

YOUTH

TEXAS GUN SENSE

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



★
TGS



INTRODUCTION

Living as a young person in Texas comes with the reality of living with the gun violence crisis that is plaguing our state. At Texas Gun Sense, we aim to empower young people through education.

This toolkit is designed to provide young Texans under the age of 18 with the tools and information required to be effective gun violence prevention advocates.

UNDERSTANDING THE GUN LAWS IN TEXAS

1 It is **not a requirement** that someone purchasing a gun pass a criminal background check.

2 A person carrying a concealed or openly carried handgun **does not have to have a permit** to do so.

!! *This means that they did not necessarily take a firearm training class or pass a criminal background check.*

!!! *An openly carried gun has to be carried in a holster, and the carrier **must be legally allowed** to carry a gun and 21 years of age or older.*

3 You have to be at least 18 years old to buy a long gun (e.g. a rifle) and 21 years old to buy a handgun in Texas.

!! *Despite having to be at least 18 years old to purchase a gun, **there are no laws against minors owning guns.** A minor can be given a gun as a gift if a parent or legal guardian gives their express written permission.*

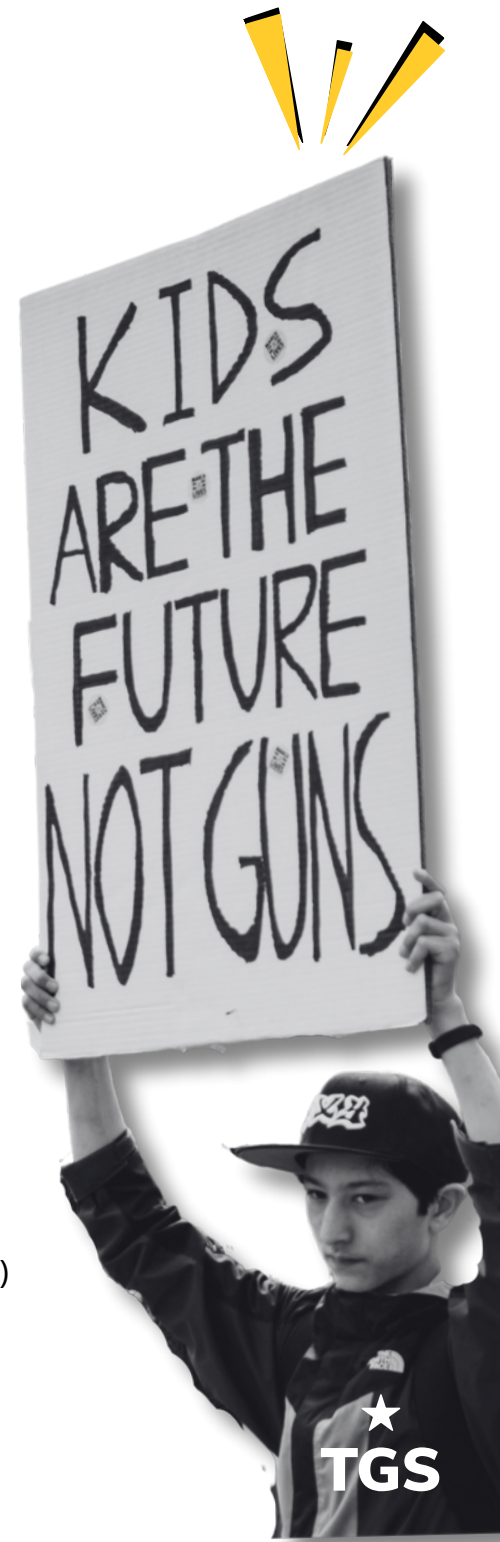
4 Guns are still restricted in **many places**, such as courtrooms, polling places, schools, the airport (beyond security checkpoints), and some private businesses.

5 The “Castle Doctrine” is the law that protects people who defend themselves using deadly force **while on their own property**.

!! *An extension of the “Castle Doctrine” is the “Stand Your Ground” law, which allows people to defend themselves using deadly force in a public place if they are allowed to be there and are not committing a crime.*

6 There are many states with which Texas has handgun license reciprocity agreements. Texas honors reciprocity laws of **44 other states**.

7 Texas does not have an Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) law, which would **allow the courts to temporarily remove weapons from people deemed a threat to themselves or others**. This is commonly known as a Red Flag Law.



40%

of Americans feel that their school is **not** safe from gun violence. (PBS NewsHour / NPR / Marist)

80%

of Americans favor policies that **prevent** people under the age of 21 from buying any type of gun. (CNN)

**NEARLY
100%**

of young people know at least one person who has been shot and wounded or killed. (Southern Poverty Law Center)

4,613

Texans died by gun violence in 2021, including 502 children and teens. (Johns Hopkins CGVS)

THE ROOT CAUSES OF GUN VIOLENCE

Lack of laws that keep guns out of the hands of people who could be a threat to themselves. There are laws that make access to guns easy. Common sense gun measures, such as red flag laws and background checks, could prevent mass shootings and other gun violence.

