

CSTS podcast series
Let's Talk About Your Guns
episode 201: Your Guns? Why Should I Care?

1.	NOTES	SCRIPT
2.		<p>DR CURT WEST: Welcome to Let's Talk About Your Guns, a podcast where we explore how to have conversations – sometimes tough conversations - about storing firearms safely. These conversations are important, and they could save a life.</p> <p>I'm Curt West, Associate Professor of Psychiatry and scientist at the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress.</p> <p>Today we're going to try something a little bit different.</p> <p>I have in the studio with me, Kristina Medvescek and Doctor John Bradley.</p> <p>As part of getting ready for this season, our production staff, some of our new members listened to some of the older episodes and it generated a very interesting reaction.</p> <p>First, tell us a little bit about yourself, Kristina, and tell us about your initial reaction to the podcast.</p>

3.		<p>KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: Hi all. My name is Kristina. I'm a member of the podcast production team. I work at the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress with Dr Curt West. I and the other new members of the production team were asked to listen to a few episodes of season one to get familiar with the podcast and to provide some fresh eyes... or fresh ears. We all liked it, but some of us said that we probably wouldn't listen to it independently.</p>
4.		<p>DR CURT WEST: Well, of course, it was personally devastating that someone would listen to our podcast and say, oh I don't think this is relevant to me. So that then cued the interest in this topic of, well, why is this topic of firearm conversations relevant to anybody, whether you own firearms or not, whether you know people who own firearms or not and so that's what we're going to talk about today. Why is this relevant? So can you expand on why you thought this podcast was not necessarily for you?</p>
5.		<p>KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: I was raised without firearms in my house, and it's just not something that I engage with day to day. I don't really come across guns and I don't really talk about them. Well, not until I started working on this podcast. It didn't really feel like it was part</p>

		of my life and something that I would really be engaging with.
6.		DR CURT WEST: But you changed your mind. Can you tell us about that?
7.		KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: Actually, I was totally wrong. I think my response of this not being relevant was partially for practical reasons, but also kind of an identity issue that I think of myself not as somebody who engages with firearms.
8.		DR CURT WEST: John, could you go ahead and introduce yourself?
9.		DR JOHN BRADLEY: Hello, everybody. John Bradley, I am the director of mental health at the VA Boston Healthcare System and a veteran myself.
10.		DR CURT WEST: John, can you share with us your perspective on firearms and your own experience with firearms just to set the stage?
11.		DR JOHN BRADLEY: Yes. Happy to. I think Kristina hit on an important point about how firearms can be an identity issue for many people. Certainly as a military veteran, I became, you know, familiarized with firearms and proficient in the use of firearms over the course of my career. And it became of interest for me to maintain that proficiency. Two thirds of

		<p>veterans own firearms in their homes and untold numbers of Americans - we don't really have a good number about that - own firearms in their homes. So firearms are ubiquitous.</p>
<p>12.</p>		<p>DR CURT WEST: So you gained experience in firearms through the military and felt the need to keep that proficiency after your time in the military, as many people do. Was protection ever part of the equation in your life?</p>
<p>13.</p>		<p>DR JOHN BRADLEY: I won't say that it was never part of the equation, but it's certainly not the major part of the equation for me. Nor is necessarily firearm ownership part of how I see my identity. Firearm ownership, for me, is more of a hobby. And I gained an interest again through the military, became very interested in military history and the firearms used throughout our military history and began collecting. The only times when I have felt a need for a firearm for protection is when I'm traveling alone, say, across the country or on a motorcycle trip or camping, that I'll bring a firearm for protection, you know, against wildlife or whatever else might be out there when I'm traveling. But on a day-to-day basis, I keep my firearms secured, in a safe, disassembled the ones that can be disassembled and store the ammunition separate from those firearms because, like many firearm owners who think</p>

		about firearm ownership as a safety precaution, I want to make sure that my possession of them maintains the safety within my household.
14.		DR CURT WEST: So Kristina, if we know that as many as 43 percent of Americans keep firearms in their homes, somewhere in your circle of friends is someone who keeps a gun. How did firearms show up in your conversations?
15.	SOCIAL CLIP	KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: Yeah, absolutely. I think after our initial conversation where I said I don't have friends who own firearms, or this doesn't come up for me. I thought about it more and I realized not true. I'm a military spouse. I have friends in the military community who own firearms. I have friends from other walks of life who also own firearms or have firearms in their homes. Just as we've been producing this episode, I've been having conversations with people about this podcast and have learned that friends who I thought didn't own firearms have firearms at home. It's really a myth, I think probably for everyone or for most people, that firearms are really separate from your community.
16.		DR CURT WEST: And John, if you think about your circle of relationships, how prevalent are firearms in in in your group?

