

Keeping School Communities Safe: Preventing Firearm and Weapon-Related Harm

Purpose

This guidance is intended to support Oregon school districts, families, caregivers, and communities in taking practical steps to prevent firearm and weapon-related harm and keep children and youth safe.

It provides information on safely storing firearms and other weapons, talking with children and youth about weapon safety, recognizing and reporting safety concerns, and accessing available prevention resources. It also identifies actions schools and families can take together to reduce risks and strengthen school and community safety.

The guidance builds on Oregon's existing school safety and prevention systems and encourages shared responsibility for creating safe and supportive environments for our school communities.

Overview

Every child deserves to be safe at home, at school, and in their community. While no single action can prevent every incident, there are meaningful steps we can take to reduce risks. These include securely storing firearms and other weapons, talking with children about safety, recognizing and reporting concerns, and ensuring students know where to turn for help.

Keeping students safe is a shared responsibility. Prevention starts at home, continues in our schools, and is strengthened by our communities. Safe communities help create safe schools, and safe schools help build a safer society.

Schools play an important role in providing safe and supportive learning environments, but they cannot do this work alone. Families, caregivers, educators, students, and community partners each contribute to preventing harm.

This guidance focuses on three prevention priorities:

- 1. Secure firearms and other weapons to prevent unauthorized access.**
- 2. Talk with children and youth about weapon safety and how to respond to potentially dangerous situations.**
- 3. Recognize and report safety concerns so responsible adults can take appropriate action.**

These actions complement Oregon's broader school safety framework, including behavioral safety assessment, suicide prevention, school emergency preparedness, and regional prevention supports.

Disclaimer: This guidance is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Use of this document is not required, and nothing included in this document creates additional requirements for school districts or families. Existing obligations under applicable state and federal laws remain in effect. School districts are encouraged to consult their legal counsel to ensure compliance with applicable state and federal laws, district policies, and safety procedures.

Core Prevention Priorities

The following priorities are intended to guide prevention efforts at home, at school, and throughout the community. They identify actions individuals and organizations can take to reduce risks while recognizing that adults have primary responsibility for securing weapons and protecting children.

1. Safe Storage: Preventing Unauthorized Access to Firearms and Other Weapons

Prevention starts with keeping firearms and other weapons out of the hands of children and unauthorized individuals.

Children and youth may encounter firearms or other weapons at home, while visiting friends or relatives, or in other community settings. Adults can reduce the risk of injury by ensuring that firearms and other dangerous weapons are securely stored and inaccessible to children.

Simply hiding a firearm, placing it on a high shelf, or telling children not to touch it does not provide adequate protection. Secure firearm storage helps reduce the risk of unintentional injury, unauthorized access, and firearm-related suicide. Keeping firearms unloaded and locked, with ammunition secured separately, is an important prevention practice. Families can take these steps whether or not they believe a child is at risk, because access to an unsecured firearm can create danger in unexpected circumstances.

What families and caregivers can do:

- Store firearms unloaded in a locked safe or lockbox, with ammunition locked separately.
- Ensure children and unauthorized individuals cannot access keys, combinations, or other ways of opening firearm storage.
- Secure firearms whenever they are not under the control of an authorized person.
- Store other dangerous weapons, including knives and sharp objects, securely and in ways appropriate to children's ages and abilities.
- Ask about the presence and secure storage of firearms before children visit another home.
- Regularly review firearm and weapon storage practices with household members.

What this can look like:

Before my child visits your home, I wanted to ask about safety. If there are firearms in the home, are they unloaded and securely locked away? We want to make sure our children are safe wherever they spend time at your home.

What Oregon law says:

[Oregon Revised Statute \(ORS\) 166.395](#) generally requires firearm owners and possessors to secure firearms when they are not carried by or under the control of an authorized person. The law recognizes specified methods of securing firearms, including engaged trigger or

cable locks, locked containers, and gun rooms, and provides certain exceptions.

[ORS 166.397](#) requires reporting lost or stolen firearms to law enforcement within the timeframes established by law, generally no later than 72 hours after the loss or theft was known or reasonably should have been known.

The recommendation to store firearms unloaded, with ammunition kept separately, is a prevention best practice and distinct from the minimum requirements of Oregon's firearm storage law.

Additional Resources

- [Oregon Health Authority: Firearm Safety](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Preventing Firearm Injury and Death](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics: Guns in the Home, How to Keep Kids Safe](#)

2. Talking with Children and Youth About Weapon Safety

Children and youth need clear, age-appropriate information about firearms and other weapons, including what to do if they encounter one or become aware of an unsafe situation.

