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SUMMARY

The podcast discusses the pressing issue of gun violence affecting children, highlighting the need for parents to be aware of gun safety, especially as indoor playdates resume. Dr. Nina Agrawal, a pediatrician specializing in child abuse pediatrics, emphasizes that gun violence is now the leading cause of death among children aged 1 to 19, surpassing motor vehicle accidents, and calls for a public health approach to address this crisis.

- Gun violence is the leading cause of death in children aged 1-19, affecting marginalized communities disproportionately.*
- Current data collection methods underestimate the prevalence of non-fatal gun injuries among children.*
- The Dickey Amendment has historically stifled research on gun violence, limiting understanding and prevention strategies.*
- Public health campaigns are needed to educate parents on safe gun storage and to normalize discussions about guns in homes.*
- Pediatricians play a crucial role in discussing gun safety with parents, but many lack training and comfort in addressing the topic.*
- Community engagement and creating safe environments can significantly reduce gun violence and its impact on children.*
- After-school programs and community resources are vital in providing safe spaces for children and preventing exposure to violence.*
- Addressing gun violence requires a multifaceted approach, including legislative advocacy for child access prevention laws and community-driven safety initiatives.*

[Music] hello and welcome to the your parenting mojo podcast and today we're going to discuss a topic that i think is about to come into parents consciousness in a way that it really hasn't as much over the last year and for some of us that's a result of our privilege and i was reflecting that as vaccinations for children become more available we're probably going to start moving towards indoor

play dates without parents being around because when my daughter went into when we went into sort of lockdown she was young enough that she wasn't really doing play dates indoors with other people anyone's else's houses and so i never really felt as though i needed to ask are there guns in your house because i was always there to supervise and so of course over the last year she's played with a lot of kids on our street and they're always outside and i

can always hear them and so it the danger doesn't seem to be there in the same way for me uh in in those outdoor play-date scenarios but of course as vaccinations become available and these things start to move inside

i don't know which of my friends has guns in their houses and and if i'm kind of uncomfortable asking about this i'm guessing that a lot of parents haven't even thought about it and don't have it on their

collective radar yet so and so i wanted to bring that up into our consciousness before before we actually need it and then of course there's another issue here as well that we're going to delve into fairly deeply today which is that gun violence is becoming increasingly common in a wide variety of settings that children live in and are exposed to and that this can have really big impacts on them and that that isn't necessarily talked about or studied nearly as much

and we have a very special guest here with us today to talk about these issues dr nina agrawal she's a pediatrician who is board certified in child abuse pediatrics and she has expertise in violence against children she was on the faculty at columbia university in child and adolescent health she co-founded the gun safety committee for the american academy of pediatrics in new york state and she's leading the gun violence prevention task force for the american women's association

welcome dr agarwal thank you so much for having me jen all right so i wonder if we can maybe start by just understanding how big is the scope of this problem and and piggybacking on that how much do we know about how big is the scope of this problem and why don't we know as much as we might want to know right great question um right now guns are the leading cause of death in children

um one to 19 years of age um before it was motor vehicle accidents yeah without its firearm so it's something that's a health issue it's a public health issue it's a safety issue affecting all children okay and yeah i actually i hadn't seen those latest statistics this the the peer-reviewed papers i was looking at from 2018 still showed it in that number two position so um so that's a an unfortunate development over the last couple of

years that that position has switched then and it doesn't affect everybody equally right it affects some children more than others yes definitely there uh racially it affects black children disproportionately um blacks and then hispanics and then white children okay and i noticed that actually the way that this data is collected we might think oh it's fairly easy to understand how prevalent this kind of thing is how prevalent injuries are and actually there's a couple of different ways of

estimating it but the most common way is using data from the centers for disease control which is sampled from 100 hospitals and i'm just thinking okay there are thousands of trauma centers that are dealing with this kind of thing can a sample of 100 hospitals give us a complete picture of what what the actual prevalence rates for this are right um yeah as with a lot of um a lot of injuries and children it's a combination of hospital data

