, try again, under conditions designed to keep everyone safe while you learn. That loop is how good habits form, and it is something no page, video or confident friend can provide on its own.

A useful way to hold the two together: the manual is the map; the instructor is the person who walks the route with you the first time.

Borrowed, rented, inherited

Firearms often reach people through routes other than a purchase. Each route carries the same lesson.

- **Borrowed.** A friend says, "It's just like yours." It may be similar. It is not the same. Get its manual and a supervised introduction.
- **Rented.** Range rental counters usually offer to walk you through a model. Say yes.
- **Inherited or found.** A firearm in a late relative's closet, garage or drawer is an unknown. Unknown means hands off. Do not open a case or handle a firearm to find out what it is or whether it is loaded. Keep others, especially children, out of

the room, and contact a qualified person for guidance, such as an instructor, a licensed dealer or a local police non-emergency line. Rules about inherited firearms vary, so check the official source for your jurisdiction before deciding anything further.

The two-question check

Before anyone handles a firearm they have not personally learned, ask:

1. "Do we have this exact model's manual, and has the person read it?"
2. "Is a qualified person here to supervise?"

If either answer is no, the answer for now is no handling. The check applies to owners, borrowers, visitors and household members alike. It is especially useful for people who do not own firearms and are handed one with the words "just hold this for a second." You can say, "I haven't learned that one, so I'll pass," and that is the end of it.

A word for returning owners

If you are coming back after years away, a lot may have changed. Designs evolve. Your eyesight, grip strength and reaction speed may have changed too. Ranges update their procedures, and laws where you live may be different from what you remember. None of this means you have forgotten everything. It means you are learning in a new context. A refresher class with a qualified instructor is one of the most experienced things a returning owner can do.

Questions worth bringing to an instructor

Whether you are new, returning, or a household member who simply wants to understand, a short list of questions makes supervised time more useful. You might ask:

- "Which parts of this model's manual should I read most carefully before we start?"
- "What do people who are used to other designs most often get wrong with this one?"
- "What would you want everyone in my household to understand about this firearm, even if they never handle it?"
- "When should this firearm go to a qualified professional for service, and how would I know?"
- "If I forget something between sessions, what should I do instead of guessing?"

Write the answers down. Then compare them with the manual. Where the two seem to disagree, ask again rather than choosing whichever answer is more convenient. A good instructor will be glad you checked.

What this chapter does not mean

You do not need to memorize a manual or become a technician. Reading a manual does not qualify you to do what it describes, and it is not an invitation to take things apart, practise mechanical procedures alone or attempt repairs; the safety rules themselves say service belongs with qualified people. Nor does any of this cast suspicion on experienced people. "Have you used this exact model before?" is an ordinary, respectful question, and good instructors ask it of everyone.

In practice

"I'll just show you at home." A woman whose partner owns a firearm decides she would like to understand it. Her partner offers to show her at home on Sunday. She thinks about it and says, "I'd rather learn from an instructor first, with you there if you like. Then we'll both be using the same words." Her partner is a little surprised, then agrees and finds an introductory class. Afterward, he admits the instructor explained two things differently from how he would have. They add both to their household notes.

The old manual. A retired nurse in her sixties, returning to target shooting after twenty years, finds the manual for her old firearm in a box of papers. Reading it again, she realizes she no longer remembers half the warnings and does not recognize some of the storage guidance at all. Instead of feeling embarrassed, she treats it as useful information and books a refresher session. "I used to know this," she tells the instructor, "and I'd like to know it properly again."

Checklist

- I understand that the principles are universal but each firearm must be learned on its own.
- I know a manual comes from the manufacturer and can usually be replaced if lost.
- I read warnings first and list unfamiliar terms to ask about.
- I know reading is not a substitute for supervised instruction.
- I can use the two-question check and decline handling politely.
- I know that an unknown or inherited firearm means hands off and a call to a qualified person.

- If I am returning, I treat a refresher as normal.

Key terms

- **Manual:** the manufacturer's document for a specific model, including its warnings, ammunition and service guidance.
- **Qualified instructor:** a person with recognized training who teaches and supervises hands-on learning.
- **Supervision:** a qualified person watching and correcting in real time.
- **Model-specific:** applying to one design, not to firearms in general.
- **Mechanical safety:** a device on some firearms intended to help prevent firing; never a substitute for the principles.

Talk it through

1. Why might an experienced person be at more risk of a mistake with an unfamiliar firearm than they expect?
2. How would you politely decline when someone hands you a firearm you have not learned?
3. What makes a manual and an instructor stronger together than either alone?

Journal prompt

Write the two-question check in your own words and the sentence you would use to decline handling an unfamiliar firearm. If you are a returning owner, note what has changed since you last learned. If you are not an owner, note what you would like to understand better.