Conversations about weapon safety should be calm, direct, and reassuring. The goal is not to frighten children but to help them recognize danger, make safe choices, and know when and how to ask for help. Children may encounter information about weapons through news coverage, social media, video games, friends, or conversations with others. Families can use these moments to reinforce basic safety expectations.

What families and caregivers can do:

- Talk with children about the dangers of firearms and other weapons in ways appropriate to their age and development.
- Explain that real firearms and other dangerous weapons are not toys and can cause serious injury or death.
- Teach children never to touch, pick up, move, or handle an unfamiliar firearm or weapon.
- Encourage children to move away from dangerous situations and tell a trusted adult immediately.
- Explain that threats involving weapons should always be shared with a trusted adult, even when someone describes them as a joke.
- Remind children that they should not keep secrets involving weapons, threats, or plans to hurt someone.
- Invite questions, listen carefully, and reassure children that adults are responsible for helping keep them safe.

What this can look like:

For younger children: If you ever see a gun or another dangerous weapon, don't touch it. Move away and tell a trusted adult right away. Even if you think it might be a toy, don't pick it up.

For older children and teens: If someone shows you a weapon, talks about bringing one to school, or threatens to hurt someone, take it seriously. Don't try to handle the situation yourself. Get somewhere safe and tell a trusted adult. Speaking up can help protect you and others.

If a child encounters a firearm or another dangerous weapon, reinforce three actions:

1. **Don't touch it:** Never pick up, handle, or attempt to move the weapon.
2. **Move away:** Leave the area if it is safe to do so. Do not approach or confront someone holding a weapon.
3. **Tell a trusted adult immediately:** Notify a parent, teacher, school employee, or another trusted adult. If there is immediate danger, call 911 when safe to do so.

Children should understand that reporting a weapon or threat is about protecting people, not getting someone in trouble.

Important reminder: Teaching children about weapon safety does not replace the responsibility of adults to secure firearms and other weapons.

Additional Resources:

- [American Academy of Pediatrics: Guns in the Home, How to Keep Kids Safe](#)
- [CDC: Preventing Firearm Injury and Death](#)

3. Recognizing and Reporting Safety Concerns

Speaking up about safety concerns can help prevent harm and connect individuals with appropriate support.

Students, families, and school staff may become aware of threats, concerning statements, or potentially unsafe situations. Reporting these concerns promptly allows trained adults to assess the information, determine the level of risk, and respond appropriately.

Not every concerning statement or behavior means someone intends to cause harm. Concerns should be evaluated based on the circumstances, without making assumptions about a student's identity, disability, or mental health.

What families and caregivers can do:

- Report threats involving firearms or other weapons, whether made in person, through

text messages, or online.

- Tell a trusted adult if someone talks about bringing a weapon to school or harming themselves or others.
- Take concerning statements seriously, even when someone claims they are joking.
- Avoid confronting someone with a weapon or attempting to investigate a threat independently.
- Report concerns through school staff, established district reporting procedures, or [SafeOregon](#).
- Call 911 when there is an immediate threat to safety.

What this can look like:

If you hear someone threatening to hurt another person or talking about bringing a weapon to school, please tell a trusted adult right away. You do not have to decide whether the threat is real. Adults can help determine what needs to happen next.

SafeOregon Tip Line

SafeOregon is a statewide school safety reporting system that allows students, families, school staff, and community members to report threats or potential threats to student safety.

Reports can be submitted anonymously. Trained staff receive reports 24 hours a day, every day of the year, and forward information to designated school contacts and, when appropriate, law enforcement.

SafeOregon is not a replacement for emergency services or a crisis line.

- **When in Immediate Danger:** Call 911.
- **Mental Health or Suicide Crisis:** Call or text 988.

Additional Resources:

- [SafeOregon Tip Line](#)
- [ODE: SafeOregon Information](#)
- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)

Putting Prevention into Practice

The following guidance is intended to help schools, families, and community partners translate prevention priorities into practical actions. Districts should adapt these recommendations to their local circumstances, available resources, existing policies, and established safety procedures.

1. School District Communication and Family Engagement

Schools have an important role in ensuring families have access to clear, consistent, and practical safety information.

What school districts can do:

- Share information about safe firearms and weapon storage with families.
- Provide age-appropriate resources to help caregivers talk with children about weapon safety.
- Remind families how to report safety concerns, including through SafeOregon.
- Make safety information accessible in the languages commonly spoken by families.

What this can look like

Keeping students safe requires all of us working together. We encourage families to review how firearms and other weapons are stored, talk with children about what to do if they encounter a weapon or hear a threat, and report safety concerns promptly. These everyday actions can help reduce risks and protect our school community.

2. Student Safety, Reporting, and Response

Districts should use existing school safety procedures to respond to threats or concerns involving firearms and other weapons.