ems data and media we're increasingly using media data there's a gun violence archive that looks at shootings in in communities and then and then the cdc data i think one of the problems with the cdc data is that it doesn't include non-fatal injuries it only includes fatal injuries um so we're missing a lot of children um who suffered non-fatal injuries and understanding those so that we can

prevent them yeah okay and i i think when a lot of parents think about guns one thing that they may be most kind of afraid of the immediate fear is of a mass shooting because those get so much publicity right is is that the thing that we should be the most afraid of statistically speaking statistically definitely not um it's it's one percent of of shootings so much more common is homicide and suicide

um and unintentional injuries and then mass shootings are a small percentage but they gain the most media attention and because they gain the most immediate attention they gain the most resources prevention resources um and so we have children dying every day from homicide and suicide and yet um we're really not devoting the investing in um prevention of deaths in those children due to firearms yeah okay and i think a big reason why uh

we're not investing as much in the the pieces of this that really matter are that we don't understand it well enough and there's a reason we don't understand much about gun violence right can you tell us about that reason i love telling this story it's a story that's not known and once people hear about it they're like oh my god this this really makes sense um so anyhow enough of the preamble um what it is is that in 1990

um 94 95 there was a study that came out in the new england journal of medicine that found that if you had a gun in your home you're a gun owner you or somebody else in your home were more likely to die or get injured from that that firearm rather than protect yourself from an intruder so well most people a lot of people keep it for cell protection it actually doesn't work that way it you know the statistics tell you you're

actually more at danger from hurting yourself um or somebody that you care about in your home um and so the study was published in new england journal medicine um the nra was not happy about it um because that would affect firearms sales and they um you know they basically lobbied representative dickey of arkansas um and representative dickey inserted an amendment called the dickey amendment after his name saying that no funds could be used by

the cdc or the nih eventually went to the nih that could be used to advocate or promote gun control and so what they did is um they this congress took away money from the cdc that had been used for firearm prevention research and earmarked it for concussions and and the cdc doesn't have this pot of money where they can use it indiscriminately it has to be earmarked for a certain um you know injury or health

issue and um so then basically they had very limited funding um and um research plummeted and it you know that dicky amendment created a chilling effect on the entire research community because funding is so limited um for research and you know people didn't want their funding taken away for other things that they could do research on so um gun violence research plummeted and with that are our solutions so this was in 1996

the dickey amendment passed and every year it gets um re-approved and there have been efforts through certain um presidential administrations to try and repeal it but it just keeps going on and on and more recently in 2019 for the first time the cdc was appropriated um 25 million dollars for gun violence prevention research and i just want to make a distinction between gun control and gun violence prevention and the

distinction is is that public health issues are not trying to control um an injury or an illness we're trying to create safety when it comes to injuries so just like we don't say highway control we say highway safety we don't say cars control we say car safety we don't say cribs control we say crib safety so this is gun safety we understand that you can have guns but we just want them

to be safe around children yeah okay so thank you for that and i just want to to pull out some pieces of what you said particularly for listeners who are outside the u.s um so so what we're talking about here is that the cdc is the centers for disease control and nih is the national institute for health um and and that these organizations fund scientists working in academia to conduct studies on a whole variety of array of things

related to health but but specifically here we're talking about uh gun safety issues and uh the nra is the national rifle association which has an enormous amount of lobbying power here in the u.s and that they had uh that they had approached jim dickey and said uh you know this is this is something that you need to be with us on and he agreed and i was actually uh interested to see that he has more recently

uh flipped on that and he has regretted his role in stifling the research he he didn't want there to be more gun control and that was why he advocated for that because he he was i think worried that the research was going to lead to ammunition i guess as it were for people who wanted gun control to to put that into effect um but he now says that he he regrets his role in stifling the the flow of research on

that so it's encouraging to see that we are now starting to see this big spigot loosened and some money flowing through yes for sure um yeah right before he he actually died but right before he died um he became before he died well before he died he became friends with um the person who was head of the cdc at the time and um together they um they tried to advocate for gun violence prevention research yeah okay all right so so thank you for

