

# Firearm Violence Language Project

## Quick Reference Sheets

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The Firearm Violence Language Project offers basic information to encourage productive dialogue about firearm injury and death. A balanced, open view and careful listening can help achieve solutions to reduce firearm violence. Respectful and thoughtful conversations make it easier to find common ground with people who have different perspectives. Building bridges with confidence and trust is a critical step in creating a safer society.

With thorough research and comprehensive reviews, the Firearm Violence Language Project developed a collection of 11 Quick Reference Sheets (QRSs). These QRSs provide a foundation to promote beneficial communications in helping prevent firearm injury and death. We hope these QRSs are useful in many contexts.

These materials were produced by volunteers in consultation with law enforcement, public safety, and public health.

# **Talking About Firearms**

Word Choice And Examples Of Terminology

Conversations: Engaging, Pivoting, Or Ending

Confronting Misinformation And Disinformation

The Second Amendment

More Resources From Impartial Perspectives

# Word Choice And Examples Of Terminology

## Quick Reference Sheet

Words/Phrases to Avoid	Word Choice Alternatives	Because
gun	firearm	more formal, used in most laws, avoids including BB guns
gun control, anti-gun gun rights	firearm safety	controversial, can quickly end conversations
constitutional carry	permitless carry	implies constitutional right without stating actual meaning
urban gun violence gang violence	city firearm violence	connotes racial or economic groups
school shootings	trauma of firearm violence at schools	conflates trauma of injury and gunfire
accidental shootings	injury from unintentional discharge	typically happens due to negligence and not following the Four Rules of Gun Safety
accidental shootings (by children)	unintentional shootings (by children)	if firearms available to children, it's not accidental
victim of gun violence	someone injured by firearm violence, someone traumatized by firearm violence, or someone killed by firearm violence	too broad and doesn't honor survivors
committed suicide [with gun not stated]	died by suicide with a firearm	doesn't say how a person died
universal background checks (UBC)	background checks on most sales of firearms  Note: Some states' laws allow certain transfers or sales without a UBC.	not specific enough
Ban, restrict, control, confiscate guns from a prohibited person (under state or federal law)  Examples include adjudicated mental illness, misdemeanor domestic or intimate partner violence, felony convictions, protective orders, and Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs)	people who legally, either permanently or temporarily, can't have access to firearms	sounds punitive and permanent, labels people rather than noting temporary conditions

"Alliance Messaging Guide." Alliance for Gun Responsibility, 2019. [gunresponsibility.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/messaging-guide.pdf](https://gunresponsibility.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/messaging-guide.pdf), accessed August 2023.

"Words We Use." Everytown for Gun Safety, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in American, Students Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, August 2020. [ocdp.org/sites/default/files/content/words\\_we\\_use\\_2020.pdf](https://ocdp.org/sites/default/files/content/words_we_use_2020.pdf), accessed October 2023.

# Examples of Recommended Terminology Related to Firearms

Rather Than ...	Consider ...	Rationale
<b>Firearms and firearm ownership</b>		
"Gun"	"Firearm"	"Firearm" may be more neutral
"Restriction," "surrender," or "confiscation" (unless as an outcome of enforcement activity)	"Transfer," "relinquishment," or "temporary removal"	Avoids provocative language; distinguishes between enforcement and voluntary actions
"Assault weapon," "assault rifle," or "military-style rifle"	"AR15-style rifle," "AK-style rifle," "semiautomatic rifle," "Rifle"	Avoids terms that gun owners may perceive as pejorative or inaccurate
"Firearm safety counseling" to describe counseling about secure firearm storage	"Firearm responsibility," "prevention of unauthorized access," or "secure firearm storage" counseling	"Firearm safety" connotes safe firearm handling (e.g., how to safely use a firearm); focuses on access (vs storage) avoids linkage to storage-related laws
"Are your firearms locked up?"	"Do you prevent access of your firearms by unauthorized individuals" (e.g., untrained, unable to control firearms owing to strength/age, unable to understand risks, altered judgment or perception)	Shifts focus from the item to the at-risk user, drawing on standard principle of responsible firearm ownership (preventing unauthorized access)
"All guns should be stored unloaded and separate from ammunition"	Responsibly "stage" firearms intended for defensive purposes; responsibly "store" firearms used for hunting or recreation	Acknowledges that norms and preferences for staging or storage vary according to use (e.g., a personal defense weapon is often stored locked but loaded and quickly accessible)
<b>Suicide</b>		
"Commit" suicide	"Die by" or "die of" suicide	"Commit" implies criminality of the act and assigns blame
"Successful" or "failed" suicide attempt	"Died by suicide," "completed suicide," "killed themselves," "survived an attempt"	Avoids assigning moral judgment to outcome of attempt or implying that suicide death is a good outcome
"X caused the suicide"; "it was out of the blue"	Acknowledge that suicide is complex with no single cause and that there are often warning signs	Avoids oversimplifying suicide and encourages awareness of warning signs
"Suicide is inevitable"; "they'll always find a way"	Acknowledge that suicide can be prevented and that most people who survive a suicide attempt do not later die by suicide	Supports rationale for reducing access to firearms and other lethal methods during often brief (hours or days) periods or risk to prevent death
Omitting practical tips for seeking or providing help	Emphasize that asking people about suicide does not increase their risk; provide basic suicide warning signs and hotline resources	Supports efforts to make it easy to give and find help
<b>Community violence</b>		
"Gangs," "thugs," "gang bangers," or "ex-convicts"	"Group involved," "street affiliated," "formerly incarcerated," "justice involved," or "people who use violence"	Avoids stigmatizing perpetrators or victims on the basis of prior/potential criminality; avoids implying that victims "deserved it"
"Black-on-Black crime"	Describe the high relative risk of firearm injury and death among young Black and Hispanic men and the structural racism that underlies that reality	Avoids implying that inherent racial/ethnic differences are the risk factor (rather than structural inequities in housing, jobs, education, and prison sentences)
"Inner cities" or "urban communities" as code words for race or socioeconomic status	Talk about "communities that are disproportionately affected by violence"	Avoids stigmatizing people living in urban communities affected by gun violence
Jokes or statements about victims such as "they were just minding their own business"; suggesting that victims are withholding information by not revealing who shot them	In clinical settings, say "I'm sorry this happened to you" and provide time and space for patients to discuss the circumstances if and when they are ready	Follows principles of "trauma-informed care" in not forcing people to discuss circumstances if they are not ready
Implying that mental illness is the cause of all violence	Acknowledge the complex relationship between mental health and community violence exposure; note that the vast majority of people with mental health conditions do not engage in violent behavior and that people with mental health conditions are at increased risk of being the victim of crime	Avoids misdirection of resources and attention from the real underlying problems (e.g., prior firearm injury increases risk of substance use, depression, and anxiety; people with serious mental illness are more likely to be victims than perpetrators)
"Innocent victims"	Acknowledge that all victims are equally deserving of medical care and prevention efforts	Avoids implying that some people "deserve" to get shot and therefore that violence cannot be prevented