17.		<p>DR JOHN BRADLEY: I would say they're fairly prevalent, although I haven't taken the liberty to, um, survey my friend group to see who owns firearms and who doesn't. Although a vast number of my close friends and acquaintances are also military hobbyists and do collect mostly antique weapons. But I haven't surveyed that group to see if they also own handguns or other firearms for protection.</p>
18.		<p>DR CURT WEST: I want to pause and remind our listeners that the purpose of this podcast. We're here to motivate and empower people to have conversations about safe storage of firearms with people in their lives. Safe storage means guns are stored unloaded, stored in a locked container, disassembled or with a locking device engaged, and ammunition is stored and locked separately. Finally, safe storage also means having a plan for alternate storage during difficult times. John and Kristina, I'm curious to know whether each of you have ever had a conversation about safe storage with your friends?</p>
19.		<p>KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: No, I haven't had those conversations. Before we started working on this podcast. I had never heard the term safe storage. But I can think of at least one time when perhaps I should have had a conversation like that with a friend. I have a close friend who I</p>

		<p>know has firearms because he is a hunter. I also knew that he had a history of depression. He was having a particularly difficult time in his life, and I think now, knowing what I do, that that would have been a really good opportunity for me to have had a friendly conversation with him about how he was storing his firearms. And to this day, I don't know how he stores his firearms if something like that were to happen again. And I don't even really feel like I have the language to have those conversations.</p>
20.		<p>DR CURT WEST: John, can you talk about any conversations that you have had around firearms and safety, in particular safe or secure storage?</p>
21.		<p>DR JOHN BRADLEY: You know, this is a daily conversation for me in my professional life. But let me shift gears and talk about my personal life. Quite a number of years ago, I had a great friend who was going through a terrible time. He was profoundly depressed and did own firearms. And I knew of this because he would talk about his-hobby of going to the range and firing and so on and so forth. And that was the first opportunity that I had to say, you know, it's probably not a good idea for you to have access to a firearm when you're feeling so depressed. And fortunately, he was very receptive to that discussion and was appreciative that I offered</p>

		<p>to take possession of the firearm while he was in the throes of his crisis and seeking help for that problem. He readily relinquished his handgun over to my custody. We waited a period of about six months, and I observed that he seemed to be doing much better. He attested that he was doing much better and he was ready to regain possession of the firearm. So we had a discussion about, what the safe storage best practices are for him, and I expressed a willingness to serve as his repository, should the crisis ever reoccur in his life. So that was the first time. And that conversation has happened two additional times since then with close friends and I think what it has shown me is that people are open to having the discussion. If that discussion is from a place of empathy and concern and support.</p>
22.		<p>DR CURT WEST: <i>So Let's Talk About Your Guns</i> is not about cocktail party conversations about guns and safety, but these are about people that are in your life that matter to you and that you want to live in a safer environment. With that in mind, I wanted to follow up, Kristina, with your thoughts on both John's scenario, but your own scenario with your friend. Having had the had you had the opportunity to do it differently, how would you approach it now?</p>

23.		<p>KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: Yeah, I guess I'll answer your question with a question for John, which is I still feel like - and I don't think I'm alone in this - I am feeling a barrier with even starting that type of conversation. How did you approach your friend, or did they approach you to talk about you taking their firearm for a limited period of time?</p>
24.	<p>SOCIAL CLIP</p>	<p>DR JOHN BRADLEY: It's a great question because context matters. Right. And in this, you know, first case with my friend, he approached me, um, expressing that he was in crisis. Um, he didn't express a desire to relinquish his firearm until I brought it up, knowing that he owned firearms. Inherent in that question is whether you know that your friends own firearms and we can never be certain, as you so perfectly pointed out in the introduction. But we can assume given the prevalence of firearm ownership, that there may be firearms in proximity to any person in crisis. It might be worth shifting the dialog from do you own firearms to something along the lines of, you know people in crisis might have access to firearms. And I don't know if that's the case in your home. But if that is, have you thought about how you would safely manage those firearms during the time of crisis? Again, a very contextual discussion presuming that someone one is in crisis and</p>