telling us that story and it is always amazing how the politics uh ends up impacting our view of public health issues and and i think that that seeing this as a public health issue is is really at the core of your approach here and uh part of that is the the because of the way that gun violence impacts children so i wonder if you can tell us some more about your your ideas and your research and thinking

on how gun violence impacts children and how we should be thinking about it yes i think we need to think about gun violence and children more broadly um we we have been in the research setting we've been thinking about as injuries and deaths how do we prevent an injury how do we prevent a death and we're making some head roads in that um but we one is um you know we're making head roads in certain areas

so suicide and accidental injuries so like the toddler who picks up a gun on a playdate um how do we prevent that from happening um we haven't made a lot of inroads in homicide affecting children and that is the most common intent um in in in children and youth so we haven't made a lot of inroads in prevention of homicide um the other thing that we don't talk about is exposure to gun violence and when i

was working in the bronx you know it was a pretty some of i was working in the south bronx and it was a busy er a lot of people come in with gunshot wounds but the wounds that we weren't um weren't coming in or weren't presenting to medical attention were the kids who were having mental health problems because of exposure you know they're having anxiety they were having they were having depression i am actually authoring a book chapter on

exposure in in that i included this anecdote of a five-year-old that i was um interviewing and i asked her about eating and sleeping and you know school and she said she didn't sleep well and i was like well why not and she goes she told me there were noises that kept her up at night i was like well what were those noises and um not expecting her to say this she said they were gunshots and and i was like well what do you do she

when that happens and she said well i get a snack and i go back to sleep and it was this five-year-old living in this this world of trauma in her bedroom um so the gun violence is going on physically outside her bedroom but is coming through into her home it's coming through into her her um development and it and her health and what happens to those kids and from the adverse childhood experiences studies we know that those violent

exposures affect children's health across the long term and they you know they may develop academic problems behavioral problems in adolescence with gun violence they may become victims and perpetrators and um and then later on in life if they don't die from gun violence they may have chronic health issues so basically you know what happens before age five what children see and hear can affect their brains

and their lives the trajectory of their lives forever yeah yeah and and so to to dig a little more deeply into some of those things that you mentioned firstly you you said that we've we've made some progress on the things like the accidental deaths and the suicides which primarily impact white children and we have not made so much progress on the homicides aspect which primarily does not impact white children it's primarily black children and so there's a very racially

differentiated uh issue right on where we've focused our attention and where we've been able to make progress on this yeah and again you know unintentional injuries where a toddler picks up a gun is again a very small percentage of of uh gun violence in children the biggest bucket is homicide but within that bucket we haven't made a distinction between unintentional homicide and intentional homicide so we see this in the news all the time

you know people are children and even adults i'm getting hit by stray bullets and they see the wrong place at the wrong time but is it that person's you know i guess it's like where does the onus is it that person he shouldn't have gone to that restaurant he shouldn't have gone to that place the child shouldn't have gone to that playground so i think we need to make a distinction between the unintended target and the intended

target because the dynamics are going to be different the environments may be the same but you know a mother of a five-year-old you know getting shot by a spray bullet like how can we help her keep her child safe um can we say you know look maybe this area of your neighborhood is not safe or maybe we need to go to the

community leaders and say like hey this playground is not safe for our children there's shootings that

happen there are there drug deals that happen there let's make this safe so you know there's there's work that says uh that is found that creation of safe green spaces reduces shootings in communities and i think that is i think that's a very um viable way of keeping children safer yeah and and also thinking back to that five-year-old who's who's saying you know i get woken up at night and and what i'm hearing is gunshots and

and thinking about how that's going to play out in that five-year-old's academic career you know maybe she's asleep at school the next day because she couldn't she couldn't sleep at night time and then it's like well what are the parents doing why don't the parents make sure she goes to bed at the right time the parents might be seen as well this parent is failing this child um maybe the child gets referred for special services because