Betz, Marian E., MD, MPH; Jill Harkavy-Friedman, PhD; Fatimah Loren Dreier, MA; Rob Pincus, BA; and Megan L. Ranney, MD, MPH, "Talking About 'Firearm Injury' and 'Gun Violence': Words Matter." American Journal of Public Health, December 2021. This table reproduced in full with permission of Marian E. Betz.

# Conversations: Engaging, Pivoting, Or Ending

## Quick Reference Sheet

### What's A Productive Conversation?

- It's a comfortable, respectful exchange where you can voice opinions or disagree graciously and with kindness and openness. You're curious and you don't make assumptions. You listen to facts and feelings, check your new understandings, and learn from each other.
- You focus on common ground and shared values and beliefs. Talking about firearm safety is productive because most people agree it's important.
- If you think people might take something the wrong way, you don't say it or you consider asking a question about it instead of making an assumption.
- You avoid citing lots of statistics, a game impossible to win.
- An exchange is successful if each person better understands the other position, and if someone with unfounded beliefs is more open to accurate information.

### Talking With Someone With Different Views

- Communicate with empathy and compassion, not judgement.
- Find out about your lives and what's important and not important to each of you.
- Share some of your stories.

### Questions You Can Ask To Learn About Others

- Ask questions for understanding. For example, "Why is *carrying a concealed firearm* [or another topic] important to you?" Or, "Tell to me more about why you feel this way."
- If a person cites statistics you know are wrong, you could say, "It seems you're basing your position on that data. If that information wasn't correct, or if there are any conflicting data, would you feel the same way? Do you have other reasons that make you feel this way?"

### When To Engage

If the answer is yes to any of these questions, engage. If not, pivot.

- Is the person open to talking about firearms with you?
- Do they have honest questions about your positions? (or picking a fight)
- Are they willing to listen to you when you offer correct information? (or becoming defensive)

### How To Pivot

If you start to feel too challenged or uncomfortable or if the conversation isn't going well, these are some things you can do:

- Use short sentences that have impact, such as, "When firearms are safely stored, there's less risk of adolescent suicides or theft."
- Give one or two key facts, like the percentage of support on the topic you're discussing or information about any unbiased, academic, or law enforcement studies on the topic.
- Talk about the common things you share or what you agree about, such as how you both support children or early childhood education. Then decide to discuss more later.

### When To End An Unproductive Conversation

If the answer is yes to any question below, end the conversation and use the time for a better conversation with someone else. When tension is high, it can be impossible to change direction.

- Do you notice an aggressive tone? Is this an attack? Are they name-calling or labeling you?
- Are they using accusatory language, sexist/racist/ethnic slurs, or other offensive language?

## Sources

Burnett, James. "How to Have a Productive Conversation About Guns with Someone Who Holds Different Views." *The Trace*, December 22, 2018.

Jones, Han. "Abortion Post-Roe." *RUN NOW*, National Organization for Women. July 2023.