Chapter 3. Anyone can say stop

A small word with a big job

In many fields where people work around hazards, good safety cultures share one habit: the newest person in the room is allowed to call a pause, and everyone else honors it. This chapter brings that habit home. Wherever firearms are present — a home, a class, a family gathering — anyone may say "stop." The owner. A partner. A child. A guest. A brand-new student. The instructor.

NSSF closes its safety rules by urging constant reminders for children and non-shooters, because safety includes everyone present, not only the person holding a firearm. A stop agreement is how that inclusion becomes real.

Why it is hard to say

If saying stop were easy, nobody would need a chapter about it. Several forces push against it.

- **Hierarchy.** It feels odd for a teenager to stop a parent, or a guest to stop a host.
- **Politeness.** People do not want to embarrass anyone or spoil a gathering.
- **Expertise.** "Who am I to say something? I don't know anything about firearms."
- **Fear of being wrong.** What if it was fine, and I made a fuss?
- **Belonging.** Nobody wants to be the person who "ruined the fun."

All of these are real feelings. None of them outweighs a firearm pointed at people. The purpose of a stop agreement is to remove as many of these forces as possible before the moment arrives, so that saying stop feels like following a household rule rather than challenging someone.

How to say it

Keep it short, clear and calm. Say it once.

- "Stop, please."
- "Not now."
- "Please put that away."
- "Please point that away from people."
- "I'm not comfortable. I'm going to step out."

You do not need to explain how firearms work. You do not need to prove you are right. You do not need to raise your voice. If someone asks why, "I'll tell you in a minute, once it's put away" is enough.

How to back someone up

The easiest safety skill there is might be this one: when someone else says stop, add your voice. "She's right. Not now." "Let's do what he asked." Backing someone up turns a lonely act of courage into a shared rule. It matters most when the person who spoke is younger, newer, or less sure of themselves. A child who says stop and is backed up learns that speaking up works. A child who says stop and is laughed at learns the opposite.

How to receive it

If you are the one being stopped, the best response has three parts.

1. **Stop first.** Do not argue, joke or finish your sentence.
2. **Make it safe** in the way your training and the firearm's manual taught you. This book does not describe how.
3. **Then ask,** "What did you see?" and listen.

Then thank the person. Even if you believe the concern was mistaken, a pause costs a few seconds of pride. Brushing it off can cost far more, and it teaches everyone watching that speaking up is unwelcome. Being easy to stop is a habit worth keeping over a lifetime.

When stop is ignored

Sometimes a request is ignored or laughed off. You still do not have to argue, block anyone or touch anything, and you must never reach for someone else's firearm. Instead:

- Leave the room or area.
- Take children with you.
- Tell the responsible adult, the host or a staff member.
- If there is immediate danger, get to a safe place and call emergency services.

Leaving is not losing. It is a complete, valid response, and often a wise one.

At ranges and in classes

Ranges have their own procedures, and the staff and posted rules are in charge. The safety briefing usually explains how to raise a concern. If you see something unsafe at a range, tell staff right away. A first range visit, including briefings and asking for a pause, is a related topic of its own. In classes, good instructors welcome "Can we stop for a second?" from any student. If an instructor mocks that request, you have learned something important about the class.

Writing a household stop agreement

A useful agreement fits on four lines:

1. **The words we use.** For example, "Stop" or "Not now."
2. **Who may use them.** Everyone, including children and guests.
3. **What happens next.** Stop, make safe as trained, then talk.
4. **Our promise.** Nobody is teased or punished for using them, even if the concern turns out to be mistaken.

Read it together. Put it where adults will see it. Explain it to regular visitors and to children in words that fit their age. For young children, the stop word pairs naturally with the message in chapter 4: don't touch, move away, tell a grown-up.

When you are the guest

A stop agreement is easiest in your own home. It is harder in someone else's. As a guest, you may not know the household's rules, and you may feel you have less standing to speak. The prin-

ciple does not change: anyone present may ask for a pause. What changes is how gently you may want to say it, and how ready you are to leave.

A few sentences that work well for guests:

- "Would you mind putting that away while we're all here?"
- "I'd feel more comfortable if that went back in its case."
- "I'm going to take the kids outside for a bit."

If the host respects the request, thank them and move on. If they do not, you have already done the most important thing by saying it once. You can leave, take children with you, and decide later whether to return. You do not owe anyone a debate about it. Many hosts are glad to be asked; some had simply not noticed how the moment looked from across the room.

The same applies in reverse. When you host, invite guests to speak up. Something as simple as "If anything ever makes you uncomfortable here, just say so" tells visitors that your stop agreement includes them.