special education because she can't concentrate because she can't focus because you didn't sleep at night and so all of a sudden we see all of these potential ramifications happening down the line of something that seems completely unrelated like what what teacher in school is is going to make the connection necessarily between this child who is being referred for special services and the fact that there are gunshots in her neighborhood at night time it's it's such a broader issue and and

we tend to focus so tightly on the individual child like why is this child struggling and they must need special help when actually we we just ignore the the broader society these children live in right yeah i think that's a great great point is that you know there's exposure and then there's buffering that exposure and what are the variables that buffer that exposure and that toxic stress you know that damage that may come to that child

um and so you know the you know we talk about resilience what is resilience is resilience internal is it internal and external is it something that we can do in the children's environment to help them be stronger um so you know i think the exposure element came to light when it became when it was um the parkland youth they you know for the most part you know they grew up in a um in a suburban community with

resources a resource community they came from economically advantaged families they were very verbal children or verbal youth and that was very that was a game changer and those kids told us look i am depressed i am suicidal um because of the exposure because i've lost friends i'm scared that this is gonna happen to me so the trauma of that exposure um became real um and this is real

in in in black children growing up in the south bronx like my little patient but she's not getting um the the resources nor the recognition like you said that the fact she's not doing well in school is not because she's you know um not she's not that she's not capable it's that she's in an environment that doesn't allow her to learn yeah yeah and and even deeper on what you said about the parkland children you know we're we're paying attention to

them because they're expressing this in in words that we choose to hear in in language um maybe there are black

children who express it through acting out you know what is what is seen as acting out in school they're expressing this trauma this this post-traumatic stress disorder and the other stuff that's going on and and we see that as misbehavior as something that they need to correct as a problem and not as an expression of i am hurting

there is something here that is hurting me um and and we we choose to to kind of turn the other way and say you know you have a problem we're going to you're going to deal with it we're going to suspend your ex bill you're whatever because you're misbehaving i mean it's just it when you say it like that that that we listen to the parkland children and it's so clear that we don't listen to other children

how does that sit with you yeah i've thought about this a lot you know and i i think what it is i think about these things because how can we change things how can we change the language how can we change policy and i think language matters and when we talk about um the children you know like the park and children were like how do we create a safer um school environment for children you know we we they talk about it in the

schools um the lawmakers talked about it research has been devoted to this how do we make schools safer but yet when it comes to black children in in these economically disadvantaged communities we don't talk about it is how do we make these children safer we talk about it as violence prevention we start out with a different um baseline okay it's violent how do we bring down the violence rather than you know how do we make the

environment safer for these children as well they both deserve to be safer um the the with the children of the black children and the or in these under resourced communities they don't feel safe getting from school to home they might feel safer in school it's it's all their environment however you define it where children live where they they go to school where they play they should feel free in all of these areas yeah yeah absolutely okay and so um

so we're making some progress here not enough uh on the other side of this gun purchases are up gun purchases are up in the last year specifically um 32 percent uh of households had guns in the us in 2016. it's now 39 and we have 120 and a half guns for every 100 people in the u.s and which is more than twice as much as the second highest country which is yemen and there was an article on this just the other day in

the times and they interviewed people who were working at gun stores and stores that have gun counters and and talking to the employees and saying well who is buying guns and these employees are saying well it's not the usual people it's not our usual clientele this is now white people coming in people who have never seen a gun in real life before who have absolutely no idea how to hold it what to do with it and

they're telling the store owners uh we're going to be locking down we're constrained to our homes we want to keep safe and so and that fits with a gallup poll that published in 2018 that found that the percentage of people who believe that having a gun in the home makes it a safe place to be rose from 35 percent to 63 between 2000 and 2014 i mean you already gave away the lead here right which is

the uh the guns are not safe homes are not safer when they have guns in them so what what's going on here why is there such a disconnect right i think it's a lack of a public health approach and you know we saw this with kovid and that when you don't have a central approach from the cdc you know issuing prevention guidelines you know people you know make up their own theories and you know to fit whatever their

