

We Can Do Better: Protect Children, Not Guns

2013 Children's Sabbath Adult Education Program for use in conjunction with the Children's Defense Fund Report *Protect Children Not Guns 2013*

Suggested Outline

Preparation:

- Download and read the report *Protect Children Not Guns 2013* (<http://www.childrensdefense.org/dobetter>) or order a print copy from www.childrensdefense.org.
- Review Pages 50-51, 52-53, and 62 and highlight the facts about your particular state.
- Make a copy for each participant of: the Overview (Pages 5-7), The Truth About Guns (Pages 10, 11, and 13), and We Can Do Better: Action Steps (Pages 36-39). Each of these sections can be found at the end of this document. Alternatively, prepare a PowerPoint presentation to project these pages on a screen for your group to view.
- If desired, make color photocopies (original size or enlarged) of the following pages from the report and post them around the room: 4, 8, 22, 32, and 40. After the class is completed, if possible arrange to display the "posters" in an appropriate location in your congregation's buildings. (Alternatively, include those pages as slides in a PowerPoint presentation for the class.)
- If your denomination or faith tradition has passed resolutions or made official statements on gun violence and gun safety, make copies of them to share with participants.
- If desired, identify additional or alternate sacred texts from your tradition that underscore our responsibility to protect children and seek peace to use in section two of this program.

1. Welcome (10 minutes)

- **Introduce yourself and introduce the focus of the session**, which will explore how we as a faith community, a state, and a nation can do better to protect children from the gun violence that kills or injures a child or teen every 30 minutes in our nation. If desired, read aloud portions of the foreword from Marian Wright Edelman on Pages 2-3.
- If group size and time permit, invite people to introduce themselves. If the group is too large for individual introductions, you may invite people to introduce themselves to someone sitting near them and to share in a minute or less why they chose to attend this session and what they hope to take from it.
- **Acknowledge that there are a variety of perspectives and emotions** about the topic and that the goal is a respectful, informed discussion that keeps its focus on how we can protect children from gun violence and work to counter a culture that glamorizes violence and bloodshed.
- **If appropriate for your tradition, open with a time of prayer** (or silence), asking for insight, compassion and commitment to action that we might better protect all children, beloved by God.

2. Sacred Texts and Traditions on Nonviolence and Peacemaking (10 minutes)

- Begin by reading the theme text for the 2013 Children's Sabbath from the prophet Micah, if appropriate for your tradition:

[God] shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:1-4 NRSV)

- If desired, substitute or supplement that passage with another reading from your particular tradition that highlights the call to seek peace and well-being.
- Ask: *What passages from sacred texts or teachings inform your understanding of our responsibility as people of faith to seek peace and protect children from violence?* Allow time for responses as a whole group or, depending on size, in pairs or groups of three or four. (You may want to distribute adhesive notes such as Post-Its and invite people to jot a phrase of that text and post it on the wall or sheet of paper after reading it aloud to the group.)
- Review resolutions from your religious tradition. If your tradition has passed a resolution or made an official statement on gun violence and children through the national governing body or other structure, share that now.

3. The Equivalent of a Sandy Hook Massacre Every Three Days: The Problem of Child Gun Deaths and Injuries (15 minutes)

- Distribute copies of the four-page Overview (Pages 5-9). Tell participants they will have about five minutes to read the material silently.
- Encourage participants to make notations as they read: an exclamation mark next to something that surprises them; a question mark next to what they don't understand or want to learn more about; and a star next to the information that affects them most powerfully.
- Open up a time of discussion, after the time of silent reading is over. You may want to start by asking several people to share what they identified as most surprising to them or what affected them most powerfully. Then ask what participants noted as wanting to learn more about or what they didn't understand. As the facilitator of this session, do not feel like you need to have all the answers. Some of the additional information may be in the report, *Protect Children Not Guns 2013*, but some questions may simply need to be explored after the session concludes.

4. We Can Do Better: Action Steps (20 minutes)

- Distribute copies of "We Can Do Better: Action Steps" (Pages 36-39)
- Note that the first two action steps relate to public policy advocacy at the federal and state level; the third and fourth identify what parents (and grandparents and other caregivers) can do at home; the fifth focuses on raising awareness; and the last focuses on hands-on responses. Invite participants to

take a few moments to skim through the actions. Let them know that in the small groups (to follow) there will be the opportunity to discuss additional actions.