What this chapter does not mean

Saying stop is not an accusation and not a judgment about the person or about owning firearms. It is not a requirement to confront anyone. It is not a tool for winning unrelated arguments. If a household disagrees about whether to keep firearms at all, that deserves its own calm conversation at another time. The stop agreement is narrow on purpose: it is for the moment, and it works best when everyone trusts that it will be used only for safety. Setting and holding personal boundaries, and leaving arguments, are broader related topics.

In practice

"Can we pause?" In an introductory class at a community range, a student in her thirties feels overwhelmed partway through the hands-on portion. Her heart is racing and she cannot focus. She says quietly, "Can we pause for a minute?" The instructor answers, "Absolutely. Thank you for saying so," and helps her step back while the group takes a short break. Later he tells the whole class that the most useful thing a student can do is say when they need a pause. She finishes the class, and she remembers that moment more than anything else.

The kitchen table. A parent sets a firearm case on the kitchen table, planning some routine upkeep, while a younger child is drawing at the other end. The family's sixteen-year-old says, "Stop — not with her right there." The parent pauses, nods, closes the case and puts it away until the younger child is at school. That evening the parent tells the teenager, "You were right, and thank you." The teenager notices how good it felt to be heard.

Checklist

- Our household has a stop word or phrase.
- Everyone, including children and guests, knows they may use it.
- Everyone knows what happens next: stop, make safe as trained, then talk.
- We have promised that nobody is teased for using it.
- I have practised saying it once, plainly.
- I know how to back someone else up.
- I know that leaving, taking children and telling someone responsible are always options.

- I would never reach for someone else's firearm.

Key terms

- **Stop agreement:** a household or group rule that anyone may call a pause for safety.
- **Backing up:** adding your voice to someone else's safety request.
- **Make safe:** returning a firearm to a safe state in the way the handler was trained; not described in this course.
- **Range staff:** the people in charge of safety procedures at a range.

Talk it through

1. Who in your household would find it hardest to say stop, and what would make it easier for them?
2. How would you like someone to respond if you stopped them?
3. What is the difference between a stop agreement and an argument about firearms in general?

Journal prompt

Draft your household stop agreement in four lines: the words, who may use them, what happens next, and the promise that nobody is teased for using them. Then describe one situation where stop would be hard to say, and what would help.

Chapter 4. Children and visitors

Curiosity is normal

Children are curious. That curiosity is healthy, and it is also why adults carry the responsibility for keeping firearms out of children's hands. The Department of Justice's storage guide says plainly that hiding a firearm in a closet, drawer or similar place is not safe storage, because children are extremely curious and may find what adults believed was out of reach. Project ChildSafe adds that households should not assume children are absent or that they already know not to touch.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) makes a point many parents find surprising: teaching children about firearm safety matters, but it is not enough on its own. Children's knowledge is a backup layer. Secure storage, the subject of chapter 5, is the main one.

What to tell children

Keep the message short enough for a young child to repeat, and repeat it often:

> If you see a firearm, don't touch it. Move away. Tell a grown-up right away.

Both the AAP and the Department of Justice give children essentially this message. A few habits help it stick:

- Say it in ordinary moments, not only after a news story or a scare.
- Ask the child to say it back in their own words.
- Leave room for questions. Project ChildSafe notes that children may have questions even when they do not ask them.
- Remind children, as the AAP suggests, that what they see in films and games is not real, and that real firearms can badly hurt people.
- Never "test" a child by leaving a firearm, real or not, where they might find it. Practise with conversation, not props.

Teenagers need a way out

Teenagers can understand more, and they also face more social pressure. A friend might show off a firearm at a sleepover. An older sibling might take one out to impress others. Give teenagers a plan that protects their dignity: "If anyone ever shows you a firearm, you can leave and text me. I'll come and get you, no lecture in the moment." Some families agree on a code word that means "call me with a reason I need to come home." The point is to make leaving easy.

Asking before a visit

The AAP reports that more than a third of unintentional shootings of children happen in the homes of friends, neighbors or relatives. Its practical suggestion is simple: add one question to the checks parents already make before a child visits another home, the

ones about pets, allergies and who will be supervising. The Department of Justice likewise encourages checking with homes children may visit.

The key is tone. Ask it the same way you would ask about allergies:

> "Looking forward to Saturday! Quick checks: any pets or allergies I should know about? And are there firearms in the home, and if so, are they locked up?"

Ask every household the same way. Do not decide in advance which families are "the type"; that relies on guesswork and stereotypes and misses the homes you never thought to ask.

If the answer is reassuring, you have learned something useful. If it is unclear, you have options that do not require an argument: offer to host, suggest meeting at a park, or ask a simple follow-up. If you are the one being asked, try to answer plainly and without offense. The parent asking is doing exactly what a careful parent should.

Visitors in your own home

When people visit you, a different set of questions comes up.