Income inequality, underfunded resources, and a lack of public housing.

A lack of access to safe schools and parks that remove important safe spaces for children can also contribute to a rise in gun violence in a community. (Gun Violence: UC Davis Researches Causes, Trends, Solutions)

Black Americans are far more likely to be impacted by gun violence at some point in their life than white Americans, which is largely due to policies that have created segregated neighborhoods that lack access to important resources.

Only 4% of violence against others is caused by symptoms of mental illness. Mental illness is a stronger risk factor for suicide using a firearm.

Domestic violence and/or sexual abuse has also been shown to increase the risk of gun violence. (The Truth About Mental Health & Gun Violence - NAMI California)

Exposure to prior gun violence has also been shown to increase the risk of future gun violence. (The Truth About Mental Health and Gun Violence - NAMI California)

SCHOOL SAFETY: KEY STATISTICS

Texas has had **2 of the 5 deadliest school shootings in U.S. history**. 10 were killed at Santa Fe High School on May 18, 2018 and 21 were killed at Robb Elementary on May 24, 2022. (K-12 School Shooting Database)

Mass shootings at schools make-up **>1%** of the violence on school campuses. (Everytown)

60% of school age shooters on school campuses were current or former students of the school. (Everytown)

**Individuals shooting firearms at schools typically have a connection to the school.*

76% of school shooters got their firearm from a parent's or a close relative's house. In nearly **half** of those instances, the gun was not securely stored in the home.

67% of gun violence incidents occurred on school campuses that had a majority of Black & brown students. (Everytown)

SOLUTIONS

SECURE FIREARM STORAGE LAWS

This would reduce the ease at which teenagers & kids can access guns in the home. Since so many of the guns brought to schools are from parents homes, these laws would **help reduce gun violence on school campuses.**



EXTREME RISK LAWS AND ERPOS

These would also help reduce gun violence on school campuses. The Secret Service found that **kids who brought guns to school almost always had previously exhibited violent behavior** or there were instances in which **the shooter was a danger to themselves or others.** These laws would prevent students who have a history of troubling behavior from legally buying weapons & bringing them onto school campuses.

RAISING THE AGE

TO PURCHASE SEMI-AUTOMATIC WEAPONS

In the Robb Elementary and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shootings, the shooters had legally bought the semi-automatic weapons they used. They were both only 18 years old, and raising the age to purchase these weapons could have prevented these tragedies.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

This would help reduce gun violence in schools. When schools have access to resources for students, students are less likely to result to violence on school grounds.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION



As young people, your voices are powerful tools for change in the fight to prevent gun violence.

RELATIONAL ORGANIZING

Talking to the people in your life about the need for gun safety reform is one of the most important things you can do. Change happens at every level, and personal conversations are an important part of the culture change we need to see. Dialogue can increase awareness and support for gun safety measures. In any situation that requires effective outreach, a familiar voice is more likely to encourage action.

MOBILIZING YOUR PEERS

Seek out **like-minded peers and organizations** to collaborate with! Building a coalition of impassioned people and organizations will amplify your impact.



TIPS FOR TALKING ABOUT GUN VIOLENCE WITH OTHERS

When discussing the sensitive topic of gun violence with others, it's important to **approach the subject with empathy, knowledge, and active listening**. Dialogue with people in your life is one of the most effective means of reaching common ground. Here are some tips for productive conversations:



- 1** EMPATHIZE and understand that others may have **different perspectives** and experiences with guns.
- 2** FIND COMMON GROUND. Begin by finding areas of **shared concerns** to create a more positive dialogue.
- 3** PRACTICE ACTIVE LISTENING by giving the speaker your full attention and **staying engaged** in the conversation.
- 4** STAY CALM AND RESPECTFUL by maintaining composure and **avoiding personal attacks**.
- 5** STICK TO THE FACTS by basing your arguments on data and evidence to **avoid spreading misinformation**.
- 6** OFFER SOLUTIONS to the gun violence crisis instead of focusing solely on the failures that have led us to where we are now.
- 7** SHARE **personal stories** related to gun violence and advocacy, if appropriate.
- 8** KNOW WHEN TO WALK AWAY if a conversation becomes hostile or unproductive.
- 9** BE PATIENT! Changing attitudes on gun violence **takes time**. Regardless of the result of the conversation, it is up to you to continue advocating for what you believe in.

Young Black males ages **15-34** make up **2% of the population** but accounted for **1/4 of all gun homicide deaths** in 2021.