- **Invite participants to divide into one of four groups** (if you have enough participants), selecting the way they would most like to get involved to make a difference: advocacy; family life; raising awareness; and hands-on response.
 - Have each group select someone who will take notes and report back to the larger group.
 - Ask each small group to discuss the action steps in their category on the handout and to add any additional ideas they have.
 - Encourage them to think about resources in the congregation and community that could support that action.
 - Encourage them to identify the first step they would need to take to begin putting the idea into action and when they would take it.
- **Share the results of the small group discussions.** Bring the small groups back into one large group and have each report back on the discussion. Find out who is interested in working together to pursue action and make arrangements to share contact information or plan for a next meeting.

5. Closing (5 minutes)

- Close with a prayer, song, or act of commitment.

Overview

2,694 children and teens died from guns in the United States in 2010.

The Children's Defense Fund's publication, *Protect Children, Not Guns 2013*, analyzes the latest fatal and nonfatal gun injury data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for children and teens ages 0-19.

The U.S. has as many guns as people.

- The U.S. accounts for less than 5 percent of the global population, but owns an estimated 35 to 50 percent of all civilian-owned guns in the world.
- The most recent estimate of U.S. civilian gun ownership is as high as 310 million, about one gun per person. In contrast, U.S. military and law enforcement agencies possess 4 million guns.
- American companies manufacture enough bullets each year to fire 31 rounds into every one of our citizens.

A gun in the home increases the risk of homicide, suicide and accidental death.

- A gun in the home makes the likelihood of homicide three times higher, suicide three to five times higher, and accidental death four times higher. For every time a gun in the home injures or kills in self-defense, there are 11 completed and attempted gun suicides, seven criminal assaults and homicides with a gun, and four unintentional shooting deaths or injuries.
- More than half of youth who committed suicide with a gun obtained the gun from their home, usually a parent's gun.

U.S. children and teens are 17 times more likely to die from a gun than their peers in 25 other high-income countries combined.

- U.S. children and teens made up 43 percent of all children and teens in these 26 countries but were 93 percent of all children and teens killed by guns.
- In 2010, children and teen gun death rates in the U.S. were over four times higher than in Canada, the country with the next highest rate, nearly seven times higher than in Israel, and nearly 65 times higher than in the United Kingdom.
- U.S. children and teens were 32 times more likely to die from a gun homicide and 10 times more likely to die from a gun suicide or a gun accident than all their peers in the other high-income countries combined.

A child or teen dies or is injured from guns every 30 minutes.

- **18,270** children and teens died or were injured from guns in 2010.
 - **1** child or teen died or was injured every 30 minutes.
 - **50** children and teens died or were injured every day.
 - **351** children and teens died or were injured every week.

More children and teens die from guns every three days than died in the Newtown massacre.

- **2,694** children and teens died from guns in 2010.
 - **1** child or teen died every 3 hours and 15 minutes.
 - **7** children and teens died every day, more than 20 every three days.
 - **51** children and teens died every week.
- The children and teens who died from guns in 2010 would fill 134 classrooms of 20 children.

Overview

Guns are the second leading cause of death among children and teens ages 1-19 and the number one cause among Black children and teens.

- Only motor vehicle accidents kill more children and teens every year.
- White and Asian/Pacific Islander children and teens were nearly three times more likely, American Indian/Alaska Native children and teens more than two times as likely, and Hispanic children and teens one-and-a-half times more likely to be killed in a car accident than by a gun.
- In contrast, Black children and teens were twice as likely to be killed by a gun than to be killed in a car accident.

Although total gun deaths dropped in 2010 for the fourth consecutive year, gun death rates remained higher than in the early 1960s.

- In 2010, the rate of gun deaths in children and teens was 30 percent higher than in 1963, when data were first collected from all states.
- While Black children and teens have experienced the highest rates of gun deaths, the largest number of deaths has been among White children and teens. Out of the estimated 166,600 children and teens who have died from guns between 1963 and 2010, 53 percent were among White children and teens, and 36 percent were among Black children and teens.
- Between 1963 and 2010, 59,265 Black children and teens were killed by guns—more than 17 times the recorded lynchings of Black people of all ages in the 86 years from 1882 to 1968.