- **Curious guests.** A guest may ask to see a firearm. During a gathering, "Not today. It stays locked up when we have people over" is a complete answer. You do not need to justify it.
- **Guests who carry.** A guest may arrive carrying their own firearm. You can share your house expectations ahead of time. Laws about carrying firearms and about private property vary,

so check the official source for your jurisdiction rather than guessing.

- **Guests with children.** Visiting children have not heard your household's rules. Storage that works for the adults who live there needs a second look when young visitors arrive.

Your home, your rules. The simplest rule for gatherings is that firearms stay secured, and safety does not change with the company.

Household members who do not own firearms

If you live with firearms you do not own, it is reasonable to ask whether they are in the home and whether they are secured. You do not need the key or the code to be reassured that the firearm is locked. Questions like "Is it locked whenever you're not using it?" and "What happens when we have guests?" are reasonable, and calm answers are a sign that the plan is real.

Matching the message to the age

Children take in safety messages differently as they grow. A few rough guides, to adapt for the children you know:

- **Very young children** need one short, steady message, repeated often and calmly: don't touch, move away, tell a grown-up. They also need adults who never rely on that message alone.
- **School-age children** can understand that a real firearm is different from a toy or something on a screen, and that a grown-up's job is to keep firearms locked away. They can practise saying the message back and talking through "What would you do if…?" questions, without props.

- **Teenagers** can talk about why the principles exist, about pressure from friends, and about leaving. They benefit from being treated as partners in safety: invited into the household stop agreement, and trusted to use their way-out plan.

At every age, the conversation goes better when it is ordinary rather than dramatic. Short talks, repeated often, are easier to keep up than one big one. If a child asks something you cannot answer, "Good question. Let me find out and tell you" is a perfectly good reply.

Children with disabilities or different communication needs may benefit from the message in another form: pictures, a short phrase they already use, or a routine practised with a trusted adult. The goal is the same for every child: a message they can actually use, backed by adults who keep firearms secured.

What this chapter does not mean

Asking another family about firearms is not an accusation or a comment on their values. Teaching children does not make them safe around unsecured firearms, and a child who touches one out of curiosity is not a bad child; the responsibility sits with adults. Saying "not today" to a curious guest does not mean the guest is untrustworthy. It means a party is not a class.

In practice

The grandparent's question. A grandfather looks after his two grandchildren on Wednesdays. A neighbor invites them over to play with her own grandkids. He feels awkward asking, but he does it the way his daughter taught him: "Thanks so much! Any pets? And are there firearms in the house, and are they locked up?" The neighbor laughs. "Two cats, very lazy. And yes, my hus-

band's are locked in a safe; the kids can't get near the keys." The grandfather thanks her. Walking home, he notices the question took four seconds.

The text. A fifteen-year-old is at a friend's house when the friend's older brother takes out a firearm to show it off. She remembers her family's plan, sends her mother the agreed code word, and says she has to head home. Her mother picks her up a few minutes later and asks only, "Are you okay?" The next day, over breakfast, they talk. Her mother says, "You did exactly the right thing. I'm proud of you." No lecture, no punishment, and a plan that worked.

Checklist

- Children in my life know: don't touch, move away, tell a grown-up.
- I repeat the message in ordinary moments and ask children to say it back.
- I never test a child with a firearm or a prop.
- Teenagers in my life have a way out with no lecture in the moment.
- I ask every household the same visit question, in the same tone as allergies.
- I have a "not today" sentence ready for curious guests.
- I know that teaching children is a backup layer, not the main one.
- Household members who do not own firearms know they can ask whether firearms are secured.

Key terms

- **Visit question:** a plain question about firearms and storage, asked alongside allergy and pet questions before a child visits another home.
- **Backup layer:** a protection that helps if the main one fails, such as children's knowledge behind secure storage.
- **Code word:** a pre-agreed word a child can use to ask to be picked up without explaining in front of others.
- **House rule:** an expectation a household sets for its own home and visitors.

Talk it through

1. Why might the visit question feel awkward, and how could you make it feel ordinary?
2. How would you answer if another parent asked you the visit question?
3. What would a good "way out" plan look like for a teenager you know?

Journal prompt

Write the exact words you would use to ask about firearms before a child visits another home, in the same tone as an allergy question. Then write your "not today" sentence for a guest who asks to see a firearm.

Chapter 5. Storage is part of safety

Where safety does its quiet work

Much of a firearm's life is spent not in use. It sits in a home for days, weeks or months between occasions when anyone touches it. That is when storage does much of the safety work, and it is why this course treats storage as part of safety rather than a separate topic.