their needs are and you can't blame them right if they don't have the information they can't act on it and they may not trust the information that they're getting so we need to have a public health campaign that gives you know evidence-based guidelines it's not based on politics it's based on what the science says and if the science says that safe storage decreases injuries in your children and that we all like as doctors as school providers we all

embark upon that campaign i think we can make a difference but the re but the problem is it it's very um varied right now um i do want to say though you know it's who's buying the gun so you know we are seeing more people buy guns but it's also in the other the populations that weren't buying guns um like black people are buying guns legally asian people are now buying guns legally and you actually can't blame them

you know like why should i be a sitting duck if so and so has a gun and i don't um so um i think you know we need to equalize this guns need to be kept out of the wrong hands on on all lands okay okay and so uh so as the rate of gun ownership increases there are going to be more children living in houses that have guns that it's it it seems unlikely that only

people who don't have children are buying all of these guns and so um there have been a bunch of studies done actually obviously a lot of them fairly old now because of the the stifling of the the research but um in 1994 more than 22 million children lived in homes in the us that had guns 55 percent of these people who responded to a survey reported that they had one or more firearms in an unlocked place 13 had firearms stored

unlocked and loaded and so so it they're incredibly accessible to young children and uh these numbers may actually be an underestimate because people know you're not supposed to have loaded firearms in a house with children and so they may not have reported truthfully on the survey um and so and in another survey parents will say oh yeah this it's important i need to store my gun safely and and 85 of them will say yes safe storage is

important and then they'll go on to say but they don't do it themselves um and so i i think at the heart of this is is a misunderstanding of what children are capable of and and if we just tell them you know oh we have a gun don't touch the gun um then then the children won't touch the gun wait what what do you think about that yeah there definitely is um lack of knowledge in this area

the the nra the national rifle associate had an eddie eagle campaign and that was tailored to children and you know look don't touch the gun you know or if you do have a gun this is the way to handle it safely it didn't work there's no evidence behind it there's no science that says that we were able to reduce injuries and deaths in in children um because of that campaign what works is educating parents if you educate parents on safe storage

not gun control safe storage um then um and keeping the gun um unloaded um locked with the ammunition in a separate place um you can reduce unintentional injuries um and uh suicide injuries in use um but again um that message needs needs to get out there what we mean by gun safety um we mean gun storage uh safe storage i'm sorry yeah yeah and just to to make it super

clear for any parent who's thinking well my kid's different my kid could tell the difference my kid would never would never touch a real gun because i've told them not to do it uh there was a fascinating study that uh that hid where the researchers hid two water pistols and a real gun in in drawers in a room and uh and the the gun had a radio transmitter on it that would make a light flash when

when the trigger was pulled hard enough to to actually pull it if it was uh really enabled and it was a really small study admittedly it was only 29 kids they were all boys um 72 percent of them found the gun 76 of those handled it and 16 of them pulled the trigger and about half of the boys who found the gun were not sure if it was real or not more than 90 percent of the the boys who'd handled

the gun or pulled the trigger reported that they'd received some kind of safety instruction so putting all of that together children cannot tell if a gun is real or not if they find the gun they are probably going to handle it and even if you have told them not to touch a gun if they find a gun they're probably going to do it so so i just want to reiterate what you're saying that uh that teaching our children to uh to not

touch guns is not enough it's probably necessary do you think but but not enough it's necessary just like anything else like don't touch a hot stove don't you know like things that that are may cause injuries but um you know i talk about this with like lead paint you know like we kept on making lead paint and you know you could tell kids don't eat the paint but they're going to do it so we need to stop making the lead paint

and we need to make the paint safer so what does that mean like with guns you put a trigger lock on it you put it you lock it up because just telling a kid don't touch it it didn't doesn't work for really anything and i guess to go to your um the study um that you're talking about there's a really great um tv special with diane sawyer where they put two boys in a room um with a real gun and they instructed the

