

Firearms Safety

what to do when you find a gun

By JT (Jerry) Fest

I have never faced an incident in any program I ever ran where a firearm was discharged or used in a threatening manner. That does not mean that I never came across a firearm. Agencies working with young people -- particularly runaway and street-dependent youth -- run the risk of encountering firearms, and I have personally received firearms (ranging from revolvers to semi-automatics to shotguns) either found in property or lockers or voluntarily turned in by young people and facilitated moving these weapons off of the street and into the hands of the police. That being the case, either I am some kind of firearm magnet or agencies around the country are also encountering firearms.

Yet I can't remember the last time I visited an agency that had a written policy concerning firearms that went further than *No Guns Allowed*. That's a good start, but what if someone turns in a firearm? What is staff expected to do? Of even greater and more immediate concern, how is the weapon to be handled to ensure the safety of youth, staff, and the community?

Many people working in youth agencies have little knowledge of or experience with firearms, and I have never seen a youth agency that requires a firearm safety course as part of staff training. The end result is that we have a profession where there is a high likelihood of encountering firearms, and staff who do not have the proper training, knowledge, or policies to safely deal with them.

I strongly recommend that every youth agency develop policies for staff to follow if a firearm enters the facility. It is not possible to develop a blanket policy for agencies to adopt, as local resources and unique aspects of individual programs have to be considered. What I can do, however, is provide you with procedures for handling firearms safely. The policy below, developed for my own programs, **should not be considered a substitute for firearms safety training**. I provide it simply as an incentive for you to begin development of your own procedures.

NOTE: Implementation of the following policy requires that agencies have a supply of nylon cable ties accessible to staff. This policy is for information only. The author accepts no responsibility for injury or any consequences resulting from implementation of this policy. This policy should be reviewed by and implemented under the supervision of a qualified firearms instructor and all persons who may be expected to handle firearms should be provided with appropriate training.

What is the Proper Procedure for Handling Firearms?

- ° Always handle a firearm as if it is **loaded and ready to fire**, EVEN IF YOU KNOW FOR A FACT THAT IT IS NOT.
- ° Always point a firearm at the floor*. Bullets can travel through walls, so if you are pointing it horizontally or upwards you may be pointing it at a human being on the other side of a wall or ceiling. Always assume that if you are pointing a firearm at something you are going to put a bullet into it, so never point a firearm at anything that you do not *intend to kill*.
- * The procedure of pointing a firearm at the floor assumes that there is nothing *under* the floor, such as a basement or lower level, where people may be. **A firearm should always be pointed in the direction of least probability that a human being may be hit.**
- ° Never touch the trigger. With one exception, described below in the unloading procedure, there is no reason to touch the trigger except to fire the weapon. Since you have no reason to fire the weapon you have no reason to touch the trigger.

What is the Proper Procedure for Unloading Firearms?

- Do not unload in public areas.
- Follow all handling procedures. In addition to pointing the firearm at the floor, unload with the barrel resting against 3 or more *thick* phone books. In the case of accidental discharge the phonebooks should be able to stop most bullets, but don't count on it.
- Determine whether the firearm is a PISTOL or a REVOLVER

NOTE: It is not possible to describe how to unload all forms of Pellet and BB-type weapons, or long guns such as rifles and shotguns. If you understand the basics a relatively simple examination should reveal how to unload the weapon in most cases. If not, follow all safe firearm handling procedures and store as described in this policy.



PISTOLS

The picture above is an example of a pistol; AKA semi-automatic. Pistols come in many shapes and sizes and are identifiable by a slide mechanism over the barrel, and a magazine (or clip) that contains the bullets generally located in the handle.



REVOLVERS

The picture above is an example of a revolver. Revolvers come in many shapes and sizes and are identifiable by a revolving cylinder behind the barrel that contains the bullets.

- **If the gun is a PISTOL:**
 1. Locate the textured magazine release button, generally on the left side of the grip.
 2. Press the button to release the magazine.
 3. Remove the magazine from the pistol.
 4. Work the slide by gripping the handle of the pistol in one hand (do not touch the trigger) and pulling back with your other hand. The slide may be very hard to pull but will move quickly once you apply enough pressure. If the slide won't move there may be a 'safety' function. Locate the safety button, usually on the left side of the slide, and click it off. Most weapons show a red dot when the safety is off.
 5. If a bullet is in the pistol, working the slide will eject it*.
 6. Visually inspect the chamber to ensure that it is empty.
 7. Disable the pistol by following the disabling firearms procedure.
 8. Recover any ejected bullets and store them, the magazine, and the weapon according to the firearms storage procedures.