The storage guidance checked for this course, from NSSF, Project ChildSafe, the Department of Justice and the American Academy of Pediatrics, agrees on the core: when a firearm is not in use, it is unloaded and secured, and ammunition is locked separately. Project ChildSafe describes secure storage as a way to keep firearms away from children, to prevent theft, and to keep them from anyone who may be at risk of harming themselves or others.

This chapter is deliberately brief. Storage categories and a detailed review routine are a related topic beyond this chapter. Here the aim is to give everyone in a household, owners and non-owners alike, the same few ideas and the same questions.

One goal, in one line

The Department of Justice guide frames the goal neatly: a firearm should be available to the person responsible for it, and inaccessible or inoperable to everyone else. Everything else in this chapter is a way of meeting that goal.

Four ideas that carry the weight

Hidden is not secured. A high shelf, a closet, a sock drawer or the back of a wardrobe depends on nobody looking. Children look. Visitors look. People who break in look. The DOJ guide and Project ChildSafe both say that hiding is not secure storage.

Keys and codes need the same care as the firearm. The Department of Justice and the AAP both say keys and combinations should be kept out of reach of children and anyone at risk. A locked container with its key in the next drawer is only a puzzle with the answer attached.

A lock is a layer, not the whole plan. The DOJ guide calls a gun lock an additional safety precaution, not a substitute for secure storage, and notes that a cable lock can be defeated by a determined person with tools. Locks are valuable as one layer among several.

A vehicle is not a storage plan. The DOJ guide says that locking your car doors does not count as secure storage, and that a glove compartment or console, even a lockable one, should not be treated as a secure storage device. Firearms come home and go into the household's secure storage.

Talking about storage without sharing secrets

Storage is a household conversation, not only the owner's private business. Household members who do not own firearms can hold an owner to the goal above without ever learning a code. Useful questions sound like this:

- "Is it locked whenever you're not using it?"
- "Is the ammunition locked separately?"
- "Who else could get to the key or the code?"

- "What happens when we have guests?"
- "What would change if someone in the house were going through a hard time?"

An owner who answers these calmly is not being interrogated. They are showing the people they live with that the plan is real. And everyone, owner or not, should keep the actual details private. Never put real codes, key locations or addresses into a shared worksheet, a group chat, a course response or a journal.

When the people change, the plan changes

A storage plan is built for a particular household at a particular time. When the people in that home change, the plan needs a fresh look. Common moments include:

- grandchildren or other young visitors coming to stay;
- a new baby, or a toddler who has suddenly learned to climb;
- a teenager in the home, or teenagers visiting;
- a new roommate, partner or lodger;
- a contractor, cleaner or caregiver working in the home;
- someone in the household going through a very difficult time.

The **change check** is three questions, asked whenever one of these happens: Who could reach the firearm? Who could reach the keys or codes? What is different now from the last time we checked? Write the answers privately, and act on them.

When someone is in crisis

The last item on that list deserves its own words. When someone in a home is struggling — talking about feeling hopeless or like a burden, withdrawing from people, drinking more, or acting very

differently from usual — the Department of Justice suggests considering temporary storage of firearms outside the home, and making sure the person cannot reach the firearm or its keys. Project ChildSafe notes that limiting access to lethal means can help teens who are at risk.

None of this is a judgment of the person who is struggling. It is a way of caring for them while they get through a hard stretch. And it should come with support, not instead of it. In the United States, anyone can call or text 988, or use the 988 Lifeline's online chat, for free, confidential support at any hour of the day or night, whether for themselves or for someone they care about. Reaching out is a strength.

If you are worried about someone right now and believe they are in immediate danger, contact emergency services.

Help with equipment, and the limits of this chapter

If you need equipment, Project ChildSafe offers free safety kits that include a gun lock. A qualified retailer or instructor can help you think through storage options suited to your household, and the storage manufacturer's instructions explain how a particular product is meant to be used.

This chapter does not recommend a product, explain how to install any device, or confirm that any arrangement meets the law where you live. The DOJ guide notes that state or local laws may apply to storage; check the official source for your jurisdiction.

What this chapter does not mean

Storage is not about hiding things better. It is not a judgment of any household. And it is not a sign of distrust toward the people you live with. Locking up a firearm is as ordinary as buckling a seat belt: a quiet habit that protects the people you love, especially those who did not choose to have a firearm in the home.

In practice

The new roommate. A young man who keeps a firearm is about to share his apartment with a roommate he met through work. Before moving day, he runs the change check. He realizes the key to his storage case has always lived in a kitchen drawer, which made sense when he lived alone and does not now. He moves it somewhere only he can reach, and on the first evening he tells his new roommate, plainly, "I own a firearm. It's always locked and unloaded, ammunition separate. If you ever have a concern, just tell me." The roommate appreciates knowing, and the conversation takes two minutes.