Since 1963, three times more children and teens died from guns on American soil than U.S. soldiers killed in action in wars abroad.

- 166,500 children and teens died from guns on American soil between 1963 and 2010, while 52,183 U.S. soldiers were killed in action in the Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq wars combined during that same period.
- On average 3,470 children and teens were killed by guns every year from 1963 to 2010, or 174 classrooms of 20 children every year.

Nearly three times more children and teens were injured by guns in 2010 than the number of U.S. soldiers wounded in action that year in the war in Afghanistan.

- An estimated 15,576 children and teens were injured by guns in 2010.
 - 1 child or teen was injured every 34 minutes.
 - 43 children and teens were injured every day.
 - 300 children and teens were injured every week.
 - 5,247 U.S. soldiers were injured in the war in Afghanistan in 2010.

Children and teens die from gun violence in all states.

- Every state lost children to gun violence between 2000 and 2010. The number of deaths varied from 15 in Hawaii to 4,668 in California.
- The deadliest state was Alaska with 8.7 gun deaths for every 100,000 children and teens each year, more than twice the nationwide rate of 3.6. Alaska was 21 times more deadly for children and teens than Hawaii, the safest state.

Overview

Guns kill more children under 5 than law enforcement officers in the line of duty.

- 82 children under 5 died from guns in 2010, compared to 55 law enforcement officers killed by guns in the line of duty.

Children are more likely to be exposed to violence than adults.

- The 2008 National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence found that nearly two-thirds of children and youth had been victims or witnesses of violence within the past year.
- Nearly 1 in 10 children and 1 in 5 14-17 year-olds had witnessed a shooting at some point in their lives.

Black, Hispanic, American Indian and Alaska Native children and teens are disproportionately more likely to die or be injured by guns.

- In 2010, 45 percent of gun deaths and 46 percent of gun injuries were among Black children and teens, although they comprised only 15 percent of all children and teens.
- Black children and teens were 4.7 times more likely to die from guns than White children the same age, and 8.5 times more likely to be injured. American Indian or Alaska Native children and teens were 2.4 times more likely to die from guns, and Hispanic children were 3.3 times more likely to be injured from guns than White children and teens.
- Black children and teens were 17 times more likely to die from a gun homicide than White children the same age.
- American Indian or Alaska Native children and teens had the highest rate of gun suicides, nearly twice as high as White children and teens.

Homicide is the leading manner of gun death among children and teens and assault the leading manner of gun injury.

- Children and teen gun deaths were most likely to be homicides; adult gun deaths were most likely to be suicides.
- Two out of three child and teen gun deaths were homicides; a little over one out of four were suicides.
- Among nonfatal gun injuries, a little over three out of four resulted from assaults while nearly one out of five was accidental.

Older teenagers are most at risk from gun violence, Black male teens are most at risk.

- Eighty-six percent of gun deaths and 89 percent of gun injuries in 2010 occurred in 15-19 year-olds.
- Black males ages 15-19 were nearly 30 times more likely to die in a gun homicide than White males and more than three times more likely to die in a gun homicide than Hispanic males of the same age.

Total gun deaths and injuries in 2010 cost the U.S. \$174.1 billion, or 1.15 percent of our gross domestic product.

- The 105,177 gun deaths and injuries to children, teens and adults that occurred in 2010 cost the nation \$8.4 billion in medical and other direct costs, \$52.5 billion in lost productivity and lost wages, and \$113.3 billion in lost enjoyment of life.

The Truth About Guns

1. A gun in the home increases the risk of homicide, suicide and accidental death.

Contrary to what many people believe, having a gun in your home doesn't make you safer but instead endangers you and your loved ones. A gun in the home makes the likelihood of homicide three times higher,¹ suicide three to five times higher,^{2,3} and accidental death four times higher.⁴ For every time a gun in the home injures or kills in self-defense, there are 11 completed and attempted gun suicides, seven criminal assaults and homicides with a gun, and four unintentional shooting deaths or injuries.⁵

2. Many children live in homes with loaded and unlocked guns. Every parent and grandparent needs to be careful where their children play and ask if there is a gun in the home.