# Confronting Misinformation And Disinformation

## Quick Reference Sheet

**Misinformation:** Not true, wrong. Unintentional, accidental spread of inaccurate information.

**Disinformation:** Inaccurate information intended to deceive or manipulate. Spread to do serious harm.

**Propaganda:** Perhaps based in fact, but designed to provoke a specific feeling, response, or view.

**Fake News:** Misleading content distributed on the internet, and especially on social media.

### Why It's Important To Confront Misinformation And Disinformation

- Information spreads fast now and affects many different areas, including public safety and health, firearm violence of all types, and minority rights.
- Young people and elders are especially vulnerable to misinformation, propaganda, and fake news.
- Motives vary: can be political, ideological, commercial, self-promoting, or any combination.
- When people with power and influence use it, disinformation can cause distrust in public institutions, help polarize societies, and exacerbate social divisions, creating an environment where populism and authoritarianism can grow and flourish.
- Only a well-informed society is truly free.
- Tolerating biased attitudes gives permission for more actions of bias and more distortions.
- Silence is complicity. It's critical to speak up against misinformation and disinformation!

### Legitimate, Respected Sources Of Information About Firearm Violence

- Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health: Center for Gun Violence Solutions
- RAND Corporation (see Gun Policy in America and topics of gun policy and gun violence)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Firearm Violence Prevention
- Annals of Internal Medicine: Firearm-Related Injury
- Pew Research Center

### What You Can Say To Stop Misinformation And Disinformation

Respond right away. This is critical. Say what's correct and ask questions. See the examples below of types of things you can say and ask, depending on the situation. Be prepared to cite your sources, preferably academic or law enforcement sources.

- Those sources aren't trustworthy. They don't have accurate information.
- What's your source? Have multiple sources reported the information?
- Those "facts" are not accurate. Legitimate sources contradict that incorrect information.
- It seems you're basing your feelings on that information. If the data wasn't correct, would you feel the same way? Do you feel that way for any other reasons?

### What To Avoid

- Don't engage with a false premise. If you say, "I don't want blue lemons," then they exist.
- Don't answer a question if you don't have full information. Go back to your core values.
- Don't talk about details of possible laws. Always answer with clear, simple statements.

## Sources

“Advisory Opinion OC-5/85 of 13 November 1985.” Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Paragraph 70.

“Evaluating Information.” Johns Hopkins Sheridan Libraries, updated July 25, 2023.

“First Amendment and Censorship.” American Library Association, updated October 2021.  
Guterres, António, “Countering disinformation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms,” United Nations General Assembly, August 12, 2022.

Jackson, Dean, “Issue Brief: Distinguishing Disinformation From Propaganda, Misinformation, and ‘Fake News’.” International Forum for Democratic Studies, National Endowment for Democracy, October 17, 2017.

“Propaganda, Misinformation, Disinformation & Fact Finding Resources.” Wayne State University Library System, FYS1010, updated July 29, 2023.



# The Second Amendment

## Quick Reference Sheet

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed. —*Joint Resolution passed by Congress on September 25, 1789 and ratified by the states on December 15, 1791*

### History

- During the writing of the Constitution, many important constitutional thinkers opposed the idea of a permanent standing army that was regulated and directed by the Federal government.
- Colonial leaders were aware that throughout history, governments had been deposed by coups led by professional military forces that were originally established to protect the nation or state.
- Because this historical knowledge and awareness was so prevalent, the country's framers never seriously considered maintaining the Continental Army after the War of Independence [ended 1783].
- The costs necessary to raise and maintain a permanent military organization would require an immense tax burden for the people.
- The victorious colonies still had to find a way to defend against possible invasion and Indigenous protection of their land and resources in the context of the people's deep distrust of a permanent army of paid soldiers.
- They decided to establish and regulate state militias by passing and adopting the Second Amendment, and later, the Militia Acts of 1792, 1795, 1862, and 1903.

### Commentary

Until recently, there were few U.S. Supreme Court cases on the Second Amendment. The National Firearms Act of 1934 was the first Federal gun control law, and it was followed by the Gun Control Act of 1968. Only in 2010 was the Second Amendment applied to the states. We see more and more legislation and litigation, with decisions about who is too dangerous to own firearms, the extent of an "individual right" view, what licensing is constitutional, and what firearms are protected. We strongly recommend that people read widely, especially good, balanced articles from different points of view.

- "Besides the advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation, the existence of subordinate governments, to which the people are attached, and by which the militia officers are appointed, forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition, more insurmountable than any which a simple government of any form can admit of. Notwithstanding the military establishments in the several kingdoms of Europe, which are carried as far as the public resources will bear, the governments are afraid to trust the people with arms." —*James Madison, Federalist No. 46, January 29, 1788* [brainstorming for the U.S. Constitution]
- "The real purpose of the Second Amendment was to ensure that the 'state armies'—'the militia'—would be maintained for the defense of the state. ... The very language of the Second Amendment refutes any argument that it was intended to guarantee every citizen an unfettered right to any kind of weapon he or she desires." —*Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, Associated Press, December 11, 1991*
- "Like most rights, the Second Amendment right is not unlimited. It is not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose: For example, concealed weapons prohibitions have been upheld under the Amendment or state analogues. The Court's opinion should not be taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial

sale of arms.” —*United States Supreme Court, District of Columbia, ET AL. v. HELLER, No. 07–290.* [stating the Second Amendment is an individual right, not a collective right]