A hard season. A couple notice that their nineteen-year-old, home from college, has been withdrawn and has said a few times that everyone would be better off without them. They are frightened. That evening, they arrange for the household's firearm to be stored temporarily outside the home, following the rules where they live. Then one of them calls 988 to ask how best to support their child, and they make an appointment with a doctor together. Months later, their child is doing better. The firearm's absence from the home was one quiet part of a much larger act of care.

Checklist

- I know the core: unloaded and secured when not in use, ammunition locked separately.
- I know that hidden is not secured.
- Keys and codes are kept out of reach of children and anyone at risk.
- I treat a lock as one layer, not the whole plan.
- I do not treat a vehicle as storage.
- I run the change check whenever the people in my home change.
- I know that temporary out-of-home storage is an option during a crisis, and that 988 offers support.
- I never write real codes, key locations or addresses in shared places.

Key terms

- **Secured:** locked so that only the responsible person can access the firearm.
- **Ammunition apart:** ammunition stored and locked separately from the firearm.
- **Change check:** three questions asked whenever the people in a home change.
- **Temporary out-of-home storage:** keeping a firearm somewhere outside the home for a period, within the law, often during a household crisis.
- **988:** the U.S. Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, reachable by call, text or chat, free and confidential, at any hour.

Talk it through

1. Why is “hidden” so tempting, and why does it fall short?
2. How can someone who does not own a firearm be part of the storage conversation without needing any codes?
3. What changes might your household go through in the next year, and how would the change check help?

Journal prompt

List the kinds of change your home might see in the next year and one storage question each would raise. Do not write codes, key locations or addresses. Note where you will keep support numbers such as 988.

Chapter 6. Find hands-on instruction and keep learning

Why hands-on

This course has given you words, principles and conversations. Those matter. But a book cannot watch you, and principles alone do not build the physical habits that safe handling requires. Reading builds vocabulary. Hands-on instruction builds habits, under the eye of someone qualified who can correct them while they form. That is why NSSF recommends safety courses and says beginners should be closely supervised.

Who benefits

More people than you might expect.

- **New owners,** before habits set.
- **Returning owners,** because designs, bodies, ranges and laws change (chapter 2).
- **Household members who do not own firearms,** who want to understand what is in their home. Taking an introductory class does not commit anyone to buying, owning or enjoying anything. Some people take one simply so that words like “unloaded” and “secured” mean something concrete to them.
- **Anyone who will be around firearms** at a relative’s home, a hunting camp or a range, and wants to understand what they are seeing.

Where to look

There is no single directory of every class, but there are good places to start.

- **State wildlife or natural-resources agencies.** Many run hunter-education programs. The International Hunter Education Association's Find A Course page links a state-by-state map for hunter, bowhunter, muzzleloader and trapper education, and also points to separate firearm-fundamentals safety courses. You do not have to plan to hunt to ask your state agency what its course covers and whether it suits you.
- **Local ranges and clubs.** Many run introductory classes. Call the front desk and ask. How different organizations and clubs work, and how to make a useful inquiry, is a related topic of its own.
- **Community programs.** Ask local community centers or adult-education programs whether they host safety classes with qualified instructors, who teaches, and how the hands-on part is supervised.

What a good class tends to look like

Every class is different, but good ones tend to share some features:

- A clear **safety briefing first**, before anything else happens.
- An instructor who **asks about your experience and goals** instead of assuming.
- A **small enough group** that someone is actually watching you during any hands-on portion.
- **Questions welcome,** including the same question twice, and including "Can we stop for a second?"

- **Equipment introduced properly,** with its own explanation, which is chapter 2 in action.
- **Legal questions pointed to official sources,** not answered with personal opinions about the law.
- **No pressure** to buy anything.
- **Accessibility taken seriously,** with reasonable adjustments discussed before the day.

Warning signs

Some signs suggest a class is not the right fit:

- promises of a certificate or "full qualification" in very little time;
- discouraging questions, or mocking beginners;
- no safety briefing, or a rushed one;
- "bring any firearm, we'll figure it out";
- pressure to buy equipment, memberships or further courses on the spot.

You can say no and keep looking. Leaving a class that does not feel right is a safety decision, not a failure.

The booking call

Before you sign up, call or write and ask:

1. Who teaches the class, what training or certification do they hold, and from whom?
2. How many students are there per instructor during the hands-on part?
3. Is the class suitable for complete beginners, or for people returning after years away?

4. Is equipment provided, and how is it introduced?
5. What accessibility needs can you meet?

Add cost and cancellation terms, and note the answers. A good provider will be glad you asked. If you are new, say so. If you are nervous, say that too. Good instructors plan for both.

Before and after

Before your first hands-on session, it is worth reading up on planning, check-in, the safety briefing, and hearing protection and range health. Bring your list of questions from chapter 2.

