

**A Training Guide for Community Violence
Intervention Programs**

SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS AS A HARM REDUCTION APPROACH

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This training guide was developed by **Ellie Jackson**, MPH candidate in the Community-Oriented Public Health Practice program at the University of Washington. She worked under **Karyn Brownson**, Community Safety Manager of Violence & Injury Prevention within the Health Sciences Division at Public Health - Seattle & King County.

**Public Health - Seattle & King County
Violence & Injury Prevention**

Ellie Jackson
n-ejackson@kingcounty.gov

Karyn Brownson
karyn.brownson@kingcounty.gov

Thank you to our **community partners** across Washington state and colleagues from King County's **Regional Office of Gun Violence Prevention**:

- Amara Family, Tacoma
- Choose 180, Tacoma
- Imagine Justice Project, Tacoma
- Innovative Change Makers, Tacoma
- Progress Pushers, Renton
- Walk About Yakima, Yakima

This training guide is for the intended use of CVI program staff and partners. This training is intended to protect youth ages 24 and younger from firearm-related injuries and deaths (unintentional and intentional). It is not intended to promote firearm use among youth.

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BACKGROUND FOR CVI PARTNERS

INTRODUCTION

Why safe storage?

According to a 2020 Gallup Poll, 32% of Americans personally owned a firearm while a total of 44% lived in a firearm-owning household. (1) Research over the previous 30-years has shown that the presence of firearms in the home substantially increases the risk for intentional and unintentional deaths due to firearms. (2,3) Firearms remain the leading cause of death among ages 0-24, with 85% of these deaths among children 0-12 occurring in the home. (4) Approximately 20% of US firearm-owning households with children do not properly secure their firearms. (5) Safe storage of firearms is defined as “having firearms locked, unloaded, and with ammunition locked and stored separately”. (6) This is also known as the “triple safe storage method”. (7) Washington state law defines “secure gun storage” as 1) A locked box, gun safe, or other secure locked storage space that is designed to prevent unauthorized use or discharge of a firearm; and 2) The act of keeping an unloaded firearm stored by such means.

These practices have been proven to reduce suicide and unintentional firearm injury, particularly in homes with children and adolescents. (3,6–9) Therefore, safe storage of firearms is an effective primary prevention strategy that serves as a harm reduction approach by preventing access to firearms in the home.

Sources:

1. (GALLUP, 2020)
2. (Aitken et al., 2020)
3. (Monuteaux et al., 2019)
4. (Lee et al., 2023)
5. (Azrael et al., 2018)
6. (Gastineau & McKay, 2023)
7. (King et al., 2019)
8. (Anestis et al., 2023)
9. (Horn et al., 2003)

FRAMING THE ISSUE:

Firearms are the leading cause of death for U.S. children.

Trends in Firearm Deaths Among U.S. Children **By Age Group***



Source: (Roberts et al., 2023)

Key Takeaway:

More 15-19 year-olds die from guns than younger youth. The death count among this group increased every year between 2018-2021.

Firearm Deaths **By Age in WA**

WA follows national trends.

15-19 year-olds have the highest rates of firearm related deaths compared to younger age groups.** Suicide rates among this group increased between 2019 - 2021. Firearms were the leading cause of death among WA children and teens between 2021-2023.

Source: (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, n.d.; The Alliance for Gun Responsibility, 2023)

