

Episode 49: Guns at Home During Covid-19



National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255.

Music provided by: David "Drumcrazie" Curby

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*****Brady legal music*****

JJ

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*****Brady musical introduction*****

JJ

Hey everybody, welcome to a very special minisode. So, yeah, COVID-19. That's a thing, that's a thing that's happening and as a result we're all ideally practicing our social distancing if we can. We're also seeing a lot of stories in the news because unfortunately, gun violence doesn't stop, it

continues. And so over the next week or so, hopefully not longer, but honestly at this point who knows? “Red, Blue and Brady” is going to be bringing you little minisodes in addition to our regular content dealing with this intersection of COVID-19, gun violence and gun violence prevention.

To kick things off, I am talking to Ky Hunter, who fans of the podcast will have heard before, but also Leslie LaRue, who's a fantastic mom, a PTA member and a gun owner. And we're gonna be talking about how to normalize conversations about guns in the home about how to end family fire in the time of social distancing in a normal panic-free way. Essentially, we're having a conversation about how to have a conversation. So on that note, can you two ladies introduce yourselves?

Leslie LaRue

I'm Leslie LaRue and I am a mom here in Austin, Texas. I have two kids, a second grader who's eight and a kindergartner who's five and 1/2 and I work part-time and am a full-time mom.

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter

And I'm Ky Hunter, Vice President of programs at Brady and a previous podcast guest co-host extraordinaire and more. Full disclosure, Leslie is my sister so I am super excited to be on this today because in the time of social distancing, this is how we could get together.

Leslie LaRue

Absolutely! Thank God for technology, right?

JJ

Well, and I've heard so much about your kids too through Ky.

Leslie LaRue

Aw that makes me happy.

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter

And I have to say Ella, the second grader, was a very special guest of Team Brady over the summer, and we are very much looking forward to having her join our team again sometime in the future.

Leslie LaRue

And her little brother Maxim can't wait too.

JJ

Well, and so the other reason beyond the fact that you're a mom and that obviously you and Ky share genetic material Leslie, that we really wanted you on the podcast is because I understand you're also really actively engaged with, like, the PTA in Texas as well.

Leslie LaRue

Yeah, yeah, and more than that, it's being involved in your own community, I think, um, you know, doesn't necessarily have to be on an official platform for you to have a voice. And so yeah to me, it just, you know, community is really important, and bringing people together is really important. And that's how ideas are shared and how things that were once kind of uncomfortable to talk about could be more comfortable to talk about.

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter

And that's what I want to talk about right now. I know this is a bit of a disruptful, we shall say, time for you and several other parents out there in that we are--in addition to everything else that is a bit unprecedented around COVID-19--we are seeing kids being home from school in a time where kids usually aren't home from school.

You know, there's often plans made for the summer or vacations as to what you're going to do, but this is a bit of an indefinite time, and we're not quite sure when it's gonna end. And so one of the things that is a risk that falls into that category that's often taboo to talk about is access to guns in the home. You know, we have kids that are now home. Even if parents are being home and practicing social distancing as well. They're often distracted because of work. They're leaving kids to their own devices to take care of their school work. Kids may often get, I'm gonna use the air quotes, "bored" because I know Mom would be very upset if we ever admitted to being bored as a child.

Leslie LaRue

Can't use the B-word.

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter

But overly curious to try to find something to do, shall we say? And so one of the things we know that that is a risk is unsecured guns in the home because kids are curious. They're gonna be home a lot more now, and it often is, I think, taboo to talk about having a gun in your home.

So I would like to hear a little bit about you know, not just how you can talk to your kids about this, but how you have conversations with your spouse about how to store these safely. Because this is something that in this time of crazy uncertainty, I think we can really take control of and model good behavior on and help provide some order and save lives.

Leslie LaRue

Absolutely. And, you know, you bring up a really good point because this is a time of unknowns, like I just found out. So we have spring break this week. So starting today, is spring break. The kids are gonna be home for a least two more weeks after that. So that's three weeks home, and they're saying that's just a minimum. So, like you said, who knows what's gonna happen? And, yeah, kids are going to be home. This is a totally different routine than we're used to. They're gonna have unsupervised time. You know, I don't think any mom or parent should be with their kids 24/7. That's not healthy.

And like you said, it's a time where you can get kind of curious or bored or or this or that. And so I think one thing that's really important is for parents to not be afraid of talking about guns with

each other and also with their kids. You know, we have a hunting rifle in our home. Both kids know that, and I think that's important so that they don't just accidentally stumble upon it and go, oh, what's this? You know? So just letting them know that we do have one, that it is locked. We never have ammo in the home and also what Dad uses it for? You know, there's a purpose that we have this weapon and it's for when he goes hunting.