- “ ... therefore it may be helpful to provide a succinct summary of what we have actually held. In *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570 (2008), the Court concluded that the Second Amendment protects the right to keep a handgun in the home for self-defense. *Heller* found that the Amendment codified a preexisting right and that this right was regarded at the time of the Amendment’s adoption as rooted in “the natural right of resistance and self-preservation.” *Id.*, at 594. “[T]he inherent right of self-defense,” *Heller* explained, is “central to the Second Amendment right.” *Id.*, at 628. —*Justice Alito concurrence in New York State Rifle & Pistol Assn., Inc. v. Bruen; June 23, 2022*
- Brigham Young University's online index of Founding Era American English and Early Modern English documents shows the phrase “bear arms” was used about 1,500 times in the 17th and 18th centuries, and overwhelmingly made reference to war, soldiering, or organized armed action, which suggests a strictly military meaning of “bear arms” in the Second Amendment.—*Dennis Baron, “Scalia was wrong about the meaning of ‘bear arms’ ”; Washington Post, May 21, 2018*

### Useful Responses To Common Comments

Common Comments	Useful Responses
The Second Amendment prevents the government from regulating guns.	Though the Constitution includes the right to bear arms, controls like sensitive place restrictions (such as polling places) and public carry licenses are constitutional, while extreme permit laws like those in New York State’s Sullivan Act are not constitutional.
The country’s framers wrote the Second Amendment as an individual right to own a firearm.	The framers’ stated purpose was to defend the states and the U.S. using universal militias, not a standing army; the Militia Act of 1792 required men in the militia to have their own suitable firearm.
“Guns are normal, and normal people use guns.” — <i>David Yamane, sociologist at Wake Forest who studies gun culture</i>	7 in 10 people have fired a firearm, and the 2020 social unrest/uncertainty played into gun culture trends and more personal protection concerns. Firearm violence is committed by a small minority of people, often illegally in possession of a firearm.
Guns don’t kill, people kill people.	Firearms don’t act alone but are much more deadly than knives, bats, pipes, and other commonly used weapons, which justifies reasonable screening laws of those proven dangerous to others. (Moros & Kopel, amicus in <i>Rahimi</i> )
The best answer to a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.	“Owning a violin doesn’t make the owner a violinist; one has to learn to play the violin.” A “good guy with a gun” is simplistic. Training in lawful self-defense makes you the violinist.
Restrictions on guns primarily affect citizens who are law-abiding.	If you don’t screen for abusers, people with mental illness, and felons, they’ll have firearms too.
Ban assault weapons. Ban semi-automatic weapons.	Better definitions of “assault weapons” and their regulation are in litigation. People use semi-automatic weapons legally for sporting and hunting. The National Firearms Act mandates registration only for fully automatic weapons.
Gun ownership provides self-defense.	Police can’t always arrive quickly. Requires knowledge about when lethal force is justified and when it isn’t.

# More Resources From Impartial Perspectives

## Quick Reference Sheet

### **concealed carry permit holders**

Lott, John. "Concealed Carry Permit Holders Across the United States: 2022." Social Science Research Network, November 17, 2022. [papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4279137](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4279137)

In a 2016 study of concealed carry permit holders in 14 states, John Lott found that less than 0.1% of permit holders had permits revoked for all reasons, both violent and administrative.

### **Duke Center for Firearms Law**

A balanced and reliable resource on firearms law for academics, other professionals, and the public. Plus Repository of Historical Gun Laws and blogs by Duke University scholars. [firearmslaw.duke.edu](https://firearmslaw.duke.edu)

### **Federalist Papers**

While the Federalist Papers were first published in 1788 and the Bill of Rights was adopted three years later in 1791, the Papers did address the topics found in the Second Amendment, specifically Papers 29, 46, 69, and 74. [guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/full-text](https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/full-text)

### **gun policy and gun violence**

The RAND Corporation, an excellent resource because it thoroughly analyzes all academic data and publications on firearm studies.

Gun Policy in America	<a href="https://rand.org/research/gun-policy.html">rand.org/research/gun-policy.html</a>
Gun Policy	<a href="https://rand.org/topics/gun-policy.html">rand.org/topics/gun-policy.html</a>
Gun Violence	<a href="https://rand.org/topics/gun-violence.html">rand.org/topics/gun-violence.html</a>

### **historical social effects reflected in alcohol and other substance abuse**

"Alcohol Use Data by NM County." New Mexico Department of Health. [nmhealth.org/data/view/behavior/538](https://nmhealth.org/data/view/behavior/538)

Since 1981, New Mexico's U.S. rank is 1, 2, and 3 for total alcohol-related deaths. From 1997 to 2007, NM was #1. For years, its rate was almost twice as high as the U.S. rate. Covering much data from 2008 to 2012 about social problems, the study also addresses homicides and suicide deaths.

### **reporting on firearms and their intersection with politics**

(reprinted with permission of Stephen Gutowski) [thereload.com](https://thereload.com)

The Reload focuses on sober, serious reporting on—as well as analysis of—firearms policy and politics to accomplish those goals. No hot takes. No screaming. No manipulating. Just reporting.