What school districts can do:

- Ensure students, families, and staff understand how to report safety concerns.
- Review established procedures for receiving and responding to threats.
- Follow applicable reporting requirements when firearms or other weapons are involved.
- Use existing behavioral safety assessment processes to evaluate concerning behaviors and identify appropriate interventions.
- Coordinate with law enforcement and emergency responders when necessary.
- Ensure responses are appropriate to the circumstances and do not rely on stereotypes or assumptions about students.

What this can look like

Students and families who become aware of a threat involving a weapon should immediately notify school staff or report the concern through SafeOregon. School personnel will follow established safety procedures and coordinate with appropriate partners to assess and respond.

3. Supporting Children and Youth After Frightening Events

News of violence or other frightening events can affect children differently. Some may ask questions, express fear, or worry about whether something similar could happen at their school.

Adults can help children feel supported by listening, responding calmly, and providing reassurance without making promises that cannot be guaranteed.

What school districts can do:

- Ask children what they have heard and what questions they have.
- Listen to their concerns without dismissing their feelings.
- Provide factual, age-appropriate information without unnecessary graphic details.
- Limit repeated exposure to distressing news or social media coverage.
- Maintain familiar routines and identify trusted adults who can help.
- Connect children with school counselors or other mental health supports when needed.

What this can look like

I know hearing about something frightening can make you worry. It's okay to feel upset or have questions. Adults at home and school, work together to help keep you safe. If something worries you, you can always talk with me or another trusted adult.

4. Coordination with Oregon's School Safety and Prevention System

What school districts can do:

- Connect with the regional School Safety and Prevention Specialist serving the district through the education service district.
- Use established behavioral safety assessment processes when appropriate.
- Review district emergency operations plans and relevant staff training.
- Coordinate with ODE's School Safety and Emergency Management program.
- Identify opportunities to connect families with community-based prevention and support resources.

What this can look like

District leaders will work with regional school safety partners to review prevention practices, strengthen reporting procedures, and ensure staff and families understand the resources available to support student safety.

Quick-Start Checklist for Districts

Districts can use the checklist below to reinforce firearm and weapon-related harm prevention through existing school safety and family engagement efforts.

1. Communication and Family Engagement

- ☐ Share firearm and weapon safe-storage information with families.
- ☐ Provide age-appropriate resources for talking with children and youth about weapon safety.
- ☐ Make information accessible to multilingual families.
- ☐ Include safety prevention reminders in regular family communications.

2. Reporting and Prevention

- ☐ Remind students, staff, and families how to report safety concerns.
- ☐ Promote SafeOregon and clarify when to call 911.
- ☐ Review existing procedures for responding to threats or concerns involving weapons.
- ☐ Ensure staff understands applicable reporting responsibilities.

3. School and Community Coordination

- ☐ Identify the regional School Safety and Prevention Specialist.
- ☐ Review existing behavioral safety assessment procedures.
- ☐ Confirm relevant emergency response procedures and staff roles.
- ☐ Coordinate with community partners and emergency responders as appropriate.

4. Student and Family Support

- ☐ Identify counseling and mental health resources for students and families.
- ☐ Reinforce trusted adult relationships and help-seeking behaviors.
- ☐ Provide additional support following frightening or traumatic events.
- ☐ Revisit prevention messaging throughout the school year.

Relevant Oregon Laws and Requirements

The following Oregon laws are relevant to firearm and weapon safety, school reporting responsibilities, and statewide prevention systems. These summaries are informational and should not be used in place of the full statutory text.

Oregon Law	General Description
ORS 166.395	Establishes requirements for securing firearms and addresses penalties and potential civil liability.
ORS 166.397	Establishes requirements for reporting lost or stolen firearms.
ORS 166.250	Addresses unlawful possession of firearms, including possession by minors, subject to statutory exceptions.
ORS 166.370	Addresses possession of firearms and dangerous weapons in public buildings, including schools, subject to applicable exceptions.
ORS 166.400	Establishes locking requirements for certain firearm transfers.
ORS 166.403	Addresses requirements relating to supervision when transferring firearms to minors.
ORS 166.525 to 166.543	Establishes Oregon's Extreme Risk Protection Order process for restricting access to deadly weapons when statutory criteria are met.
ORS 339.250	Addresses district student conduct and discipline policies, including provisions involving firearms.
ORS 339.315	Establishes reporting obligations for specified unlawful firearm or destructive-device possession involving schools.
ORS 339.327	Addresses notification requirements in specified circumstances involving threats or threatening lists.
ORS 339.329	Establishes Oregon's statewide school safety tip line.
ORS 339.341	Establishes Oregon's Statewide School Safety and Prevention System.
ORS 339.343	Addresses district student suicide prevention plans.
ORS 339.408	Addresses emergency drills and instruction in schools.