		two, you have the opportunity to meet with them.
25.		KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: I'm definitely guilty of making assumptions about who owns firearms and who does not. John, that was incredibly useful. I think just going in open and saying, you know, do you have access to firearms? It's a great way to start and then again, you have to be flexible based on the scenario but, Curt, we've also talked about how these conversations shouldn't only happen in times of crisis. So I'm curious about how we could be normalizing these conversations day to day.
26.		DR CURT WEST: Well, and it's interesting to think about. Yeah. When does the presence of a firearm potentially come up in casual conversation with your friends? It's an interesting question. The data is starting to indicate that a substantial number of firearm owners keep at least one gun stored in a less secure manner. And in particular those who are owning firearms for protection. So, the idea is to plant that seed that perhaps the safer alternative, is to keep that firearm locked in some way. I think one of the things that we've also emphasized throughout this podcast has been that if you do any one of the steps of secure firearm storage, you are safer than you are doing none of them. And so any step puts

		<p>time and space and one more opportunity for that person to change their mind on the worst day of their life. And so, it comes out in the idea of like, you matter to me. I care about you. this would be awful if this were to happen. And so this is one way that you can keep yourself safer, by storing your guns securely.</p>
27.		<p>DR JOHN BRADLEY: I really like that framework because, you know, what you're talking about is harm reduction. Anything we can do, towards safer storage helps improve all of our well-being. I like to have the discussion about, you know, keeping a safe household that if somebody is purchasing a firearm, whether for protection or sport or some other reason, you know, we can presume that their ultimate goal is to make their households safer. And so how can we capitalize on that positive impulse with regard to the storage of that firearm.</p>
28.		<p>DR CURT WEST: I want to come back to this question of how do we when is there a time to initiate this conversation and with whom? I think there are several opportunities that we've identified over previous episodes. Things like when you have children when your kid goes over to somebody else's house, you have the conversation to say oh are there are there guns in the house? Are the guns stored safely? You could be specific and say, by that I mean locked</p>

		and unloaded. There are I'm thinking about other times, such as, you know, other life transitions. So a friend gets into a relationship and mentions, oh, yeah, well, he or she keeps guns around the house. Oh, really? How are they stored? So if you're prepared for this, when the opportunities arise, you're ready to go. You are making a point that maybe it is more challenging to seek out these conversations, which I don't necessarily is what we're advocating for, but that you're ready to say, oh, firearms, how are they stored? And there's almost a reflex to say, are they stored safely?
29.		DR JOHN BRADLEY: Or I might reframe it and say, you know, have you thought about how to store them safely? Because that's much more inquisitive than directive, I think.
30.		KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: My current hack is just to talk about this podcast all the time, and it naturally comes up, so that works well.
31.		DR CURT WEST: That's actually worked for me with several of my relationships as well. Like, oh, you know, I'm making this podcast about talking about guns and safe storage. Oh, really?
32.		KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: Have you thought about how you store your firearms?
33.		DR CURT WEST: Well, I actually have learned so much, you know, through this podcast. Also

		<p>in terms of some of the barriers making those choices. Gun safes are expensive. If you move around, they're also very heavy and they're very difficult to move but there are all sorts of options that make safer storage more accessible whether that be different disabling devices or even just the simple act of storing your gun unloaded. I've learned quite a lot about what people see as barriers to safer storage as well.</p>
34.		<p>KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: I would say someone who doesn't own firearms or hasn't really used them. I wouldn't know before this podcast... like storing a gun unloaded, versus in a safe. You know, that's a good step in the right direction. So being able to talk about those things is really helpful.</p> <p>John, I have a question for you, which is back to having safe storage conversations with close friends. If a close friend approached you from a place of empathy about storing your firearm safely, and they were not a firearm owner themselves, would that conversation feel different to you?</p>
35.		<p>DR JOHN BRADLEY: Yeah. I don't think it's necessarily a different conversation. Right. Because we're coming at this question not from the point of view of proficiency with firearms, but rather of empathy and caring for another</p>