The Reload aims to be the best place to find fair and discerning reporting on firearms and how they intersect with politics. By applying rigorous journalistic standards and speaking to both experts and advocates from all sides of the gun debate, we hope to produce accurate and compelling reporting. We are credentialed by the House of Representatives Press Gallery and a member of the Society of Professional Journalists.

### **types of firearms most common in U.S. firearm murders**

Gramlich, John. "What the data says about gun deaths in the U.S." Pew Research Center, April 26, 2023. [pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/26/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s](https://pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/26/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s)

## **Stories To Tell About Firearms**

Teen Suicide With A Pistol

Suicides Of Two Veterans

Questa Girl Shot By A Friend

Woman And Son Shot And Killed By Her Boyfriend

# Teen Suicide With A Pistol

## Quick Reference Sheet

**Content Warning:** The content of this story is sensitive and may upset some people. If you have thoughts of suicide, call or text **988** or text **TALK to 741741**. Chat at **988lifeline.org**.

Suicide was the main cause of firearm deaths in New Mexico from 2018 to 2021.—*Comprehensive Report on Gunshot Victims Presenting at Hospitals in New Mexico*, New Mexico Department of Health, September 29, 2023.

The content of this story is from personal conversation and communications with Kerianne Gardner and “A chill in the air: The problem of teen suicide,” by Nick Pachelli, Searchlight New Mexico, August 20, 2019.

Kerianne Gardner misses her daughter Aurra every day. Their relationship was a very close one with Kerianne often singing Aurra to sleep. Perhaps her gentle lullabies led Aurra to play the cello. Aurra also loved to draw, write poetry, and study chickadees and other birds in her backyard trees, which she climbed to watch.

Aurra was a smart, high achiever at Albuquerque’s Eldorado High School who studied hard for good grades and hoped to become Valedictorian. She had high scholastic standards and excelled, scoring in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile of the PSAT. Sadly, the school’s lack of adequate academic counseling and the failure of our mental health systems led to Aurra’s suicide.

Kerianne raised Aurra and her two younger sisters with great care for their safety and well-being. As an environmental health scientist, Kerianne did many science-based activities with her daughters and gave them opportunities to learn about many things, including camping, fishing, and hunter safety. Aurra also took firearm safety classes. Kerianne’s partner used to lock their firearms in a safe. But after a burglary and seeing a man jump their back fence, he hid a .40-caliber semiautomatic pistol in their bedroom. Kerianne and her partner told Aurra where it was and showed her how to operate it safely in case of a break-in when she was home. Aurra never indicated she would use the pistol to kill herself.

One morning in March 2017, Aurra went into her mother’s bedroom, locked the door, took the firearm, and shot herself.

Kerianne had tried hard to get academic counseling for Aurra at school and wanted her teachers to move Aurra out of a very stressful AP history class. It was also hard to find a mental health counselor who Aurra felt comfortable with, and the search was slowed by the shared custody requirement for both parents to agree on a counselor. With limited mental health options, insurance in-network and out-of-network limitations, and high demand, long waits to see a mental health practitioner are a common, on-going problem in New Mexico. When Kerianne could finally schedule an appointment, it was likely too late. That appointment took place the weekend before Aurra shot and killed herself.

To help others, Kerianne is proactive in sharing her story. Kerianne doesn’t want to restrict people’s rights and doesn’t want this to happen to anyone else’s child. She notes that more is known now about suicides of high achievers and connections to mental illnesses.

### Some Signs Aurra Needed Help

- In February, Aurra panicked about organizing her AP history midterm notes and began losing sleep.
- Aurra hid in her bedroom closet, said her teachers hated her, and feared failing tests.

The week before she ended her life, Aurra missed classes a few days, unusual behavior as she always loved school. One day she hid in the school bathroom and in the orchestra room. The other day she decided to go on a hike in open space near the school instead of going to classes.

Aurra showed more signs of panic attacks and, two days before she killed herself, suddenly stopped talking with her mother. Kerianne took Aurra to visit a family friend, and they began to talk with each other again. Things seemed better, and an afternoon meeting was planned with the school to adjust Aurra's course load and transfer her out of the AP history class causing the most stress. However, the meeting never happened because that morning Aurra killed herself.

### **Some Steps Kerianne Took To Help Aurra And System Failures**

- Kerianne researched mental health therapists and advocated for Aurra to get counseling.
- She called the high school's counseling offices requesting help with Aurra's course load stress.
- Finally, a counselor agreed to do a weekly check-in with Aurra, but that never happened.
- Kerianne noticed Aurra's quick, shallow breaths when they talked about skipping classes.
- Kerianne tried to improve Aurra's mood with fun family activities and positive texts.
- In one therapy session, Aurra may have stated a desire to stab herself.
- No professional action was taken and the therapist didn't mention this statement to Kerianne.
- Kerianne delivered a letter to the school requesting a weekly wellness check-in for Aurra.

It was the next morning before school, the day of the long-awaited afternoon meeting, when Aurra locked herself in Kerianne's bedroom and shot and killed herself with great precision.