Hispanic/Latino males aged 15-34 were **2X** as likely to die by firearm homicide than their white counterparts.

In 2020, Texas youth died by suicide with a firearm **more than 50%** of the time. (Texas Suicide Prevention Collaborative)

GET TO KNOW THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE

OVERVIEW

The Texas Legislature consists of 31 Senate members and 150 House members, led by the Speaker of the House, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Governor. The Legislature convenes for 140 days every 2 years with 30-day special sessions that can only be called by the Governor.

LEGISLATION

The bill filing deadline has passed this session; bills are now being referred to different committees, after which a hearing will be called to discuss the bill and get input from the public. For a bill to pass, it has to go through both chambers before reaching the Governor's desk.

COMMITTEES

- The [House Select Committee on Community Safety](#) heard most gun-related bills during the 88th legislative session.
- The [Youth Health and Safety Select Committee](#) heard several school safety bills.
- In the Senate, gun-related legislation was often referred to the [State Affairs Committee](#).

GIVING PUBLIC TESTIMONY

During committee hearings on bills, the public has the opportunity to register a position on a bill and provide testimony in support or opposition to a piece of legislation. This is one of the most vital opportunities to have your voice heard on bills that have a chance of passage. Depending on the hearing, you will get 1-3 minutes to speak and will need to prepare accordingly. Committee hearings are often posted 48 hours in advance. View the House Committees [schedule](#) and the Senate Committees [schedule](#) for more information.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: SOCIAL MEDIA ADVOCACY

Social media can be **a powerful tool for youth advocates** calling for greater gun safety. By thoughtfully engaging on platforms like Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and others, young advocates can raise awareness, inspire action, and enact real change in their communities.



- 1** SHARE facts, **statistics and news related to gun violence impacting youth**. Cite unbiased sources and include links for followers to learn more.
- 2** REACH OUT to other youth groups that are active on social media to form partnerships and **collaborate to spread awareness**.
- 3** CREATE a platform for **diverse youth voices advocating for increased gun safety**. Use your platform to feature their advocacy posts, art, and writing.
- 4** PROMOTE **local community safety events and ways to get involved**. Provide dates, times, locations for others to join.
- 5** HAVE RESPECTFUL DIALOGUES even with those who disagree with you. Find common ground and work from there.
- 6** SUGGEST constructive ways **to contact local officials** about community safety priorities and proposals.
- 7** SHARE resources **for self-care** when conversations get overwhelming or traumatic.
- 8** RECOGNIZE different levels of engagement. Meet people where they are at. Small steps matter too.
- 9** KEEP AT IT! Creating lasting change requires sustained, long-term effort.

ENGAGING DECISION MAKERS

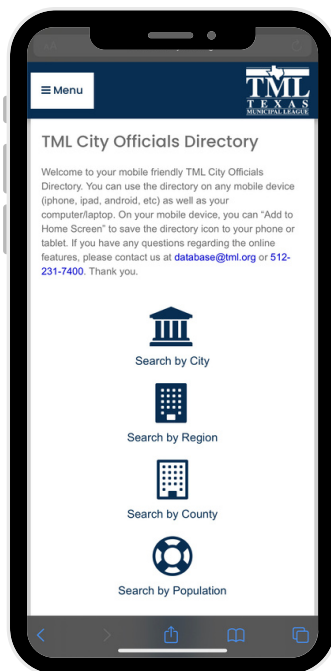


Your lawmakers and school officials **work FOR YOU** and they need to hear from their constituents on the importance of gun safety.

CALLING AND EMAILING LEGISLATORS

Both are effective ways to make your voice heard. You can also request in-person meetings with your representatives to establish relationships and have longer discussions.

**In all communications with legislative offices, include your name, contact info, and full address*



FIND YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

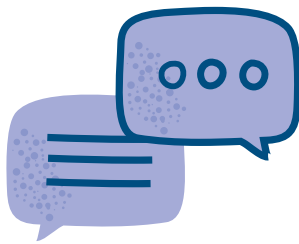
Use the [Texas Municipal League](#) and the [Who Represents Me](#) search tools to find your local representatives. This way you can have access to contact info for their respective offices.

CREATING AND SIGNING PETITIONS

Calling for those in power to take action on gun violence prevention, you can mobilize your community to display solidarity and demand action. Petitions help to demonstrate public support for common sense gun safety measures.

COMMUNITY-BASED WORK

ORGANIZE COMMUNITY EVENTS/RALLIES



These events provide an opportunity to share personal stories, facts, and advocate for local policy changes. Leave attendees with a call to action relevant to your community.

CONTACT LOCAL MEDIA OUTLETS

You can pitch stories and write Letters to the Editor (LTEs) about gun violence prevention. By sharing your perspective, you can reach a broader audience and spark public dialogue about the urgent need for effective gun safety measures.