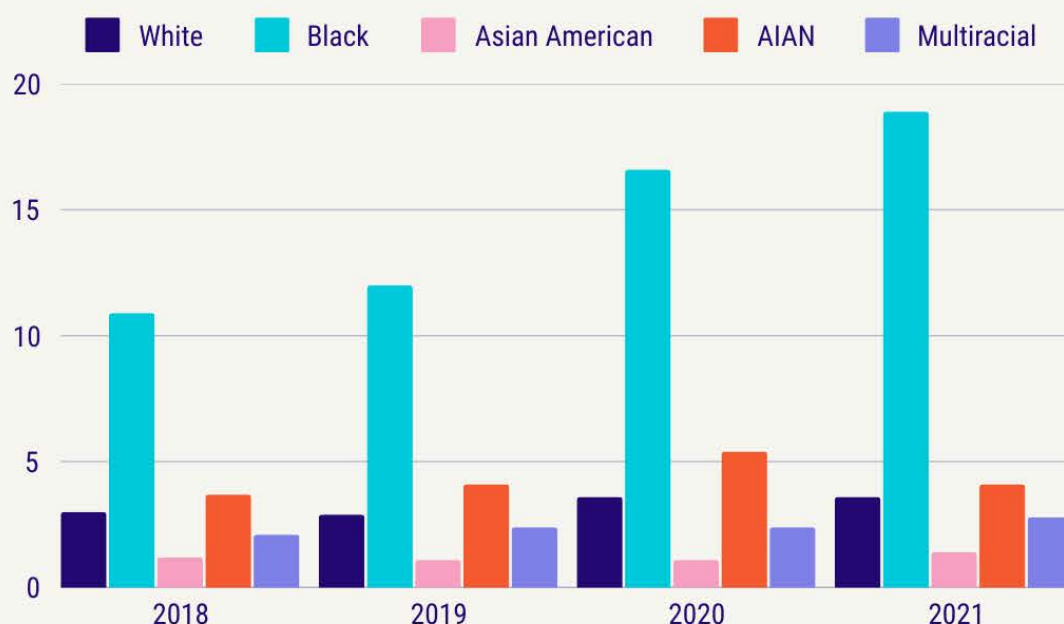
*Numbers are represented as total counts of firearm deaths by suicide, homicide, unintentional causes, and undetermined/other.

**The total number of deaths for age groups 0-4, 5-9, and 10-14 fell below 20 in 2018, 2019, and 2020 (the latest recorded year). They are not reported for confidentiality reasons.

FRAMING THE ISSUE:

Firearms are the leading cause of death for U.S. children.

Trends in Firearm Deaths Among U.S. Children **By Racial Group***



Source: (Roberts et al., 2023)

Key Takeaway:

Black youth died from guns at much higher rates than youth of other races between 2018-2021. These trends can be attributed to structural drivers of violence like socio-economics, quality of family and social supports, witnessing violence, and racism.

Firearm Deaths **By Racial Group in WA**

Black Washingtonians experiences similar disparities.

Black youth are twice as likely to die from a gun than White youth in WA. Among adults, Black and American Indian/Alaska Native Washingtonians are more likely to die from guns than White, Latino, or Asian adults.

Source: (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, n.d.; The Alliance for Gun Responsibility, 2023)

*Crude death rates are presented (death rate per 100,000 persons). Includes firearm deaths by suicide, homicide, unintentional causes, and undetermined/other.

Contact your local health department for data specific to your county. Scan the QR code to see **King County's firearm data dashboard.**



WHY HARM REDUCTION?

Firearm-related deaths and injuries can be prevented by storing firearms safely.

20%

Of firearm-owning households with children **do not securely store their firearms.**

33%

Of intentional and unintentional **youth firearm deaths are prevented by secure storage.**

72%

Of unintentional shootings **occur in the home.**

92%

Of those killed or injured by an unintentional shooting between 2015 - 2022 **were under 18.**

PRINCIPLES OF HARM REDUCTION

As they relate to firearm use based on the **National Harm Reduction Coalition's** principles of harm reduction, replacing *drugs* with *firearms*.

- 1 Accepts that **firearms** are a part of our world and chooses to work to minimize their harmful effects rather than simply ignore or condemn them.
- 2 Understands **firearm use** as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon.
- 3 Establishes quality of individual and community life and well-being as the criteria for successful interventions and policies.
- 4 Ensures that people who use **firearms** and those with a history of using **firearms** routinely have a real voice in the creation of programs and policies designed to serve them.
- 5 Recognizes that the realities of poverty, class, racism, social isolation, past trauma, sex-based discrimination, and other social inequalities affect both people's vulnerability to and capacity for effectively dealing with **firearm**-related harm.
- 6 **Does not attempt to minimize or ignore the real and tragic harm and danger that can be associated with firearms.**

THE CASE FOR SAFE STORAGE CONT.

SAFE STORAGE KEEPS KIDS & FAMILIES SAFE



WHAT DOES SAFE STORAGE LOOK LIKE?

1 UNLOADED

Make sure the chamber is empty and the cartridge is removed.