* Some pistols, particularly the smaller ones, have 'tip up' barrels. With these types of pistols, working the slide will not eject the bullet. You will be able to see a loaded bullet when the slide is open. If this is the case:

1. *Gently* let the slide return to its unopened position.
2. Locate the textured barrel release button, generally on the left side below the slide near the rear of the barrel.
3. Press the button to 'tip up' the barrel.
4. Remove the bullet from the pistol.

Please note also that 'buttons' may sometimes be 'levers' or 'push slides.'

° **If the gun is a REVOLVER:**

Determine if the revolver is **COCKED** by inspecting the hammer, or the flared metal on the upper rear of the revolver that drops to fire the weapon.

- If the revolver is **NOT cocked** (the hammer is resting fully forward):
 1. Locate the textured cylinder release button, generally on the left side near the cylinder.
 2. Press the button and swing the cylinder out from the revolver, generally to the left*.
 3. Remove the bullets from the cylinder either by pressing the bullet-release button in front of the cylinder, or tilting the cylinder backwards and letting them fall into your hand.
 4. Visually inspect the cylinder to ensure that it is empty.
 5. Disable the revolver by following the disabling firearms procedure.
 6. Store the bullets and gun according to the firearms storage procedures.

* Some revolvers, particularly older ones, have 'breakaway' barrels. With these types of revolvers the barrel 'breaks' forward before the cylinder is released.

- If the revolver **IS cocked** (the hammer is pulled back toward the rear of the firearm, exposing the pointed firing pin on the hammer):

NOTE: The following procedure should not be attempted by anyone who has not trained on an unloaded weapon. Since you do not want to store a cocked and loaded revolver in your agency, priority should be given to providing staff with appropriate training.

1. **BE AWARE THAT A COCKED REVOLVER IS THE MOST DANGEROUS WEAPON TO HANDLE AND UNLOAD.** It is ready to fire with the trigger requiring the least pressure to release the hammer. The cylinder can *not* be opened until the hammer is released, and the hammer can *not* be released until the trigger is pulled. UNLOADING A COCKED REVOLVER IS THE **ONLY** REASON TO EVER TOUCH A TRIGGER.
2. Place a nylon cable tie under the firing pin between the hammer and the frame of the revolver. The purpose of this is to ensure that the hammer does not fall fully forward should you release it too quickly.
3. With a good grip on the handle, place your thumb firmly on the hammer and apply pressure to keep it cocked *back*. MAKE SURE THE BARREL IS POINTED SAFELY AWAY FROM ANY POSSIBILITY OF HITTING SOMEONE IN CASE OF ACCIDENTAL DISCHARGE. If possible, rest the barrel against 3 or more thick phonebooks.
4. Gently place your finger on the trigger and pull back slowly until the hammer is able to move forward. Using your thumb to allow *slow* movement, *gently* let the hammer move forward until the cable tie prevents it from going further.
5. At this point you should be able to release the trigger and *slowly* pull out the cable tie, with your thumb allowing the hammer to *SLOWLY* and *GENTLY* rest fully forward.
6. Follow the procedure for unloading a revolver that is not cocked.

What is the Proper Procedure for Disabling Guns?

° PISTOLS:

- After unloading, pull back the slide to open the chamber.
- Using one or more nylon cable ties, loop them through the barrel or down through the empty handle. This will prevent the slide from closing, disabling the pistol.

° REVOLVERS:

- After unloading, keep the cylinder open away from the revolver frame.
- Using one or more nylon cable ties, loop them through the frame and the cylinder, and/or one of the cylinder chambers. This will prevent the cylinder from closing, disabling the revolver.

What is the Proper Procedure for Storing Guns?

- Firearms are only stored TEMPORARILY. Follow agency guidelines to get the weapon into the hands of the police as quickly as possible.
- Firearms should be stored UNLOADED and DISABLED. If there is no properly trained staff on duty who feels comfortable doing this, police should be called and informed that there is a LOADED firearm in the facility.
- Firearms should NEVER be stored in public areas. Remove firearms from public areas IMMEDIATELY when you receive them. They should be locked in a secure location until arrangements are made to get them to police.
- Firearms should NEVER be stored *with* bullets (unless they have not been unloaded and disabled per above). Bullets and magazines should be stored in a secure location *separate* from where the firearm is stored. Even if only storing for a short time, keep bullets and firearms secured in two *separate* locations.

A note concerning bullets: They are unlikely to be lethal if they are outside the chamber of a firearm. Bullets require a confined chamber to propel at harmful velocities. Outside of a chamber you are far more likely to be injured by a casing flying around like shrapnel than you are by a bullet.

You should always handle bullets with caution and respect, but it is a rare occurrence for them to go off, and they would probably not 'shoot' anyway. The casing should split before the bullet is propelled. You may be injured, but it is very unlikely that you or anyone else will be killed.