After the class, keep learning. Every new or unfamiliar firearm restarts chapter 2: its own manual, its own supervised introduction. Re-read your say-it-back card before occasions when firearms will be present. Refresh your household stop agreement when people move in or out. Run the change check when your household changes. Treat safety as something you practise every time, not something you finished once.

Making the most of the day

A few habits help any class go better, whatever your experience.

- **Say where you are starting from.** "I'm brand new," "I'm coming back after twenty years," or "I don't own one; I want to understand." Instructors can only adjust to what they know.
- **Ask for the pace you need.** "Could you show that once more?" is an ordinary request. So is "I'd like to go slowly."
- **Use the stop word.** If something feels wrong or you feel overwhelmed, say so. A good class treats that as part of learning, not an interruption.

- **Ask for written material.** Many instructors can point you to handouts, the relevant manuals, or official sources for the rules where you live.
- **Write notes afterward, not during hands-on time.** When you are home, jot down what you learned, what surprised you and what you still want to ask.
- **Ask about next steps.** Is there a follow-up session, a supervised practice time, or a more advanced class when you are ready?

Learning as a household

Safety habits are easier to keep when the people who share a home also share the words. If you live with others, consider learning together: one person attends the classroom portion, another the whole class, and afterward everyone compares notes against their say-it-back cards. Update your stop agreement with anything new. Children can hear a simplified version: "We learned more about keeping firearms locked away, and the rule for you stays the same: don't touch, move away, tell a grown-up." Nobody in a household needs to become an expert. Everyone benefits from understanding the plan.

What this chapter does not mean

This is an educational reading course, not a class, a certificate or a qualification, and no completion is saved. One hands-on class does not make anyone competent with every firearm. A class certificate may or may not satisfy any legal requirement where you live; check the official source for your jurisdiction. And finding a

class is not an obligation. If you decide firearms are not for you, the principles in this book still help you notice, speak up and stay safe around others who make a different choice.

In practice

The classroom portion. A man who has never owned a firearm signs up with his sister, who recently bought one, for an introductory class at a community range. He asks during the booking call whether he can attend the classroom portion only. The staff member says yes, and adds that he is welcome to watch the supervised part from the viewing area if he likes. Afterward he tells his sister, "Now I know what you mean when you say it's secured. I feel better about visiting." She feels better too.

The class she left. A returning owner in her fifties signs up for a refresher. Ten minutes in, the instructor skips the safety briefing, jokes about "people who ask too many questions," and tells the group to "just follow along." She quietly leaves at the first break and asks for a refund. The following month she finds a different class through her state agency's listings. This one starts with a careful briefing, the instructor asks about her experience, and when she says she wants to go slowly, he says, "Good. So do I."

Checklist

- I know why hands-on instruction matters even after reading.
- I know where to start looking: state agencies, ranges and clubs, community programs.
- I can recognize what a good class looks like.
- I can recognize warning signs and I know I can leave.
- I have my booking-call questions written down.

- I know this course is not a certificate or qualification.
- I have a plan to keep learning: manuals, refreshers, and my household agreements.

Key terms

- **Hands-on instruction:** supervised practice with a qualified instructor.
- **Hunter education:** structured courses, often run through state wildlife or natural-resources agencies.
- **Booking call:** a short set of questions asked before signing up for a class.
- **Refresher:** a class or session for people returning after time away.
- **Educational reading course:** reading material for learning only; no completion is saved, and it is not a certificate or qualification.

Talk it through

1. What would make you, or someone you know, more likely to take a hands-on class?
2. Which warning sign would make you leave a class, and how would you do it?
3. How could a household member who does not own firearms benefit from an introductory class?

Journal prompt

Write the booking-call questions you will ask before choosing a class, and add one question that matters to you personally. Describe a sign that would tell you a class is not the right fit, and what you would do instead.

Glossary

- **Ammunition apart:** ammunition stored and locked separately from firearms.
- **Backing up:** adding your voice to someone else's safety request.
- **Backup layer:** a protection that helps if the main one fails, such as children's knowledge behind secure storage.
- **Booking call:** a short set of questions asked before signing up for a class.
- **Change check:** three questions asked whenever the people in a home change: who could reach the firearm, who could reach the keys or codes, and what is different now.
- **Code word:** a pre-agreed word a child or teenager can use to ask to be picked up without explaining.
- **Educational reading course:** reading material for learning only; no completion is saved, and it is not a certificate, qualification or license.
- **Hidden:** placed out of sight but not locked; not the same as secured.
- **Layered safety:** several overlapping principles or protections, so that one mistake does not become an injury.
- **Make safe:** returning a firearm to a safe state as the handler was trained; not described in this course.
- **Manual:** the manufacturer's document for a specific model.
- **Model-specific:** applying to one design, not to firearms in general.
- **Muzzle:** the open end of the barrel, where a projectile would leave.