SELF-CARE TIPS

★ **BALANCING ADVOCACY WITH SCHOOL AND WORK RESPONSIBILITIES:**

Finding an equilibrium between advocacy and the demands of school or work can be a delicate tightrope act. Here are a few tips!



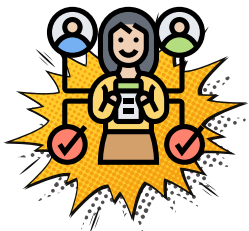
EFFECTIVE TIME MANAGEMENT

Creating a well-structured schedule that allocates specific times for work, school, and advocacy is one step you can take.



SET ACHIEVABLE GOALS & DEADLINES

Break down larger tasks into smaller, manageable goals that can be accomplished by a deadline. This can ensure that you have a sense of progress.



AVOID OVERCOMMITTING AT ALL COSTS!

Know your limits and delegate some tasks to others so that workload and responsibilities are evenly distributed.



COMMUNICATE HONESTLY

With your teachers, professors, and employers. You can discuss potential ways to integrate your efforts and explore flexible arrangements, such as project choices, alternative assignments, or adjusted work hours.

SELF-CARE TIPS (PT.2)

COMPASSION FATIGUE ✨

Compassion fatigue oftentimes occurs when the demands of advocating for others takes a toll on your mental health and emotional well being. Here are some strategies to cope!

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Be self-aware. Understand the signs and symptoms of experiencing compassion fatigue such as feeling *emotionally drained, being easily irritated, and perceiving hopelessness* in your worldview. Also, be aware of any physical symptoms, like sleep and appetite disturbances.



Learn to say NO. Recognize your limits and don't hesitate to say no when you feel overburdened and want to avoid overcommitting. It's perfectly okay to decline requests to dodge spreading yourself too thin.



Celebrate progress! Acknowledge and celebrate the impact you've made in your community through your advocacy work. Even small victories can make a huge difference in the context of larger goals.



Take breaks when you need to. Stepping back to recharge doesn't diminish your commitment, it allows you to come back stronger and thrive emotionally.



Seek help when going through hard times. There is help available for when you are in crisis. You can call or text the suicide lifeline at 988 or join a support group through the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND WEBSITES

ARTICLES

- [Washington Post](#) article about teenagers buying ghost guns online
- [Essay](#) about not naming school shooters in the media
- [Washington Post](#) article summarizing the results of a poll on gun violence in America
- [Research](#) highlighting the connections between firearm accessibility and higher suicide rates
- [Washington Post](#) article that breaks down myths surrounding gun violence

YOUTH-LED ORGANIZATIONS

- [March For Our Lives](#) is entirely youth led and has chapters in Austin, Dallas, and Houston
- [Students Demand Action](#) is Everytown's youth led initiative; their chapters are primarily high school chapters
- [Team ENOUGH](#) is Brady's youth led initiative
- [Gen-Z for Change](#) – leverages the power of social media to drive progressive change

BOOKS

- Another Day in the Death of America: A Chronicle of 10 Short Lives by Gary Younge
 - ABOUT: Younge picked a random day in 2013 and chronicled the lives of boys aged 9-19, all who were shot and killed on that day
- From a Taller Tower: The Rise of the American Mass Shooter by Seamus McGraw
 - ABOUT: McGraw explores the American mindset on guns, mental illness, and mass shooting to understand how mass shooting continue to happen
- Glimmer of Hope: How Tragedy Sparked a Movement by the MFOL founders
 - ABOUT: The founders of MFOL examine how they felt during the mass shooting at their high school and how they have carried their pain and grief with them while fighting for an end to gun violence

WEBSITES

- For state-specific information and further inquiries, reach out to us: [Texas Gun Sense](#)
- For more statistics: the [Brady United](#) website
- This [Johns Hopkins](#) report analyzes data and statistics from U.S. gun violence in 2021
- Information on gun violence from the [American Psychological Association](#)

JOIN THE FIGHT WITH TEXAS GUN SENSE

YOUR VOICE MATTERS IN THIS MOVEMENT

Your perspective and passion are crucial assets in this movement. Use your voice to help us call for common sense gun laws in Texas. We encourage you to stay engaged with us at txgunsense.org.

EDUCATE AND EMPOWER OTHERS

Share your knowledge to mobilize your peers and inspire them to join you in your advocacy. Building partnerships will amplify your collective impact. Together, we're working towards a state that is free from gun violence.

BE RESILIENT

Achieving change in Texas will be a long process that requires patience and resilience. Not every effort will yield immediate results, but every initiative contributes to long-term change and a safer Texas.



WWW.TXGUNSENSE.ORG