One-third of all households with children younger than 18 have a gun and more than 40 percent of gun-owning households with children store their guns unlocked.⁶ Twenty-two percent of children with gun-owning parents handled guns in their homes without their parents' knowledge.⁷ More than half of youth who committed suicide with a gun obtained the gun from their home, usually a parent's gun.^{8,9}

Brandon Holt, a 6-year-old from Ocean County, New Jersey was shot in the head and killed by his 4-year-old neighbor during a play date. The 4-year-old had gone into his home and brought back a loaded .22 caliber rifle. He accidentally fired the gun from about 15 feet away from his friend.^{1,2}

Caroline Sparks, 2 years old was shot in the chest and killed accidentally by her 5-year-old brother in Kentucky in May. The little boy had gotten the weapon, a .22 caliber Crickett single-shot rifle marketed to children, for his birthday.^{3,4}

Jodi Sandoval lost her 14-year-old son, Noah, to gun violence in Columbus, Ohio on July 5, 2012. A mindful parent, Jodi says, she kept a gun-free home. Her son was visiting a friend who was fooling around with a gun. Although there was no magazine in the gun, unbeknownst to the friend, there was a bullet in the chamber. Now Jodi is wracked with grief and guilt.^{5,6}

*To hear Jodi tell her story visit CDF's Faces of Courage webpage.

3. Guns make violence more deadly.

Contrary to what the gun industry says, guns do kill people. Guns make killing easy, efficient, and somewhat impersonal, thereby increasing the lethality of anger and violence.¹⁰ *An estimated 41 percent of gun-related homicides and 94 percent of gun-related suicides would not occur if no guns were present.*¹¹ On the same day as the Newtown massacre a man attacked children with a knife at an elementary school in China. Twenty-three children were injured, but none died.¹² In family and intimate assaults, the use of a gun increased the risk of death 12 times.¹³

4. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is forbidden from regulating the sale and manufacture of guns.

A 1976 amendment to the Consumer Product Safety Act specifically states that the Commission shall make no ruling or order that restricts the manufacture or sale of guns, guns ammunition, or components of guns ammunition, including black powder or gun powder for guns.¹⁴ As a result, the CPSC can regulate teddy bears and toy guns¹⁵ but not real guns, despite the fact that they are one of the most lethal consumer products.

The Truth About Guns

5. **Virtually anyone can buy a gun without a background check.** Federal law requires that anyone purchasing a gun from a federally-licensed dealer submit to a background check. But private sales, like many sales at gun shows and increasingly on the internet, do not require it. This is a loophole used by many people who could not pass a background check. In 2009, undercover stings at gun shows in Nevada, Ohio and Tennessee revealed that 63 percent of private sellers sold guns to purchasers who stated that they would be unable to pass a background check.¹⁶ A 2011 study of internet gun sales found that 62 percent of sellers agreed to sell a gun to a buyer who said he probably couldn't pass a background check.¹⁷
6. **The majority of Americans, including gun owners and NRA members, support common sense gun safety regulations.** Almost three-quarters of those in NRA households (74 percent)¹⁸ and more than four out of five gun owners (79 percent of Republican gun owners and 90 percent of Democratic gun owners)¹⁹ believe that all potential gun buyers should be subject to a criminal background check. Nearly two-thirds of Americans (65 percent) and half of gun owners (50 percent) believe that allowing people to own assault weapons makes the country a more dangerous place.²⁰ A majority of Americans want a ban on assault style weapons and oppose more teachers and school officials having guns in schools.²¹
7. **Common sense gun safety laws help reduce gun violence while protecting the legal use of guns.** The following gun safety laws have all been found to be effective in reducing gun violence. None of these regulations prevent law-abiding citizens from owning guns.
 - **Requiring background checks for purchases through private sellers as well as licensed dealers.** Since the implementation in 1994 of the Brady Law, which instituted a federal background check requirement for sales through federally-licensed dealers, 2.1 million firearm purchase applications have been denied.²² A recent study in the Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine found that states with background checks on private sales had 16 percent lower gun fatality rates.²³
 - **Firearm prohibitions for high-risk groups.** A study in California found that denial of handgun purchase to people who have committed violent misdemeanors was associated with a decrease in risk of arrest for new gun and/or violent crimes.²⁴
 - **Well-designed assault weapons ban.** An Australian law banning semi-automatic and pump-action rifles and shotguns and buying back banned weapons was associated with decreased suicide and homicide rates and with the absence of any mass shootings in the decade following the law (compared to 11 mass shootings in the prior decade).²⁵
 - **Child access prevention laws.** Studies of child access prevention laws, which require gun owners to store their guns so that children and teens cannot access them unsupervised, have found these laws reduce accidental shootings of children by as much as 23 percent²⁶ and suicides of adolescents by 8 percent.²⁷
 - **Tighter regulation and oversight of gun sellers.** A study using crime gun trace data from 54 U.S. cities found that diversion of guns for use in crimes is much less common in states:
 - that license retail gun sellers;
 - that require careful record keeping that can be reviewed by law enforcement;
 - that require potential gun buyers to apply for a license directly with a law enforcement agency; and
 - where law enforcement agencies conduct regular compliance inspections.²⁸