2 LOCKED

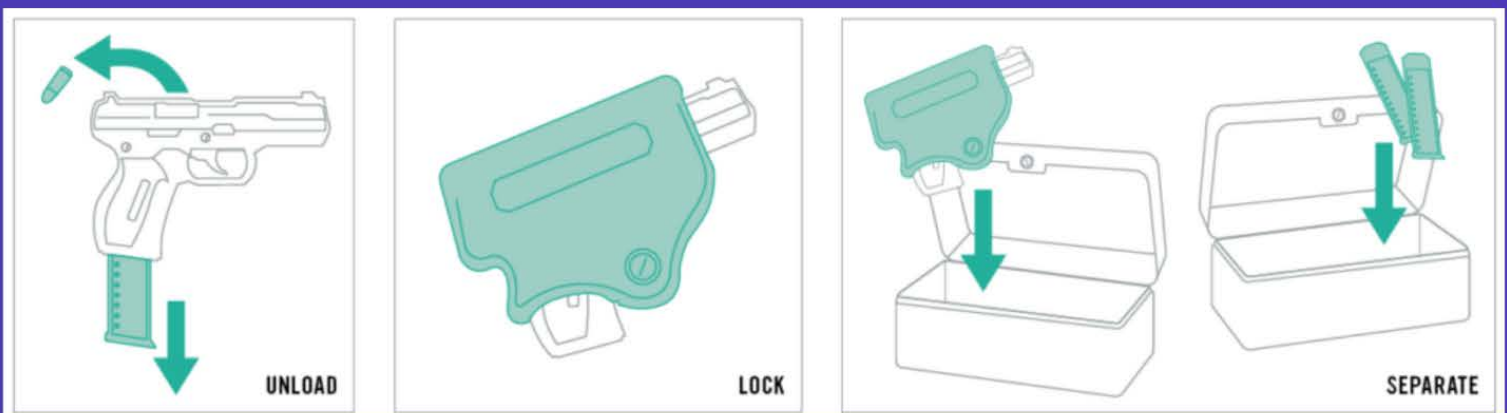
Lock firearms using the safe storage device of your choice.

3 SEPARATE

Store firearms separately from ammunition.

Practicing all three methods is the safest way to store a firearm.

However, practicing any one of these methods is better than none at all. For example, storing a loaded handgun in a lockbox is better than not storing it in a lockbox at all.







Note: A LifeJacket device is depicted in the “Lock” image. This functions similarly to a trigger lock. Any lockable safe storage device can be used for this step.

Source: (Be SMART, 2023c)

A NOTE ON STORAGE OPTIONS

Firearm storage practices differ according to the type of firearm owned, the reasons for owning a firearm, and the presence of children in the home.

STORAGE DEVICE	PROS	CONS
Lock Box 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fits most hand guns • Good for vehicle storage • More affordable (\$25-\$75) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't fit guns of all sizes
Trigger Lock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevents access by small children • More affordable (\$10-\$50) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less secure than other options - can be dismantled with minimal tools • Doesn't prevent theft
Cable Lock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevents access by small children • More affordable, often provided at point of sale (\$0-\$30) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less secure than other options - can be dismantled with minimal tools • Doesn't prevent theft
Gun Safe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevents theft if anchored to a wall • Can fit multiple guns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Least affordable option (\$200-\$2000)

Source: (Be SMART, 2023a)