So I think just the first step is just not trying to hide it, because I think you know, there is the tendency to kind of be like, oh, a gun is taboo my kids shouldn't be around it, which is true. Your child should not be around it, so I'm gonna just hide it and make it go away. Well, you know what kid doesn't open closet doors or look under beds or play hide and go seek. And so I think there's a real fear and danger in them just accidentally stumbling upon it. So I think that number one is if you have guns in your home, you need to talk to your kids about it, and that takes as an adult, taking ownership of that.

And I'm very fortunate that my husband and I are on the same page about you know, that we don't keep any ammunition in the house, that it is locked and stored away. And so that's something that, if you're going to choose to have kids, great responsibility comes with that and it is your job to take care of your kids. Just like you know, if your child had a peanut allergy, you would strategize with your spouse on how are we gonna handle this? Or my child can't swim and there's a pool in our backyard, what are we going to do? You know, these are all safety issues, so we do need to have those conversations about firearms, about allergies, about swimming pools, about hand washing, about all of it.

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter

I think you raise a really good point there about the importance of normalizing this conversation. You were hearing a lot in this time of social distancing, to check in with one another to make sure we're doing okay with regards to, you know, kind of our own sanity. Because things are being disrupted so we are being asked to check in on each other. And I think it's more important as an adult from an adult to adult conversation when we're having these, is to raise the issue of hey, if you have guns in your home, are you thinking about how they're secured? Are you thinking about having this conversation because this disruption exists?

And we have kids who are gonna be getting bored. I think especially younger kids like your kids ages, but also when we think about some older kids or even adults in the home, this is a really uncertain time with regards to, I mean we think about high schoolers right now, and graduation activities are being canceled. Problems are being canceled. Things like that are having a big impact on people, and the uncertainty can often lead to despair until when we're checking in on each other, asking the questions, you know, do you have a gun? How is it loaded? How are you looking out for yourself and protecting yourself?

Is a really important part of these conversations because the longer that we're in this disruptive time the more important it's going to be to ask the hard questions and normalize the conversation.

Leslie LaRue

I totally agree, you know, just reading on social media and in our neighborhood community Facebook page about how yeah, there are high schoolers that are like am I graduating? I'm gonna be home. And, you know, we need to address the fact that mental health is an issue, and it's something that is going to be affected by people being home, people not working, you know, and not just kids being off school, but people being home from work.

You know, when people don't have work that they need to be doing there is that slippery slope that those who struggle with addiction, or those who experience depression, bipolar mood disorder, suicidal ideation, all those things now they're home more and they might have just an increased access to guns. And so that's something like you had talked about checking in with people and I think it's absolutely checking in and talking about guns and do you have access to them?

But also just checking in with your friends. How are you doing? You know, can we make a point that twice a day we're going to get our families outside to go for a walk? Can we make a deal that you know, actually this afternoon Ella and Maxim, they're gonna face time with two of their friends. And I think that's a great way to keep that connection, because when people are isolated, I think you run the risk of dangerous things happening.

JJ

Can I ask Leslie how you've had conversations with your kids about the sort of guns in your home? If you could maybe sort of model that for some of our listeners.

Leslie LaRue

Yes. Oh, with Ella, it was probably a little bit later. So when we lived in California, the conversation honestly, never really came up. She was little when we moved to Texas and my husband, he brought his hunting gun from Tennessee. That's where he's from originally. So when we lived in California, he didn't have it with him and Ella was little and Maxim was little when they weren't really doing playdates, and it wasn't on my radar then when they were really little. But when we moved and he brought the rifle back from a trip Ella actually asked, what is that?

And so you know, I don't know if you could say I was fortunate. I was blessed that the conversation just kind of came on very organically and he said, well, this is a hunting rifle and I'm gonna go shoot deer and bring some back and we're gonna have venison and that's what it's used for. So that kind of got the ball rolling with her, not with Maxim. He was exposed. Um, and I and I don't want to offend anybody by saying like a boy girl difference, but just he naturally went towards just, you know, he picks up a stick, and I don't even think he ever saw a gun being shot before. But he went (gun sound effects), you know, it's just that's what he did. And so we were, you know, when we went to the toy store and he'd see play guns and instantly be drawn to them, so his awareness of them came on at an earlier age.

So, um, with that being said a conversation with him about it just started earlier than did with Ella because she wasn't really aware of it. And we didn't have any in the home and it wasn't on my radar. But now that it became on my radar with him, it was more talking about, you know, do you know what that is? Do you know what that's used for? And see and kind of seeing what he

knew about it, and then once getting his answers and educating, you know, that's a gun, that's a weapon. That's what people in the military use in war. And that's what people use when they want to go hunting for animals. And that causes a lot of destruction and a lot of harm.