- **Principle:** a rule about what must always be true, whatever the equipment.
- **Procedure:** model-specific steps for a task; learned from the manual and a qualified instructor.
- **Qualified instructor:** a person with recognized training who teaches and supervises hands-on learning.
- **Safe direction:** a direction where, if the firearm fired, no one would be hurt.
- **Secured:** locked so that only the responsible person can access the firearm.
- **Stop agreement:** a household or group rule that anyone may call a pause for safety.
- **Temporary out-of-home storage:** keeping a firearm outside the home for a period, within the law, often during a crisis.
- **Visit question:** a plain question about firearms and storage, asked before a child visits another home.
- **988:** the U.S. Suicide & Crisis Lifeline; call, text or chat, free and confidential, any hour.

Where to go next

Find qualified hands-on training

- **Your state wildlife or natural-resources agency.** Ask about hunter-education and safety courses, what they cover, and whether they suit your goals. The International Hunter Education Association's Find A Course page (https://www.ihea-usa.org/find-a-course-2/) links a state-by-state map as a starting point.
- **Local ranges and clubs.** Call the front desk, use the booking-call questions in chapter 6, and say plainly if you are new or returning.
- **Community programs.** Ask who teaches, how hands-on time is supervised, and what accessibility needs can be met.

No course or provider is endorsed here. Confirm details directly with the provider.

Official and reputable safety resources

- **NSSF safety rules** (https://www.nssf.org/safety/rules-firearms-safety/) and **SAAMI firearm safety rules** (https://saami.org/publications-advisories/firearm-safety-rules/) for the principles in their original wording.
- **Project ChildSafe** (https://projectchildsafe.org/) for secure-storage information and free safety kits.
- **U.S. Department of Justice, Reducing Gun Violence** (https://www.justice.gov/doj/reducing-gun-violence), which links the Department's safe-storage guide and fact sheet.

- **HealthyChildren.org from the American Academy of Pediatrics** (https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Handguns-in-the-Home.aspx) for guidance on children, visits and storage.
- **The official source for your jurisdiction** for any question about the law. Laws vary; this book makes no legal determination.

Support

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** (https://988lifeline.org/): call or text 988, or chat online. Free, confidential, any hour, for yourself or someone you care about.
- If someone is in immediate danger, contact emergency services.

Related topics

These are topics worth exploring further; they are not courses offered with this book.

- Household storage planning — storage categories and a review routine.
- A first range visit — planning, check-in and the safety briefing.
- Hearing, hygiene and range health — protection and residue.
- Manuals, parts and professional help — matching manuals to models and finding professional help.
- Finding your place in the sport — organizations, clubs and event listings.
- A first purchase — preparing questions before any purchase decision.

- Weighing evidence — judging what a source can and cannot establish.

Sources

All sources below were read on 2026-10-15. They support specific safety statements in this book; no provider wording, lesson structure, quiz, scenario or media was copied.

- NSSF — Firearm Safety: 10 Rules of Safe Gun Handling. https://www.nssf.org/safety/rules-firearms-safety/ (checked 2026-10-15)
- SAAMI — Firearm Safety Rules. https://saami.org/publications-advisories/firearm-safety-rules/ (checked 2026-10-15)
- U.S. Department of Justice — Reducing Gun Violence. https://www.justice.gov/doj/reducing-gun-violence (checked 2026-10-15)
- U.S. Department of Justice — Safe Storage of Firearms: Unload It, Lock It, Store It (guide). https://www.justice.gov/media/1337981/dl?inline (checked 2026-10-15)
- Project ChildSafe — Home. https://projectchildsafe.org/ (checked 2026-10-15)
- Project ChildSafe — Securing Your Firearm. https://projectchildsafe.org/securing-your-firearm/ (checked 2026-10-15)
- Project ChildSafe — Understanding Gun Safety. https://projectchildsafe.org/understanding-gun-safety/ (checked 2026-10-15)
- HealthyChildren.org (American Academy of Pediatrics) — Guns in the Home: How to Keep Kids Safe. https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Handguns-in-the-Home.aspx (checked 2026-10-15)

- International Hunter Education Association (IHEA-USA) — Find A Course. https://www.ihea-usa.org/find-a-course-2/ (checked 2026-10-15)
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. https://988lifeline.org/ (checked 2026-10-15)

RivalShot Academy · Original course book, authored 2026-10-15.

Educational material only. Completing this course is an educational record, not a licence, qualification or certification. Laws and requirements vary by place; check the official source for your jurisdiction. For hands-on skills, find qualified, certified instruction.

Typeset in Space Grotesk and DM Sans (SIL Open Font License 1.1). The RS mark is the original RivalShot identity.