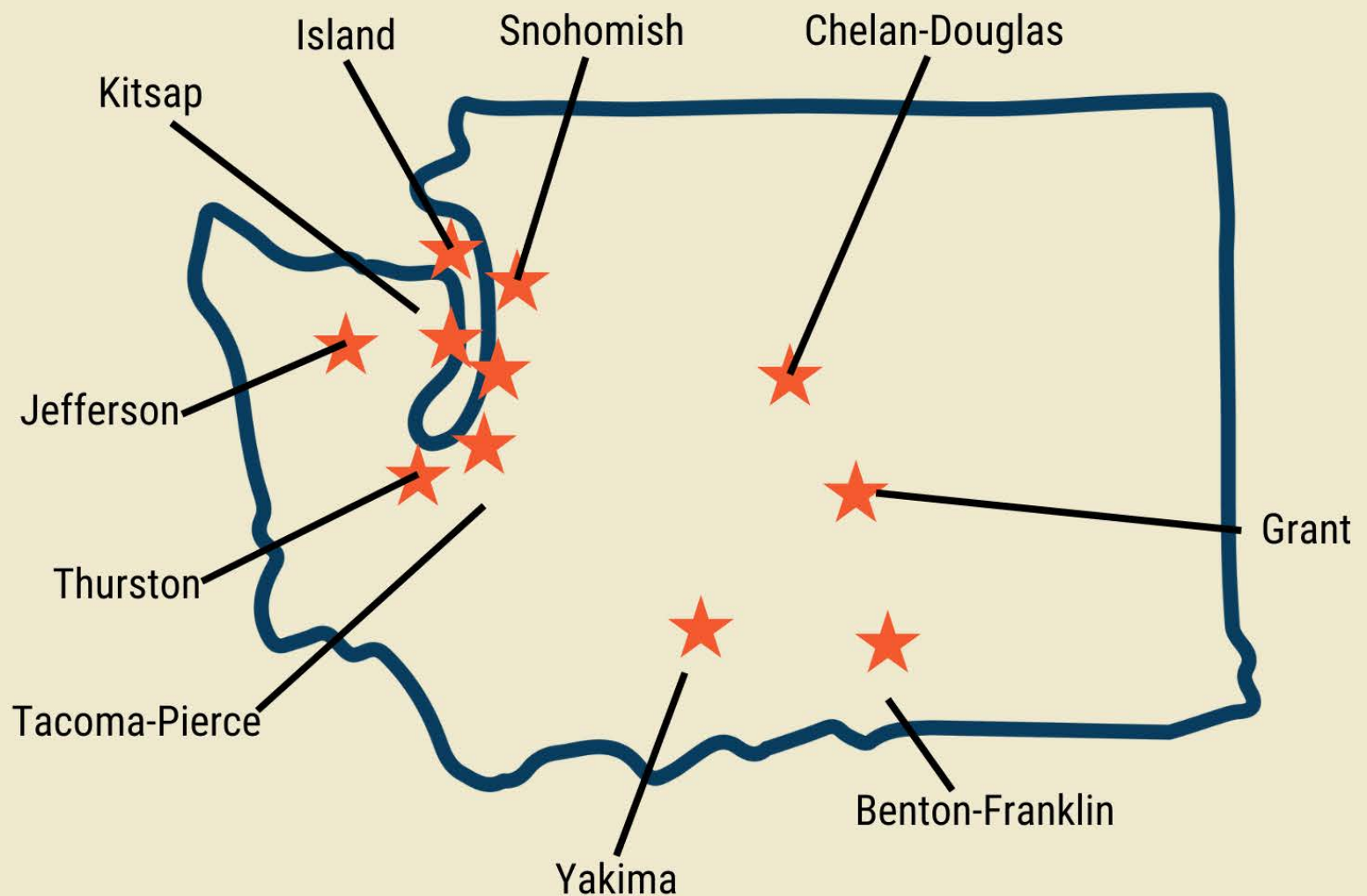
King County's Lock It Up program aims to increase safe storage among WA gun owners by partnering with firearm retailers, law enforcement, community-based organizations, and more recently, county health departments state-wide. Check out their website for more information and resources in 15 languages.

SAFE STORAGE IS HARM REDUCTION

Providing low-barrier access to safe storage devices & resources for how to use them will save lives.

LOCK IT UP COUNTY PARTNERS

King County has partnered with the following county health departments to expand the Lock It Up program state-wide thanks to funding from the WA-state Department of Commerce. In collaboration with these partners, lockboxes will be distributed *for free* at give-away events between 2024-2025.



SAFE STORAGE MESSAGING FOR YOUTH

THE POWER OF STORY-TELLING

Brian Gatewood, President & CEO of Innovative Change Makers, uses his story to educate youth about how to handle firearms safely.