### **What Was Reported About The Culture Of Suicide At The High School**

- "People talked or joked about killing themselves at least weekly."—Rachel Rhykerd, student
- KMS (kill myself) and "I wanna die lol"—Common memes in student texts and social media
- *Thirteen Reasons Why*—novel assigned to 9<sup>th</sup> graders about 17-year-old girl's suicide
- Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) has tried many anti-suicide trainings and programs.
- APS legislation in 2019 to fund social-emotional support and services failed.

### **Coping and Healing After Aurra's Death**

Following Aurra's death, Kerianne opted for Aurra's younger sisters to attend a charter school for grades 6 to 12. This arts-based charter school has many anti-suicide programs, including a mental health app called *Alongside* and a program called *Peer-to-Peer*. At this charter school, suicide is openly discussed with students and Aurra's sisters advocate for why students shouldn't kill themselves through art and poetry projects.

Kerianne and her children talk openly with one another and the three of them are very supportive of each other's grief process. After Aurra's death, the Children's Grief Center was very helpful in helping Aurra's sisters process their emotions. Kerianne continues to attend a *Survivors of Suicide* group organized specifically for mothers who have lost children to suicide in the Albuquerque area. Kerianne has also participated in many projects and articles with a focus on suicide prevention.

Kerianne allowed publication of this Quick Reference Sheet with the hope that she might help other families not go through what she did. Kerianne doesn't want her daughter's story to further any gun rights restriction political agenda, but would like to help lessen the stigma for families who have lost family members to suicide. She wants to help increase mental health opportunities and make seeking that help a less stigmatized process.

# Suicides Of Two Veterans

## Quick Reference Sheet

**Content Warning:** The content of this story is sensitive and may upset some people. If you have thoughts of suicide, call or text **988** or text **TALK to 741741**. Chat at **988lifeline.org**.

The stories reproduced in full below are from The End Family Fire campaign, a part of the Brady Center's (c)(3) efforts.

### **Adam Friedman • Mill Valley, California**

[endfamilyfire.org/stories/adam-friedman](https://endfamilyfire.org/stories/adam-friedman)

My grandfather was my hero. As someone who served in our military, to me, he exemplified so many values—like courage and perseverance—that I really admired. Just around eight years ago, in August, I remember my mom coming into my bedroom and telling me that my grandfather had died. He shot himself with a gun. My grandfather's death wasn't something that was inevitable. It wasn't something that had to happen. In the end, he had access to his firearms when he was in a moment of crisis and the situation ended really, really badly. It came from a place of such pain. And it only led to more pain for us.

Prior to my grandfather's suicide, I didn't really think about gun suicide at all. It wasn't something that was on my radar. I didn't understand that every single day that about 63 people do the exact same thing—and their family, their friends have the same stories that I do. I hope people can internalize this idea that just because something might not happen to them, it doesn't mean it won't happen to their neighbor, to their friend, or to another loved one in their life.

But there are small things that we can do to ensure that this doesn't happen to people in our community. When we check in with our friends and loved ones, we should be asking them if they have a gun, and if they do, is it safely stored? We can normalize the idea that gun safety is important and it's okay to talk about. Because it's these little things that start to change the statistics.

### **Chris Jachimiec • Las Vegas, Nevada**

[endfamilyfire.org/stories/chris-jachimiec](https://endfamilyfire.org/stories/chris-jachimiec)

In 2017, I was a First Sergeant in the Air Force. My brother Adam was serving in the Marine Corps at that time as a Lance Corporal. Unfortunately, that year I lost my brother to gun suicide. And in the year that followed, several other Veterans that I was friends with and served with died by gun suicide. It was a really hard time, but it got me thinking how Veterans can help one another and prevent more tragedies.

One way we can do so is by encouraging each other to store our guns securely. In my house, I store my weapons for the safety of not only myself but also my family. It is a simple step that can keep us safe and add an extra line of defense against gun suicide.

# Questa Girl Shot By A Friend

## Quick Reference Sheet

Artist and musician Amber Archuleta lost her life at age 13 on July 28, 2023, when she was shot in the face by 14-year-old Porfirio Brown at his home in Questa. Amber, her brother, and her girlfriend were listening to music at their friend Porfirio's house when Porfirio pulled out his father's pistol and fired one fatal shot, killing Amber.

Investigators found an AK-47, an assault rifle, shotguns, .22 caliber rifles, boxes of ammunition, loose shells, and two belts loaded with shells at Porfirio's home.