The Truth About Guns

8. **Common sense gun safety regulations protect lawful ownership and use of guns.**

The 1994 Assault Weapons Ban that expired in 2004 protected the rights of gun owners by exempting every shotgun and hunting rifle in use at the time.²⁹ Senator Dianne Feinstein's proposed 2013 legislation reinstating the ban specifically exempts over 2,000 sporting and hunting weapons.³⁰ Background checks do not prevent legal gun purchases.

9. **Universal background checks will not lead to a registry of gun owners.**

The Brady Law of 1994 explicitly bans the creation of a registry of gun owners.³¹ Under the law, instant criminal background checks have been made on over 100 million gun sales in the last decade, without leading to the formation of a gun registry.³² Likewise, the background check compromise proposed by Senators Manchin and Toomey in early 2013 also explicitly banned the creation of a gun registry and even imposed new serious criminal penalties (a felony with up to 15 years in prison) on any person who misuses or illegally retains firearms records.

10. **Loopholes in prior gun safety laws prevented them from being as effective as necessary.**

The 1993 Brady Law required federal background checks for guns purchased from federally-licensed retailers, but not for private sales.³³ The 1994 assault weapons and high-capacity magazine ban did not apply to weapons and magazines manufactured prior to the ban, allowed importation of rifles that could accept large capacity magazines, and allowed the manufacture and sale of "copy-cat" assault weapons with only small differences from banned models.³⁴

11. **Armed school guards and teachers will not necessarily make children safer but may jeopardize the futures of some children.**

Armed guards or officers are in about one-third of our nation's public schools.³⁵ Columbine High School had an armed guard,³⁶ and Virginia Tech had a full campus police force. There is no evidence that armed guards or police officers in schools make children safer.³⁷ Educators are strongly opposed to arming teachers. A National Education Association poll of its membership found that 22 percent were in favor of arming teachers, 68 percent were opposed and 61 percent were strongly opposed.³⁸ While there isn't clear evidence that armed security guards or police officers keep children in schools safer, there is very troubling evidence that their large presence on school grounds leads to the criminalization of some children, especially Black and Latino males, at increasingly younger ages and the feeding of children into the prison pipeline.³⁹ Alternatives to armed guards include threat assessment teams, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and restorative justice practices, which have all shown to be effective in reducing violence, improving school safety, and maintaining a positive school climate that allows teachers to teach and students to learn.^{40,41,42}

On January 11th, 2012 Caldwell County Sheriff's deputies went to the home of the Curtis family after receiving an emergency call: their 12-year-old son, **Steven Curtis**, had mishandled a gun and accidentally shot himself in the head. Steven loved playing football and being outside. He also spent a great deal of time hunting and as a result grew up learning about gun safety; he even had a hunter's safety certification from the Conservation Department. In Breckenridge, Missouri—a town of just 450 people—hunting safety is an important part of the middle school's agricultural curriculum. Steven's father didn't know how his son got the gun from a locked cabinet that was in their living room.^{10,11}

We Can Do Better: Action Steps

1. Urge your members of Congress to protect children from gun violence. Support common sense gun safety and gun violence prevention measures for the nation including:

- **Universal background checks.** The 1993 Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act requires federally-licensed gun dealers to conduct background checks on every sale. But as many as 40 percent of guns purchased each year are purchased with no background check from private unlicensed gun sellers who are exempt from the background check requirement. More than 80 percent of Americans support expanding background checks to cover all or most gun sales.¹ Eight states have closed the private sales loophole by requiring universal background checks for all gun sales. The effectiveness of these laws is limited when criminals can easily buy guns in states without a universal background check requirement. A federal amendment adding a requirement for background checks for all sales on the internet and at gun shows failed by five votes in the Senate in April 2013. Two-thirds of Americans believe Congress did the wrong thing.² *Congress must require criminal background checks on anyone who attempts to purchase a gun regardless of where and from whom they buy it.*
- **Limits on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines.** The federal Assault Weapons Ban signed into law in 1994 that banned the manufacture and sale of semi-automatic assault weapons with two or more military features and high-capacity ammunition magazines that contained more than 10 rounds of ammunition expired in 2004. Amendments that would have restored and strengthened both came up for a vote in March 2013, but failed in the Senate despite the support of the majority of Americans. Assault weapons and high-capacity magazines were used in the mass shootings at Virginia Tech; Tucson, Arizona; Aurora, Colorado; and Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. *Congress must restore the ban on both high-capacity magazines and on assault weapons.*
- **Consumer safety standards, childproof safety features, and authorized-user identification technology for all guns.** Every gun in this country should be childproof. One-third of all households with children have at least one gun in the home.³ It is estimated that nearly 2 million children live in homes with an unlocked and loaded gun.⁴ Federal law is silent on gun-related consumer safety standards and child access prevention. In fact, the production and manufacture of guns is specifically exempt from oversight by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. As a result, many handguns do not contain easily-installed life-saving safety features. Only 27 states have even attempted to keep children from accessing guns by passing child access prevention laws.⁵ There is a bill currently introduced in the House of Representatives, H.R. 2005, the Personalized Handgun Safety Act, which would take a major step forward for gun safety by requiring handguns manufactured in the future to be fitted with personalization technology that would limit access only to an authorized user. *Congress must subject guns to the same consumer product safety regulations that cover virtually every other consumer product. Congress must require childproof safety features on all guns.*
- **Better services for children and families facing violence in their homes and communities and for children with unmet mental health needs.** Children exposed to violence in their families or communities suffer lifelong consequences. Better services for these children and their families, as well as for children with unmet mental health needs, are needed to address the

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impact of violence on children and prevent violence in the future. Families need to have options other than calling the police when a child or adult is in need of mental health treatment. *Congress should restore and increase funds for the prevention and treatment of mental health problems in children and young adults, expand the reach of quality programs to address children's social and emotional needs in communities and schools, strengthen the capacity of publicly supported health programs for children to better address children's mental health needs, and fund initiatives to increase the number of well-trained child psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, school counselors and specialized community advocates.*

- **Public funding for gun violence prevention research and programs.** Since 1996, the NRA and its Congressional allies have succeeded in shutting down federally funded research on the prevention of gun injuries and fatalities. In 1996 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lost all funding for gun violence research.⁶ In 2011 the National Institutes of Health met the same fate. As a result, we know far less than we need to about what works to prevent the more than 100,000 gun fatalities and injuries that occur every year. *Congress must reinstate funding for gun violence prevention by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal agencies.*
- **Resources and authority for the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and law enforcement agencies to properly enforce gun laws.** Since the 1970s, the NRA and its allies in Congress have made it considerably more difficult for federal agencies and local law enforcement to hold criminal gun dealers and traffickers accountable and keep illegal guns off the streets. Furthermore, the ATF has not had a permanent director since 2006. *Congress must stop hampering the ATF's work and give the ATF the resources and regulatory authority it needs to hold criminal gun dealers and traffickers accountable.*

2. Urge state and local governments to protect children from guns.

States have the authority to enact many laws that could protect children from gun violence. Since Newtown, four states have passed common sense gun safety reforms. Urge your state legislators and local officials to:

- **Support laws to prevent child access to guns,** such as requirements for locking devices, personalized gun technology and imposing criminal liability when guns are left unsecured or stored negligently. All guns should be childproof and kept secured from unsupervised children.
- **Support universal background checks.** In the absence of a federal universal background check requirement, eight states have enacted their own. A recent study found that states with background checks on private sales had 16 percent lower firearm fatality rates.⁷
- **Support limits on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition.** Seven states and the District of Columbia have passed laws limiting the sale and/or possession of assault weapons, and eight states and the District of Columbia have state laws limiting the sale and/or possession of large capacity ammunition magazines.
- **Oppose efforts to limit the ability of schools, physicians and others to do their part to keep children safe from guns.** For example, Florida attempted to prevent physicians from asking patients about guns in homes and safe storage practices.