boys don't touch it don't you know they told them over and over again don't touch it and then they leave them alone in the room and there's a camera and they're both looking at it they're both looking at it and then one kid picks it up and and the other kids i don't think we should do that and the kids still the other kid still picks it up and i think he does like you know like motion on the trigger so

even if it is even if you tell a kid not to touch a real gun um you know it's it's the same thing like with kids like they want what they you know what could be perceived as something they can't have yeah and it's almost like the marshmallow test right but pretty delicate if they can wait 15 minutes they can have two marshmallows and and a lot of them can't do it so um okay so so then we talk about

educating parents and you've talked about a public health and public safety campaign um is this advertising or because the the primary way that i see this discussed in the literature is that pediatricians are supposed to be the ones delivering this message and that when your kid goes for their well baby visit the pediatrician is supposed to to give you advice on this and and most pediatricians are not trained in this they have no idea what to do what to say um and and

so so this advice is not happening right now do you see that as a viable way of getting this information through or are there other more effective ways um just like a public health campaign requires multiple messengers um i do think it does belong in the in the pediatrician um in the pediatrician sphere and normalizing it from birth on just like you know we talked about the stove you know don't leave your baby near a stove well the baby's not

crawling yet but you know hey start like making your room safe or your house safe because one day your child will get there um and we all know that children move quickly and they're there before you know it and then you're in the hospital before you know it with an injury that's preventable um it happens um but what can we do to prevent those things from happening because guns are highly lethal and so like other unlike the other ones like a burn

you can treat but um guns um you you may not have that opportunity um so yeah i think that uh doctors do need to do prevention but they don't really have the language to do it and it's become this touchy thing um about how to approach we do injury prevention all the time but we don't really have the language to do this one because it's been politicized really it should be policy um you know as far as a play date it

becomes like hey my kid's coming over your house and you know we ask about pools if your child can't swim we ask about nuts if your child's allergic um it's the same thing i just want to make sure my child is safe and do you have any guns in the house so i probably wouldn't just say the one thing about guns but put it in all of the the typical injury things we we ask about and the other thing is is

that we have to meet people where they are and it may not be is there a gun in your house it may be just provide the education um and say you know if you do have a gun this is what you know this is what i recommend for safe storage okay okay so so we're sort of um we're coming at this from two different perspectives here a little bit we're talking about how the pediatrician might uh influence the parent or

encourage the parent to change their own storage practices in their own house and then there's also the how do we talk to other parents about this and and i think you studied the effectiveness of the asking saves kids campaign right which is which is the idea of uh asking when you're when your child is playing in another place uh if there are guns available to them what did you find about the effectiveness of that program yeah i studied it in the south bronx um

we asked parents of children being seen in our clinic in our pediatric clinic you know about the asking saves kids information where you know again it's uh making sure if there's a gun where your child plays that it's safely stored um they overwhelmingly wanted gun safety education from their their physician um 96 but only um 11

received it from their pediatrician so there's a gap um in what parents want and what they're

they're getting okay yeah um i i can imagine uh yeah based on physicians discomfort and lack of training and all the rest of it um and also when we're we're thinking about uh who do you ask if i'm the mother it's possible that i'm going to be interacting with another mother of making plans for a playdate and there was a study i found that said that women who are frequently not the primary gun owners and that they often don't know

what guns are in their house and how they're being stored so if i'm having this conversation with another mother it's entirely possible that that person doesn't know the complete picture of what's going on in their house so do i need to like have this message go out to both parents or like how do i navigate that which i hadn't even considered yeah i think that's a great point i think you go for the parent that you

have and you ask them to distribute it to all caregivers whoever's taking care of your child um that's what we tend to do whether it's a babysitter or the grandmother or the father but i do want to take a note that or make note that domestic violence um from firearms is a public health issue as well and so i think it is um an area we don't um talk about enough you know screening um mothers for um

