



Peace and Justice Committee
The Diocese of West Missouri



BE SMART FOR THE HOLIDAYS

'Tis the season of awkward holiday conversations: Your dad wants to know why you don't call more often. Great-Aunt Mabel wonders when you're going to get a real job. Uncle Joe wants to sell you on his Florida time-share. In most of these cases, you can make a quick escape ("Water refills, anyone?"). But there's one awkward conversation that you should be having, and that's about the potentially lethal combination of kids and unsecured guns.

Gun ownership is a personal decision, but responsible storage is a public safety issue. And a simple conversation with your relatives before you arrive for the holidays can help keep children out of harm's way. Worried about bringing up the subject without upsetting anyone? Try these conversation starters.

BEFORE YOU TRAVEL, MAKE THESE CALLS

SCENARIO #1: YOU KNOW THAT YOUR FAMILY MEMBER IS A GUN OWNER

WHAT TO SAY: "Hi Mom, we are looking forward to Thanksgiving with the whole family—the kids are so excited to see you and their cousins. I know I have never asked this before, but after reading [about a 9 year old boy in Detroit that shot himself with an unsecured shotgun](#), I just have to ask: Are your guns locked, unloaded and is the ammunition stored separately? Tommy and Ellie get into everything and I don't want to spend the holidays looking over my shoulder worried about them, or the rest of the kids. I'm happy to purchase gun locks if you don't have them."

SCENARIO #2: YOU DON'T KNOW WHETHER OR NOT YOUR FAMILY MEMBER IS A GUN OWNER

WHAT TO SAY: "Hi Cindy, I'm checking off the list of things we need to get done before we come for Thanksgiving! The kids can't wait to see their cousins, and I am happy to be in charge of the pumpkin pie. Tommy and Ellie have been getting into everything these days, and I don't know if you saw the story [about a 9 year old boy in Detroit that shot himself with an unsecured shotgun](#)—it really shook me. I don't even know if you own guns, and how you store them if you do."

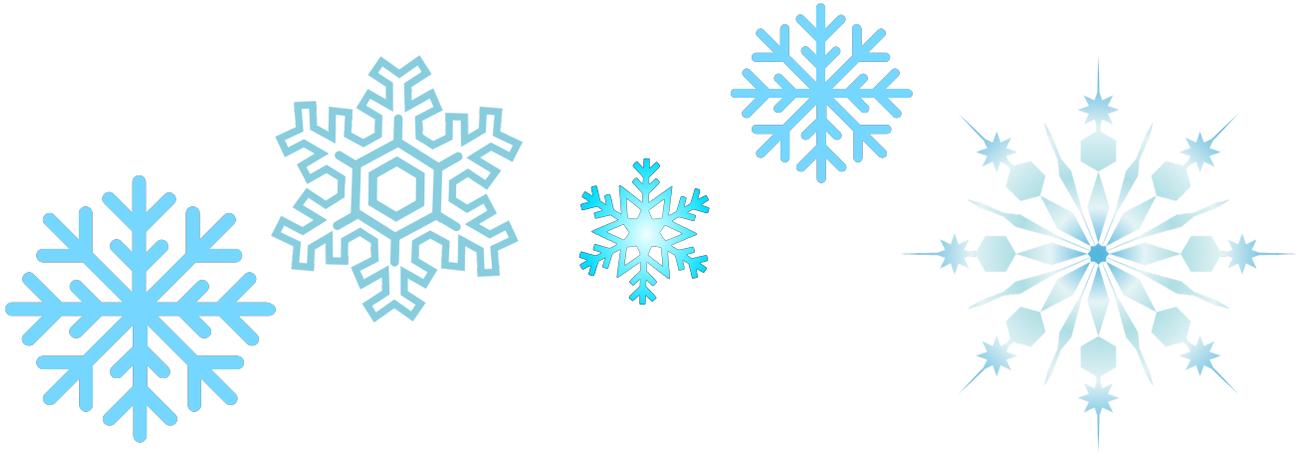
If she says she does own guns: "Thanks for telling me. It's important to me that they are stored locked and unloaded, with ammunition stored separately, so that we can all have a relaxing and safe holiday."

PREFER TO EMAIL? TRY THIS APPROACH

WHAT TO WRITE: Sometimes these conversations are easier via email. Try "sandwiching" your question amongst other questions and information. For example:

Dear Mimi, We will be arriving late on Tuesday night and can't wait to see the whole family! Tommy and Ellie are so excited to sleep over. I know Pop-Pop is a hunter, but I don't know if he keeps any guns at the cabin, if he does, are they locked, unloaded and inaccessible to the kids? Please also let me know what I can contribute to the meal. We are so excited to see you. All our love, Sue





MAKE IT A DEAL-BREAKER

In the unlikely event that your relatives won't confirm that they store guns responsibly, make sure they know that you won't allow your young children in their home for the holidays:

"I'm sorry, Aunt Diane, but unless you make sure your guns are locked the entire time we're at your home, we won't be able to make it. Tommy and Ellie get into everything lately, and I just can't take the risk of them hurting themselves or someone else. We'd be happy to have you at our house instead this year."

SHARE YOUR OWN SAFE GUN STORAGE HABITS

If you are a gun owner, volunteer information about your home, and let your friends and family know that you store your guns responsibly.

"Hi Greg and Sharon, Just wanted to let you know a few things before the holiday weekend. First, we just got a new puppy--I wanted to flag in case there were any allergies or anything. Also, I wanted to let you know that Nick and I hunt in the fall, but our guns are stored safely in gun locks--unloaded with the ammunition stored separately. With our two little ones, it's the only way we can be sure we keep our family safe. It's important for us for you both to know ahead of time too. Can't wait to see you guys! Let me know if you need anything."

MAKE IT A SMART HOLIDAY

Many unintentional shootings happen in the homes of relatives. It's very possible that family members or close friends have unsecured guns in their home. Never make assumptions when a child's safety is at stake. It's up to all of us to make it a safe, happy and SMART holiday season.