You know, that's not something that we aim at people and just kind of constantly using those, um, those words around it of, you know, when he plays with it, he goes out like he has a toy, a toy gun and goes out in the backyard and pretends to shoot at the trees and this and that. But really talking about these are, these are weapons and being honest with both of them that this kills people. This kills people in war. This can kill people if it's used in the wrong way. This can kill animals that we eat, you know, and it's for me personally, I don't think it's wise to really hide your kids from what a gun can do. Because that's almost a disservice. You're downplaying the danger of it. And it's not to invoke this fear and paranoia in them, but it's to invoke a respect for, this is a weapon, and it's not a toy. This isn't something that you know you go hunting around and play with. This has serious consequences.

Leslie LaRue

Yeah, and I think that's really important. You know, one of the reasons why we have such an epidemic of gun violence in this country is that there's a very cavalier attitude with many folks about guns. There's the sense that I'll just bring a gun into my house and it will protect me without having those really hard conversations that you had with your kids, that no these are tools that are designed to kill, and they have, whether it's to hunt and kill animals or military purpose in war or, you know, a violent purpose. But their purpose is to kill, and that's what they're designed to do.

Leslie LaRue

Yeah, and I'll be honest. I have talked to both of them now that you know their kindergarten in second grade. I've been very open and honest with them that people get accidentally killed when they play when they play with guns, and I, you know whether that's right or wrong for everybody, I don't know. But for me, they need to know, You know, don't play with these because you could get killed. It's not, you know, and I think being honest with them about that, that it's, this can kill you. Don't play with it. You know kids get shot in homes unintentionally by this, it's not something to just mess with.

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter

And yeah, that's how we End Family Fire is by having the hard conversations and modeling the good behavior they need to go hand in hand.

JJ

Well, in one of the things that I'm seeing through my networks are people who are very concerned about how it is that they're going to find child care or that they're going to manage child care because they're in industries that have already been really, like, financially affected so they can't afford to pay someone to watch their children. They can't just leave their children at home, you know?

So they're sort of relying on really sort of informal networks or asking people, you know, maybe without a lot of time and the vetting they would normally do to say, hey, I really need help here and I think what we have to do is normalize the question of do you have a gun in your home? And, you know, is it properly stored with the same way that we would say, you know, do you have any pets? Are there any allergies? Not to feel like that's an imposition of a question to ask.

Leslie LaRue

Absolutely, I agree, and I think that it can start with one person. Honestly, it can start with one person asking that question, and then the person you're asking the question to can have that ripple effect of oh, I never even thought to ask that question. Oh, my gosh. And then they ask that question, and then they...So that's one of the ways I think it becomes normalized. I was so surprised, but happy to see my daughter went to a birthday party a month ago and on the invitation it said, we're a pet free and gun free home.

And I just thought that was such an easy, nonjudgmental way to raise awareness and to kind of normalize that conversation of just letting, because, you know, now every parent who saw that invitation is going to go: You know, I don't even think about letting people know whether or not I have guns. Is that something that I should be asking? And so I think that's one way to start it. And then also to phrase it in such a way that's not judgmental. Because you bring up an excellent point with people's, you know, with school being out and people having to go to work there's a chance that, you know, some parents are gonna have their kids go to playdates that, like you, said, they just normally don't know what's going on in these homes.

And so it's almost like you kind of have to have a very neutral checklist approach to it, almost like you were saying with allergies, with pets, with swimming pools with handguns. So it's not just this is the only question that you're asking, and I'm asking it in a way that is accusing you of something. It's more, these are all the things that I care about in terms of my child's health and gun safety is one of those things.

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter

There's this knee jerk reaction when you're afraid to try to take control of a situation and how can I take control? One of the other things that we're seeing right now, and it's being reported all over the place, is this surge in people going out and buying guns. I know Leslie in one of your community Facebook groups again posted that it was, you know, forget the toilet paper, the lines for people to buy guns and ammo is out the door.

Leslie LaRue

I know, and to me it's absolutely mind blowing, but it's true people, like you said Ky, when there's this unknown, people very easily go into a mass panic or hysteria or that, you know, I have to protect myself. I need to get a gun on me, it's like, what are you doing?

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter

Yeah, and why it's more important to have these conversations now is that anecdotally when you're looking at these, most of these are first time buyers that are going out. And so when you're checking in with each other, people who in the past may have never had a gun may have gone

out and bought one because they didn't know what else to do. And so to have a very nonjudgmental conversation with them and always bring up, you know, just remember, if you have a gun, are you storing it safely here? Here's some tips on how to lock your guns up. This is the lock that I use or the safe that I have.