domestic violence um related to firearms yeah yeah um and then just sort of while we're on this topic of um of issues in the home uh as it were you you said something we had a call two weeks ago just to check that the alignment was right uh with the the kinds of topics that you're studying and what i was looking to cover on this episode and you said something that just caught my attention so much you were talking about

how peloton treadmills are being recalled that one child has died as a result of interacting with a peloton treadmill 72 reports have been received about users in children pets other objects getting pulled under the back of the treadmill um of course and each any death of a child is tragic but what what does this peloton recall say to you yeah i was watching the news and um they said you know there's been a recall on peloton

treadmills because kids are getting hurt it's just as basic as that kids are getting hurt whether it be an injury or a death each each single one was important um with guns it's it's 10 children per day um so what does that say um about you know about these um the safety i guess the the safety policies in place um for each of these industries peloton

is regulated right by um by it could be the consumer product safety commission um but there are different entities um in the federal government that regulate consumer products um firearms is the only one that falls outside of this it is not this the sale is regulated of firearms but not the safety of firearms so if a two-year-old picks up a firearm drops it it discharges um

and hurts him or somebody else you would think that should be a recall on that firearm and look what can we do do we need to put micro stamping on it do we need to put a lock on it so that a child isn't able to injure themselves or others from that firearm again that's a gap and we need to repeal that um protection from

immunity for the gun industry they need to be held accountable and they need to put safety

mechanisms in place it can't be voluntarily it doesn't happen with any industry voluntarily it didn't happen with cars you know data found that if you put a child in a car seat they're more likely to be safer if you put a seat belt in a car you're more likely to be safer we didn't get rid of the car we just made it safer for that child to be in the car same thing with firearms yeah okay um so so and i want to

sort of tease out the distinction between what i see is what you're describing here which is we're trying to make firearms safer and what seems to be the american academy of pediatric stance which is uh their official policy statement says the safest home for children is a home without a gun uh and yes that may be fact i mean it is factually true that that part is not really uh under debate here um but but is this stance likely to

be the one that improves the safety of the largest number of children if parents who own guns just kind of stop listening to the aap and and or their pediatrician or anyone else they're getting this information from where where do you see where do you kind of walk that line yeah i think there's a move to meet people where they are and while like you said that is the safest place um but people can have firearms and we just

need to um have them be safe in the presence of children so i think we need to meet people where they are do they have a firearm what kind of firearm is it why do they have that firearm it's for hunting well you know what then you you can keep it safely stored because you're not using it for self-protection um we need to learn about firearms so many of us don't know like what's it like to pull a

trigger what's it you know what are how can a two-year-old like hang uh hold a gun um so i had gone to a gun show um in new hampshire where i you know asked people about background checks and about safe storage i saw a family of four with an adolescent and um a baby that must have been like six months old and um you know i i was just i was playing you know like consumer and they all believed in safe storage

background checks you know the mother said of her or her baby like of course we keep it safe of course we keep it locked up with the user like of course you're not buying an a you know uh an assault weapon he wants to buy a rifle for for hunting you know again that's not my culture but that is a culture and i think we need to understand it and um i think we need to meet in the

middle about keeping children their children safe yeah yeah absolutely great thank you for for uh for teasing that out a little bit and so i kind of linked to this idea i think is the idea of pretend play with guns either with fingers being held up or with you know bb guns or uh other gun-like objects and and so we covered this a while ago in the show and we talked to dr diane levine who has

spent a long time studying this and and basically told us that if you you you can try and ban children from engaging in gun play war play if you want to but they're going to do it anyway they're just going to push it underground and if you support them in doing it you can actually help them from getting out of these kind of

bang bang your dead story lines that they can otherwise end up just repeating over and over again

and help them to understand well what aspect of this story is it that they're really exploring here and how can we help you to to explore that rather than necessarily focusing so much on the gun play itself um and so i think the the parents who are in the communities i work with are generally fairly comfortable with this approach and sort of acknowledging also that even if their children are allowed to uh to play with um with pretend guns that we're never