In testimony, Porfirio's mother and his 16-year-old sister said their family was trained in using firearms, but they couldn't say how many or what types were in their home. New Mexico State Police investigator Shane Faulkner testified that "... the AK-47 and another rifle were easily spotted through an open closet in the parents' bedroom and other rifles were visible in the living room and other bedrooms." <sup>1</sup>

Amber's aunt Glenda Archuleta-Alnachef, who considered the death preventable, said of Porfirio, "This friend had access to guns as his parents did not place their guns in a safe. ... These guns were freely accessible to their children or anyone who entered their home." <sup>2</sup>

William Brown, Porfirio's 39-year-old father, was charged under the Bennie Hargrove Gun Safety Act for negligently "... making a firearm accessible to a minor resulting in death, according to records from the Taos County Detention Center." Signed into law by the governor in March 2023, it's "... a fourth-degree felony for any gun owner whose weapon is used by a minor to significantly harm another person or themselves." <sup>3</sup>

About "4.6 million minors in the US live in homes with at least one loaded, unlocked firearm, according to Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence." <sup>4</sup>

In his grief, Amber's father Joshua Archuleta remembered, "She played the guitar and did mariachi. The day before this happened, she had sat all day in her room just playing her guitar learning this song by Justin Bieber. By the end of the day, she had it all down." <sup>5</sup>

Amber's family and friends are working to help stop violence by firearms. Her aunt said of Amber, "She was loved by so many and her death that could have been prevented is a tragedy not only to our family but to her community and humanity." <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1, 5, 6</sup> Todd, Marianne. "Witnesses describe Questa girl's death as result of playing with gun." Santa Fe New Mexican, August 23, 2023.

<sup>2, 3</sup> Spargo, Chris. "Cops Say Boy, 14, Killed His Best Friend's Sister, 13, Using His Dad's Gun. Now Both Are Charged With Crimes." Inside Edition, July 31, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Chasan, Aliza. "14-year-old boy, dad arrested after teen allegedly used father's gun to kill teenage girl in New Mexico." CBS News, July 30, 2023.



# Woman And Son Shot And Killed By Her Boyfriend

## Quick Reference Sheet

From two articles in the Santa Fe New Mexican by Nicholas Gilmore: “Sheriff’s office seeks suspect in double homicide near West Alameda,” November 14, 2023 and “Police arrest suspect in Santa Fe killing of mother and her son,” November 16, 2023.

On October 28, 2023, 46-year-old Carmen Navarrete of Santa Fe, New Mexico, and her boyfriend Jose Antonio “Adrian” Roman, 44, got into an argument at his home in Albuquerque.

On November 8, she filed for a protective order against him and stated that he had choked [strangled] her, threatened her with a knife, beat her with a rifle, and threatened to kill her if she went to the police.

The next day, a temporary no-contact order was issued by the First Judicial District Court with a hearing on November 29. The hearing was scheduled to make a determination on the approval of a longer-term protection order.

At 9:04 p.m. on November 13, Roman’s son alerted Albuquerque police that an hour earlier his father was intoxicated, had taken a shotgun, and might be on his way to harm Navarrete. At 9:18 p.m. a Santa Fe County deputy was dispatched to Navarrete’s home for a welfare check. At 9:19 p.m. emergency dispatchers in Santa Fe received an emergency call from one of her children.

At 9:22 p.m. the deputy arrived just as Roman was attempting to drive away from the scene. He abandoned his truck and escaped on foot.

Inside Navarrete’s home, Carmen and her 15-year-old son Axel Gonzales were found dead from gunshot wounds. Her terrified adult and other minor children and an infant grandchild were barricaded in other rooms of the house.

Roman was arrested on Wednesday, November 15, 2023. He was charged with two counts of first-degree murder and a string of violent felonies.

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**“An abusive partner’s access to a firearm is a serious threat to victims of domestic violence, making it five times more likely that a woman will be killed.”**

**“Every year, more than 600 American women are shot to death by intimate partners—roughly one every 14 hours.”**

Quotations from [giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/who-can-have-a-gun/domestic-violence-firearms](https://www.giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/who-can-have-a-gun/domestic-violence-firearms), accessed December 2023.

# **Data About Firearms**

New Mexico Department Of Health Findings On Firearm Violence

U.S. Policy Common Ground And School Concerns

# NM Department Of Health Findings On Firearm Violence

## Quick Reference Sheet

All data cited here are from the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) report *Comprehensive Report on Gunshot Victims Presenting at Hospitals in New Mexico*, September 29, 2023, which covers 2019 through 2023.

### NM Firearm-Related Deaths: Third Highest in U.S. in 2021

**Deaths.** In 2021, firearm-related deaths per person in NM increased to third highest in the U.S. In 1999, NM ranked as seventh highest in the U.S.

- **Suicide.** Suicide is the main cause of firearm-related death in NM. In 2020, an estimated 282 people committed suicide with a firearm.
- **Homicide.** The rate of homicide with a firearm in NM increased 70% from 2018 to 2021. Homicide with a firearm is a significant cause for the increase in these deaths. An estimated 142 people were killed with a firearm in 2020.

### NM Firearm Injuries and Deaths: High Cost to Public

**Annual cost.** The overall cost of firearm injuries and deaths for 2021 is estimated at \$2,818 per person, or a total of \$6 billion.

**Medicaid.** Medical costs excessively burden NM's Medicaid healthcare responsibilities for residents with the lowest income.

- **From January 2023 to September 2023.** The Medicaid expenditures on firearm injuries in NM totaled \$5.6 million.
- **Claims in 2022.** Medicaid claims for firearm injuries in NM were \$12 million.
- **Primary payer in 2022.** For 76% of gunshot-injury hospitalizations, the primary payer was Medicaid.

