

Adapted from the abstract for Geoffrey A. Jackman, et al, "Seeing Is Believing: What Do Boys Do When They Find a Real Gun?" Pediatrics, Volume 107, 2001, pages 1247-1250.

Seeing Is Believing: What Do Boys Do When They Find a Real Gun?

ABSTRACT

Objectives: To determine how boys behave when they find a handgun in a presumably safe environment and to compare parental expectations of their child's interest in real guns with this observed behavior.

Methods: A sample of 8- to 12-year-old boys was recruited from families that completed a survey on firearm ownership, storage practices, and parental perceptions. Parents were asked to rate their child's interest in real guns on a scale from 1 to 5 (1-2 = low interest, 3= moderate interest, and 4-5 = high interest). Parents of the child were asked to bring one of their son's playmates and / or a sibling, in the same age range, to the experiment. After informed parental consent was obtained, each pair or trio of boys was placed in a room with a 1-way mirror and observed for up to 15 minutes. Two water pistols and an actual .380 caliber handgun were hidden in separate drawers. The handgun contained a radio transmitter that activated a light whenever the trigger was depressed with enough force to discharge the firearm. After the experiment, each boy was asked whether he thought that the pistol was real or a toy. Before leaving, each child was counseled about safe behavior around guns.

Results: Twenty-nine groups of boys took part in the study. The mean age of participants was 9.8 years. Twenty-one of the groups (72 %) discovered the handgun; 16 groups (76%) handled it. One or more members in 10 of the groups (48%) pulled the trigger. Approximately half of the 48 boys who found the gun thought that it was a toy or were unsure whether it was real. Parental estimates of their child's interest in guns did not predict actual behavior on finding the handgun. Boys who were believed to have a low interest in real guns were just as likely to handle the handgun or pull the trigger as boys who were perceived to have a moderate or high interest in guns. More than 90% of the boys who handled the gun or pulled the trigger reported that they had previously received some sort of gun safety instruction.

Conclusion: Many 8- to 12-year-old boys will handle a handgun if they find one. Guns that are kept in homes should be stored in a manner that renders them inaccessible to children.

Adapted from the abstract for Marjorie S. Hardy, et al, "A Firearm Safety Program for Children: They Just Can't Say No," Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, Volume 17, 1996, pages 216-221.

A Firearm Safety Program for Children: They Just Can't Say No

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to compare children's play and behavior with firearms before and after an information-based intervention. Participants were 24 pairs of preschool children who were videotaped for 10 minutes in a structured play setting, in which they had access to a variety of toys and to real and toy guns. One child from each pair was then exposed to an information-based risk management strategy and told not to play with guns. The children were again videotaped in the same setting approximately 1 week later. Results indicated that the intervention was ineffective in modifying the behavior of the children. The findings in the study represent the first systematic attempt to decrease gun play in children and suggest that information provision alone is an insufficient intervention.