doing it in a public place this is always something that's done in our backyard um partially in acknowledgment that our friends if i'm white and i have a friend over who isn't white uh that they may not be as safe as my child is being out on the street and and playing with a pretend gun um and and that even if everybody involved is white that in acknowledgement that not every child is safe to do this so

i i'm wondering if if you are aware of any evidence-based reason why we might need to shift our thinking on that at all or if you are comfortable with children playing with pretend guns it's a really great question um i don't know of any research in that area i think it is something that does need to be done um you know we have there have been cities that looked at exposure to media violence and they haven't found that media

violence exposure in and of itself can cause can result in perpetration but as far as the the pretend gun i don't recommend it i think there are different um play simulations you can you can do um that don't involve you know the ultimate goal is to kill somebody because what it is you kill like you shoot somebody what they fall back and they're you know stimulating death i don't know

if that's what we want to teach kids um it's kind of like cowboys and indians we used to do that but we don't do that anymore you know robbers we don't cops and robbers we don't do that anymore so i think we maybe need to think about other things that children can play okay all right and and then from a parent's perspective if a parent is concerned about children's exposure to gun violence whether it's their own child

or whether it's children in general because ultimately what we want to do is to make the world a safe place for all children to grow up in not just my individual child um what do you recommend what kind of actions can we take that are maybe grounded in evidence um i i know that there have been some places where uh child action child access prevention laws have been put into place you know people will lobby for them and

this the research on whether these are effective is is extremely mixed because there are so many confounding variables involved we don't know if the law is being enforced or if people are actually changing their behavior so um i'm wondering if you can help us understand is there research-based are there research-based practices we can engage in to make the world safer for for all children right um there is evidence um as we said to support safe storage

and then it becomes um the laws the the laws that are effective and there was a recent study that came out by a

colleague eric fleigler out of boston children's that found that when you did look at these um these uh child access laws in different states where there were um higher penalties for for for violation of that then um that was more effective um in or was more effective in reducing

injuries and deaths in that state um versus an area that had weaker laws or weaker penalties from the same law if that makes sense yeah okay so so parents should be advocating for uh for safe storage laws in in their states is that is that the thing that we can focus on that's most uh most useful in terms of reducing children's exposure to violence or is there are there other things that should be our primary focus

what i've been um interested in is creating safer environments for children and so uh creating sort of this environmental health framework you know we talk about climate we talk about noise pollution i we need i think we need to put firearms in that i live you know in new york city in a nice neighborhood but just a block over um last week my neighbor was in the news there were gunshots at 4 pm that doesn't usually happen but it

happened you know my i since the pandemic i don't walk around at night because it actually has not been safe but now it's not safe in the daytime you know so i think we need to look at our environment just not in our home but our you know our community and i think we need to solve this as a community so whether what however you define your community as a community of parents a community of teachers

um however you define that i think you know come together and figure out what solutions matter or would make a difference in your community it's not going to be a one-size-fits-all and it's not going to be one thing either um i i really love the work um that uh charles brannis he's a gun researcher um that in philadelphia they found that if you remediate blighted land like abandoned buildings um create safe green spaces where you involve the community

um you can reduce shootings and you can reduce crime in that area um and ultimately children can be safer in that game okay so so this ultimately doesn't necessarily have to be about advocating for anything related to guns specifically it could be a much broader picture of how do we make this a community that we all feel welcome in and that if we can create that then the gun violence issue sort of becomes less of a focus as it were yeah

and then i think the other part of that is after school programs in new york city they're trying to mandate that all children are eligible for after-school programs because it's like an added expense that's a time where children can get into trouble um and so i think you know all parents could benefit from after-school programs for their for their child um whether you're in a suburban environment or in an urban environment yeah awesome well thank you so much for

for being here and and sharing your thoughts on this and your research and ideas and and uh and leaving us with with some i mean really some some things that we can do this this is not about necessarily getting out a billboard and taking on the nra this is not what we're trying to do here what we're trying to do is create communities that feel welcome to everybody and so thank you for for sharing your time with us

you