		<p>person. The person having the discussion might not know all about the safe storage techniques, but simply asking the question, have you thought about how to store these firearms safely can initiate the conversation. Boy, I don't know either. Let's look it up. Hey, let's tune in to this podcast and learn more.</p>
36.		<p>KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: That's helpful. I think the other part of it, it's a language issue and yeah, a knowledge issue, but it's also I think I am afraid sometimes because of the identity politics almost around firearm storage, that I will come off as being on the other side of some debate, and I don't want to put up a barrier between myself and a friend when I come into that conversation.</p>
37.		<p>DR JOHN BRADLEY: Well, you can very easily align by saying I am all about firearm safety.</p>
38.		<p>KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: We can all agree on that.</p>
39.		<p>DR JOHN BRADLEY: No matter where you are in the political spectrum I think you could say you're all about firearm safety.</p>
40.		<p>DR CURT WEST: This is for John. Is there anything that you would emphasize non firearm owners or people who are unfamiliar with firearms... what should they know if they want to have safe storage conversations?</p>

41.		<p>DR JOHN BRADLEY: I really think they should know that resources exist - that there is a spectrum of safe storage practices that could be employed and that this is not an all or none conversation. I think many people approach this as a potentially hot button topic, as an all or none that on one end people should not own firearms - particularly when in a crisis situation or if there are vulnerable people in the home to acknowledging the prevalence of crises that people experience and vulnerable people that live in all households and shift to more of a harm reduction approach.</p>
42.		<p>DR CURT WEST: I think it's very important to emphasize that even if you were perhaps the most anti-gun person there is, if you have a friend who owns guns you don't get that luxury of just saying, well, you should you shouldn't have that. And so being comfortable saying, oh, you have a gun. Okay. Can we talk about storing it safely? Or can you help me understand how you store it safely? Again, from a perspective of understanding let's create a safer environment for all of us. John had very rightly pointed out that sometimes the conversation is much more broad. It's about how safe is the whole house environment and the firearms are just one piece of it.</p>

		Okay. Kristina. So now do you feel ready, or do you feel more prepared to have safe storage conversations with your friends?
43.		KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: I think it will probably be uncomfortable at first, but I'll also say that discomfort isn't the worst thing in the world, especially if the potential benefit is so great. We're talking about the safety of our friends here.
44.		DR CURT WEST: Well, and I think you just highlighted the key point. It's about the connection that you have to this other person. The gun is incidental to that connection. It is one facet that you want to put in a safer place so that you can focus on the relationship with your friend and not be worried about them, not be worried about their safety. Let's just make a safe environment. Now, there are some resources that are helpful for people who are exploring the idea of having these conversations. Um, where can our listeners get those resources?
45.		KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: Yeah, we were able to track down some resources, and they'll be linked to this episode on the center for the Study of Traumatic Stress website. Many of them are focused on times of crisis or a particular risk, like children in the house, but

		they do provide some practical advice on navigating the conversations.
46.		DR CURT WEST: Excellent. Are there are there any key points that we haven't hit on already?
47.		DR JOHN BRADLEY: I think there are a couple key points to walk away with. One is that firearm ownership is more prevalent than we might have imagined. It is cloaked in secrecy for many people, and it is an uncomfortable conversation for many. So we ought to assume that our friend group consists of people who do own firearms. Maybe if only by tuning into this podcast or being part of it, we can spread the word that we're all invested in firearm safety - not only in times of crisis, but in terms of general practice, because we want like all firearm owners do, want to keep everyone safe.
48.		DR CURT WEST: Kristina?
49.		KRISTINA MEDVESCEK: I think the biggest takeaway for me is, I need to not get bogged down with the concerns about terminology and knowledge. I was really worried that you needed to go in being able to say, okay, this is the practical advice, and I need to be prepared fully to have this conversation. And that's just not true. It's most important to be approaching these conversations just out of care for your friends, which we all have. And then John,

		thank you for pointing this out: the fact finding, can be a process that you engage in together. I hope in this episode that we've been able to break down some of the barriers that many of us share in having these conversations.
50.		DR CURT WEST: Thank you, John and Kristina for sharing your perspectives. This has been such a wonderful conversation. We don't have to know exactly what to say. And you shouldn't worry about saying the wrong thing so long as you're coming from a perspective of caring – that perspective of connection. We should probably all realize that there are probably more gun owners in our life than we realize. But again that's not something you should feel nervous about or intimidated, we just need to engage those people where they are and hold onto that perspective of connection. I think we want to get everybody moving toward creating a safer environment where there's time and there's space between an impulsive thought and a fatal act.
51.		DR JOHN BRADLEY: Asking is proof that you care enough to have the conversation.
52.	Transition to a new beat	
53.		PRESENTER: You've been listening to Let's Talk about Your Guns.

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