### More NM Children in Emergency Rooms Due to Firearms

- **From 2018 to 2022.** Firearm-related emergency room visits for children up to age 17 increased by 73%, from 90 visits in 2018 to 156 visits in 2022. Firearm-related visits for all age groups increased by 35%, from 968 visits in 2018 to 1306 visits in 2022.
- **From July 2022 to June 2023.** Residents aged 18 to 29, only 16% of the population, made 36% of firearm injury emergency visits.
- **From July 2022 to June 2023.** Residents aged 30 to 49, only 25% of the population, made 41% of firearm injury emergency room visits.

### American Indians, Hispanics, Blacks: More Firearm-Related Deaths

- **Increases between 2017 and 2021.** A 91% increase in firearm-related death rates for Non-Hispanic American Indians, a 78% increase for Hispanics, and a 72% increase for Non-Hispanic Blacks. This is compared with a 12% increase for Non-Hispanic Whites.

- **Firearm-related death rates per 100,000 people in 2021.** The following table shows the death rates and the number of deaths for the four different populations.

Population	Death Rate Per 100,000 People In Each Population	# of Deaths
Non-Hispanic Blacks	45.2	19
Hispanics	27.8	295
Non-Hispanic Whites	25.1	240
Non-Hispanic American Indians	20.8	41

- **Why firearm-related death rates are higher for American Indians, Hispanics, Blacks.** The rates correlate to historical discrimination, not investing in these communities, and other social inequities. Housing, education, economic growth, and opportunities have major impacts on their death rates. The stress and trauma from racism, and generational trauma, result in worse health outcomes and lower life expectancies.  
**Important:** In successfully addressing and preventing firearm-related incidents, it's important to consider all risk factors.
- **Missing data.** This report does not include data from Veteran's Administration hospitals and from Indian Health Services, resulting in undercounts for those two populations.

### Alcohol and Other Substance Dependence Increase Firearm-Related Deaths

The following table shows the percent increase in firearm-related deaths by suicide and homicide when dependence on alcohol and other substances is a factor.

Type of Death	Years	Alcohol and Other Substances	% Increase in Dependence
Suicide	2018 to 2020	Alcohol	85%
		Other Substances	120%
Homicide	2019 to 2020	Alcohol	89%
		Other substances	475%

### Securely Storing Firearms Reduces Firearm-Related Injury and Death

Not storing firearms securely at home is a major risk of injury or death to children up to age 18. Safe, secure storage is critical to the lives of our youth. This NMDOH report includes the following 2022 data from the national Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and the 2023 New Mexico Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (NM-YRRS).

BRFSS: Firearms in Households	BRFSS: Households w/ Firearm	NM-YRRS: High School Students
37% had firearm	41% had loaded firearm	6% carried a gun in the last year, (not to hunt or target shoot)
15% had loaded firearm	21% had loaded and unlocked firearm **	
8% had loaded and unlocked firearm		44% lived in a home with a gun

\*\* 23% of this group also had a child under 18.

# U.S. Policy Common Ground And School Concerns

## Quick Reference Sheet

From *National Survey of Gun Policy*, Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, 2023.  
**Areas of Common Ground**

Policy	% Support
Prohibit gun access for people under temporary domestic violence protective orders (DVPOs)	79.2% of gun owners 81.7% of non-gun owners
Require a license before buying a gun	76.2% of both gun and non-gun owners
Require gun owners to lock guns when not in use	58.0% of gun owners 78.9% of non-gun owners
Fund programs to reduce violence using conflict mediation and other social supports	61.8% of gun owners 54.4% of Republicans

### Statistical Analysis-Based Results of Specific Policies

Policy	% Reductions
DVPO requiring firearm removal	12% less intimate partner homicide
States with strong regulations for handgun purchase	56% less fatal mass shootings 67% less mass shooting victims
Oakland, CA community violence intervention program*	32% less city shootings through 2017

\* Further research at [oaklandca.gov](http://oaklandca.gov) shows this Operation Ceasefire program decreased shootings (fatal and non-fatal) by 52% from 2011 to 2017. The Johns Hopkins 32% was for homicides from 2011 to 2017.

From *Key facts about Americans and guns*, Katherine Schaeffer, Pew Research Center, Sept 13, 2023.  
**Areas of Common Ground**

Policy	% Support
Raising the minimum age to 21 years old to buy guns	69% Republicans • 60% Rep gun owners 90% Democrats • 84% Dem gun owners
Opposed to carrying concealed firearms without a permit	60% of Republicans 91% of Democrats
Not allowing people with mental illness to buy guns	87% gun owners • 89% non-gun owners 88% Republicans • 89% Democrats

### More Americans From 2018 To 2023 Think Gun Violence Is Major Problem

- Democrats: up from 72% to 81%
- All Americans: up from 53% to 60%
- Republicans: up from 29% to 38%

### Parent's Concerns for K-12 and Students Under 18

Concern About Possible Shootings At Child's School	% of Parents
Very or extremely worried	32%
Somewhat worried	37%
Want better mental health screening/treatment for prevention	63%

# **Working Together**

to create a safer society today  
and for future generations