When Brian learned that his Dad had passed, law enforcement told him it was due to “natural causes”. But when Brian saw his Dad’s body, he realized this couldn’t be true. The biohazard team confirmed his suspicions, but it wasn’t until a secondary investigation lead by the forensic team that his death was ultimately attributed to an accidental firearm discharge. His father’s injuries indicated that he likely bent down to pick something up from the same closet the gun was in when it fired. Brian had nearly faced the same fate at age 11 when he and a friend were playing around with a gun. These and similar events have stuck with Brian throughout his life, and moved him to start locking his guns at home. He purchased a gun safe where he stores his firearms locked and unloaded to keep him and his son safe. These experiences also motivated Brian to start talking to his son about gun safety and taking him to safety trainings as early as age six.

In his current role, Brian shares his story with youth in elementary, middle, and high schools across Tacoma. He discusses how to store and use guns safely, emphasizing the importance of protecting themselves and others from harm. He has noticed an increase in the number of youth carrying firearms for protection and notes that guns have become more accessible than ever. He partially attributes this to the glamorization of guns in media, specifically through music, naming that music is the biggest weapon used to drive youth to violence.

As a trusted community member, he’s found that sharing his lived experiences with youth makes them more receptive to his messaging and more willing to ask questions. He believes that repetition is important for reinforcing gun safety messaging with kids, especially when it comes to communicating the potential consequences of mishandling guns. “That bullet can change the trajectory of your life.”

Thank you for sharing your story, Brian!

Learn more about Innovative Change Makers at innovativechangemakers.com

A DISCUSSION WITH YOUTH

What role have guns played in your life?

Protection

Safety

**Nothing
positive**

If you had a lockbox, would you use it?

**I will own a lockbox
because I'll have kids
for sure.**

**I would definitely
use one as an
extra precaution.**

**I don't own a gun so
I wouldn't use it.**

**I would give it
to someone
else to use.**

**I would use one so
none of my kids could
access it.**

**Have you or someone you know accidentally shot someone?
Did or would this change how you handled or stored guns?**

**Yes, it made me
more aware of how
dangerous guns
actually are.**

**I've only seen videos on
Instagram.**

**I learned gun safety
from someone who
accidentally shot
someone.**

IN RESPONSE:

Responding to the concern for protection:

- **Acknowledge this reality:** youth may possess firearms for safety purposes.
- **Use story-telling** through a trusted messenger to communicate the **potential consequences** of storing a gun unlocked and loaded, including unintentional harm to themselves and others.
- Storing a gun locked does not mean it can't be used for protection. Keeping it locked **decreases the chances** of it being stolen, used by someone else, or hurting someone from accidental discharge.

Responding to awareness of safe storage:

- Emphasize that safe storage methods protect themselves AND others in the household.
- Safe storage **isn't just for adults** who own guns.
- **Spread the word:** Youth who don't own guns can encourage friends and family who do own guns to practice safe storage.

Responding to lived experience:

- Witnessing or being responsible for an unintentional shooting is **traumatizing**. These events are **not normal** and also impact the families and communities of those involved.
- Connect individuals to known **trauma supports** in the community, if possible.
- **Denormalize** gun violence portrayed on social media, in movies and music videos, and video games by emphasizing the consequences of playing around with guns.

MESSAGES & MESSENGERS BY AGE GROUP

Children The focus of messaging should be to prevent an unintentional shooting. These conversations may be more likely to happen parents or teachers and should be part of regular safety conversations.

- If you see a gun, tell an adult right away. Emphasize that children will not get in trouble if they tell an adult.
- Guns are not toys. Do not touch or play with them.

Teens & Young Adults The focus of messaging should be to prevent unintentional shootings AND suicide. Peer and adult mentors are effective messengers for talking to teens about uncomfortable topics like gun safety, especially if mentors have lived experience with gun violence themselves.

- Discuss ways to safely handle and unload firearms.
- When encountering a firearm, assume it's loaded and remove yourself from the situation.
- Always keep guns locked, unloaded, and separate from ammunition, and in a safe place that can't be accessed by friends, visitors, and younger siblings.
- Keeping guns locked is especially important for preventing people who are considering suicide from accessing them.

All ages In every case, make sure the messenger is a trusted source.

- Repeat gun safety conversations on a regular basis and encourage questions.
- It's OK to ask about the presence of guns in your home or one you're visiting and whether they're stored safely.
- Guns are the most dangerous thing that people considering suicide can have access to, regardless of their age.

THANK YOU
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