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- **Oppose laws allowing concealed weapons** on school grounds, in child care centers, in churches or other public venues where children gather.
- **Demand the repeal of “Stand Your Ground” laws** now in effect in 26 states that encourage a shoot first and ask questions later approach to confrontations.

3. Parents, remove guns from your home and be vigilant about where your children play.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates nearly 2 million children live in homes with loaded, unlocked guns.⁸ The presence of guns increases the risk of death. Most adolescent suicides involve a gun owned by a parent.⁹ Parents may think they have adequately protected their children by safely storing their guns, but this sense of security is often misplaced. A study by the Harvard Injury Control Research Center found that 39 percent of children interviewed knew the location of their parents' guns and 22 percent said they had handled the guns despite their parents reporting otherwise.¹⁰ Children under 10 were just as likely to have reported knowing where the guns were kept and having handled them as older children. Research shows that it is not enough to talk to children about the dangers of guns. Children exposed to gun safety programs are no less likely to play with guns than those who are not exposed to such classes. Removing guns from the home and asking questions about guns in the homes of your children's friends are the best ways to protect your children from gun deaths.

4. Boycott products that glamorize violence.

Our culture frequently glamorizes guns and violence in movies, television, music, video games and on the internet. Many shows targeted at children have violent themes and language. The American Academy of Pediatrics has found that there is consistent scientific evidence that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children. Refuse to buy or use products that glamorize or make violence socially acceptable. Turn off violent programming and read or play with your children instead. Talk to them about the importance of rejecting violence as a cultural or personal value.

5. Bring attention to the number of children killed and injured by gun violence and the truth about guns.

Children and teens impacted by gun violence and concerned community members can unite to educate others about our crisis of gun violence. There are moving examples of parents and family members of a child killed or injured by a gun channeling their grief and anger into broadening public understanding of the devastation of guns and increasing political support for stronger gun laws. In the wake of the Newtown shooting, several new grassroots groups have formed to bring attention to this issue. Mobilize support to protect children from gun violence:

- **Organize a group of influential community leaders to see and hear first-hand the effects of gun violence.** Let them hear from children and teens who were victims of gun violence. Arrange visits with medical staff from your local hospital who directly serve gun violence victims and their families. Involve police officers who interact with both victims and perpetrators.
- **Urge local newspapers, radio and television stations to publish stories and feature photographs of children and teens killed by guns in your community.** Get them to keep a running tally of young gun victims in 2013.

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- **Encourage your place of worship to read the names of children killed by guns in your community and publish their photos in the congregational bulletin.** Begin a visual memorial to the young lives lost to gun violence by placing a stone in a central and meaningful location to mark each child lost to gun violence in your community.
 - **Use our We Can Do Better social media tools** to bring attention to the impact of gun violence in your community: www.childrensdefense.org/DoBetter
 - **Encourage and help children and teens** who have been victims of gun violence to write a letter to the editor or an opinion column about how to stop the violence.
 - **Connect with groups working to reduce the epidemic of gun violence in this country.** See page 54 in this report for the names of organizations that you can help to make a difference.
- 6. Offer parents, children and teens the resources, support, and tools to survive and work against the culture of violence.**
- **Offer a safe refuge for children exposed to violence.** Recognize the negative impact violence can have not only on children who are direct victims or who have lost siblings or close friends to violence, but also on those who live in constant fear of gun violence in their communities. Schools, congregations, community mental health centers and other community resources should offer safe places after school and on the weekends for children and teens and also help them and their parents understand, confront and deal with the anger, fear and loss of control they feel.
 - **Support non-violent conflict resolution in our homes, schools, congregations and communities.** Family violence in our society is an epidemic, child abuse and neglect are widespread, and children are exposed to television programming that glamorizes guns, violence and brutality. Conflict resolution skills are essential but not typically taught in school or at home. Concerned parents can partner with schools, community groups and faith congregations to organize nonviolent conflict resolution support groups and push for adoption of a conflict resolution curriculum in your local school.
 - **Support innovative efforts to promote positive youth development.** Many children and teens, particularly in urban areas, are exposed to gangs, drugs, violence and guns on a daily basis. We must offer positive alternatives and role models for them, especially during after-school hours, weekends and summers. We must open our congregational, school and community doors and engage young people in purposeful activities.

