A group of colleagues and I visited two gun stores earlier this year as part of an informational effort led by a nonpartisan community group in Chicago, IL, called United Power for Action and Justice. We were there to learn from gun shop owners about gun safety devices as well as to learn how gun owners teach gun safety to their children and to visitors in their homes.

I had never been in a gun store or had ever held a real firearm, so I was a bit overwhelmed. My childhood experience was with toy guns and BB guns, so I never received any formal education about how to safely handle guns of any kind. My experiences as a clinical provider, however, have unfortunately been in caring for children injured with gunshot wounds and fatal injuries in the intensive care unit, which is a consequence of the proliferation of the availability of guns in the United States. So, one may understand why my perspective on firearms is slanted.

The first salesperson, who was in his 20s, answered our questions carefully and thoughtfully. He had learned about guns while in the military. We learned that every firearm is sold with a cable lock by law in the state of Illinois. Those laws vary by state. The shop also had safe deposit boxes available for purchase for gun storage. When we asked about firearm safety education for children, he said there were several websites that would provide that kind of information; he did highlight the general approaches to teaching children about gun safety as outlined on some of those websites. Three website examples are the National Rifle Association’s Eddie Eagle GunSafe program, Project Child Safe by the National Shooting Association, and Handguns in the House by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

We learned that some guns have safety protections installed on the gun itself. We asked the salesperson “when a buyer comes into the shop and wants to buy a gun, do you also include child safety education when you teach them about the gun?” The answer was that they do give general gun safety tips and provide information on how to safely store the gun if customers ask.

Our experience in the first shop helped us prepare better for when we arrived at the second shop. The second salesperson was also knowledgeable having worked in gun shops for more than 17 years. He had been shooting guns for 30 years and began teaching his daughter, who is now age 30 years, about guns and gun safety since she was age 2 or 3 years. Some people view shooting guns as a sport and enjoy sharing a common interest among family, friends, and peers. The second store was larger than the first, and it included a shooting range in an adjoining room; we could hear the activity in the range and eventually saw several young adults shooting. The salesperson at the second shop talked about the biometric fingerprint technology, which is a mechanism available to assist in securing guns safely.

According to the Youth Handgun Safety Act Notice, the misuse of handguns is a leading contributor to juvenile violence and fatalities, and safely storing and securing firearms away from children will help prevent the unlawful possession of handguns by juveniles, stop accidents, and save lives.

According to both people we talked to at the gun stores, when a gun is purchased, there is no basic safety course required. Also, they do not ask if there are children in the home and discuss gun safety at the point of purchase unless the customer inquires. If the purchaser asks, as we did, the salespeople...
will review child gun safety as they both did with us. As stated above, each gun is required to be sold with a cable safety lock in the state of Illinois, but when we asked the salespeople if they felt that gun owners would actually use them, they both said no.

In one of *Pediatric Annals*’ Healthy Baby/Healthy Child columns, Dr. Dowd indicates that there is nearly one firearm for each person in America—that approximately one-half of all US homes contain at least one gun, including those with children. The concern is that there is a high probability that a child will have contact with a gun sometime during their childhood or adolescence. The AAP has made anticipatory guidelines for gun safety as well as advocating for better regulation of the use and sale of firearms. Dr. Dowd also commented on the efficacy of the approach of teaching children not to touch guns, which we discussed with the salespeople in the gun shops, noting that the literature states that this approach is not effective. The two groups who are at greatest risk for harm by a gun are young children and adolescents.

**REFERENCES**