And frame it as a way that we can find certainty in control in this crazy time of uncertainty, because that's, people who have never been around guns before using this as their just their response because they don't know what else to do are the ones we need to have the most conversations with I think. If we start to practice now, you know, we think about social distancing, there's this fear that it's actually about isolation. But if you look into why we are actually doing social distancing.

We're doing social distance because it's really an act of compassion. It is allowing the medical system to work. It's allowing those who need the most critical care to get access to it. And it's a time when we want to practice compassion for others. Safety, concern, well being for others, all of those things adding normalizing the conversation about guns in the home to that is a really powerful tool. You know, when we think about coming out the other side, if we've already started to have these conversations now and we're checking in with our our friends and loved ones, it's gonna be easier when we get face to face And so this is a time when I think we can practice having the hard conversations as well, and you've seen some of the silver linings of community building and community safety um, coming out of it.

Leslie LaRue

That's a really good point. I honestly didn't think about that, that way. Because a lot of you know I've been thinking of okay, you know, how can I use this time to yeah, you said it's about compassion for others thinking about other people, the safety and health of well being and that in all ties under that umbrella. And that's a really good point to use this time to practice those conversations when you're checking in with your friends.

JJ

Ideally, once things return to whatever our new normal is going to be, you know there's gonna be a lot of new gun owners in the U.S. as well who, you know, suddenly this anxiety and this fear is gone, that made them feel like they needed to purchase a firearm. But what are they going to do with it? You know, are they gonna remain vigilant with it? Are they gonna forget it in their car?

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter

Yeah, or leave it in their closet and five years later, when they have a kid, they forgot they ever put it there.

JJ

Exactly. And so I think it's it's really important that responsible firearms owners really start to model and be very vocal about appropriate behavior. These are the steps you take to lock up your guns. This is why you should keep your ammo separately. These are the conversations you should have with kids. Because you know, I don't have children but I can only comment that when I grew up in a household with guns and it was very much a fear based education thing. If

you touch this, you will die. No, don't go there until I suddenly was a teenager. But you're right like I'm...I'm so worried about the high school in the college students that are now home all day. I'm really worried about domestic violence situations that are possible now that people are home all day.

Leslie LaRue

And I think you know, to speak that I think something that's so important is while we are social distancing, it's not to be socially isolating if that makes sense, like we need to be socially distant, but not isolated. And especially, I mean, I've been thinking so much about homes where there is domestic violence and abuse and there are guns present, you know, and then you couple that with people who are off of work, they're not getting a paycheck. I mean, there's so many factors that feed into this that we need to be kind of not heightened alert, but we need to be aware and, like you've said for responsible gun owners to model what that looks like, not be afraid to talk about it.

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter

And ask the hard questions of our friends, who we might be concerned about, the situations that they're in.

Leslie LaRue

It's really important before we are three weeks in, now have that conversation and now lock up your gun and, you know, now take those steps so that it's not at that danger point.

JJ

And Ky you would know better than anyone, you know, what the rates of you know firearms in your home actually being useful in terms of self protection.

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter

You know, it's very low to nothing. I mean, it's less than 1%. It's less than a decimal of a percentage point of guns actually being used for protection. But here we know that every day eight kids are shot and injured or killed by a gun due to family fire. We know that these unsecured guns increased the likelihood of suicide by nearly 300%. And when you're now confounding uncertainty and financial questions and future questions into it, sadly, that said that rate is apt to go up. And we have the opportunity right now to have these hard conversations and work to prevent these family fire injuries.

And I think, as we practice social distancing, why it's also so important is we think about one of the reasons we're actually doing what we're doing with regards to closing schools and shutting down gatherings is to ensure that there are enough hospital beds available for those who actually need them. Why we are shutting down schools and stopping these gatherings and practicing social distancing is to help ensure that we have enough hospital beds available for those who are actually very sick so that they can get treated. Imagine just the act of stopping eight kids a day from getting shot by family fire.

You know, that's eight hospital beds that are going to be free for somebody who might be a victim of COVID-19. I mean, if we think things in that regard as well. Reducing gun violence is also helping ensure that the medical system has the resources it needs to take care of those who need it right now?

JJ

Well, Ky, any thoughts on resources people should access if they want to be good parents like Leslie?

Dr. Kyleanne Hunter

Visit [Bradyunited.org/endifamilyfire](https://bradyunited.org/endifamilyfire) for a list of tips on how to both have the conversations and also to make your home safer.

JJ

Il right, well, thank you both so much for coming on. I really appreciate it. And Leslie, thank you for bringing your experiences that's so helpful.you thank you for a platform to share.II right, well, thank you both so much for coming on. I really appreciate it. And Leslie, thank you for bringing your experiences that's so helpful.

Leslie LaRue

Thank you for a platform to share.

*****music plays*****

JJ

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*****Brady musical outro*****