

Important Considerations for Carrying a Gun

This article is a supplement to Staying Alive: How to Act Fast and Survive Deadly Encounters from Barron's Education Series and available at www.SafeHavensInternational.org. For more information See Chapter Nine ("In Self Defense: Is it logical for you to carry a gun?") from Staying Alive.

Disclaimer

The information presented in this book is designed to provide general background for the reduction of danger on an interpersonal level and group settings. Readers should be aware that to use the skills and concepts in this book, they should also seek out information from other sources and in some cases expert advice, including legal counsel, public safety agencies, risk management, emergency management personnel, supervisors, co-workers, family members, etc. as applicable to the situation at hand.

The strategies discussed in this book are for use in the context of a holistic approach including the appropriate training, equipment, preparation and in some cases licensing or certification required by the implementation of certain measures, especially those that may have legal or life-safety implications. With this in mind, this book should be treated as an informational guide and a supplement to the existing body of knowledge on the topic of survival as well as the auxiliary fields of personal safety and organizational preparedness.

To the best of our knowledge this book is based on current research, numerous interviews and the expertise of our review team and colleagues, and the authors have made a reasonable effort to verify the authenticity and currency of the information provided in this book. At the same time, this book discusses many current events with on-going developments, investigations and legal proceedings. Finally, methods of implementing procedures, programs and strategies outlined in this book are obviously beyond the control of the authors. Therefore, the authors, editors, reviewers, the publisher and Safe Havens International Inc. assume no liability for the application of any concepts described in this book or any accident, injury, loss or damage arising from the use of this information.

Carrying a gun for protection requires thoughtful consideration and appropriate preparation.

Carrying a gun involves a number of responsibilities. One does not simply walk into a store and buy a gun and become instantly protected. In order to

properly and safely carry a gun, there are many factors to thoughtfully consider, including legality, liability, the type of gun and ammunition, safe storage and carry as well as training and practice. There are a number of important questions you should ask yourself before buying any type of self-defense equipment. Here are just a few of those questions:

- What type of weapon is practical and safe for you to carry?
- What type of ammunition will provide adequate protection while not creating increased risks for others?
- How will you safely store and transport the weapon?
- How will you carry the weapon effectively and safely?
- What kind of training should you have and how often should you train?
- What are the legality concerns related to carrying the weapon?
- What type of liability insurance coverage should you have in relation to the use of a weapon?
- Are you prepared for the legal and moral implications of using the weapon?

If you decide that it is appropriate for you to carry a gun, consider each of these questions and do the appropriate research. As with any security technology, the biggest factor in the success of the equipment is the level of preparation, training and confidence of the user. As countless news stories and the killing of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent trial of George Zimmerman demonstrated, carrying a firearm can have complex repercussions.

One of the most important considerations from the questions above is the safe storage of any weapons that are not actively in use. Owning a gun entails a significant responsibility for safety. This means not only safe handling of the weapon and ammunition but storage as well. There have even been cases where children have accidentally set off ammunition by tapping on the primer. These risks are even higher if there are children in the area where the weapon will be carried or stored, or if the area is frequented by adults who are irresponsible due to mental capacity or character. An example would be if you were caring for a family member who has Alzheimer's or has a history of being careless. Though accidental deaths involving firearms have declined and are relatively rare, even well behaved children can allow curiosity to overcome parental warnings relating to firearms safety. As with the other considerations we have discussed, be sure to conduct research and make a well-informed decision.

Legality

If you decide that it is appropriate for you to carry a gun, the next step is to make sure that you can legally own and carry a firearm. Each state has its own laws, which are complex and vary widely from one region to another. Careful research is required, especially if you intend to carry a firearm outside of your residence. A good resource for more information is <http://www.handgunlaw.us/>. This site includes information on gun permits for each state, including details on how to apply, the costs associated with the application, and whether a state's permit is reciprocated by another state. At the time of this writing, there is no national permit.

Of course, the legalities of carrying a gun and using a gun are two different matters. As the trial of George Zimmerman demonstrated, taking a human life with a firearm can be a complex matter. This incident also demonstrates how diverse and intense people's reactions to the use of a firearm to take a human life can be. Regardless of your feelings regarding this tragedy the case demonstrates that killing another human being is not a simple matter.

Another factor that should be considered is whether your work situation may make it impractical to carry a firearm to and from the job site. For example, there have been instances of employees being terminated for having a firearm in their vehicle while on their employer's property. A common example of this is school employees who arm themselves. We have had clients relate incidents where school employees have been fired and, in at least one case, criminally charged when police canines alerted on a firearm in their vehicle and a gun was recovered while it was parked on school property.

The next consideration is what type of permit you will apply for. In some states, there is differentiation between an owner's permit and a permit for a carrying a concealed weapon (CCW). State law and your specific needs will determine this. Be sure that you investigate what rights and limitations there are for your state's permits before purchasing or carrying a gun.

Liability Insurance

Another consideration for those who plan to carry a gun is liability insurance. Should you use your gun in self-defense, you could be subject to criminal and civil charges, and this can be expensive. Liability insurance can help with civil

liability but will not typically cover the costs associated with defense of a criminal charge. We would advise anyone who is forced to use a gun to shoot an aggressor to contact a qualified attorney quickly. Due to the complex nature of our legal system, a person who has legitimately used a gun for self-defense can quickly find themselves in civil court or charged a crime. As with any other serious legal matter, competent legal counsel can be helpful in protecting your rights.

We need to point out that this section is not intended as a replacement for competent legal advice. None of the co-authors are attorneys, and we are not legal experts. Anyone who wants to carry a firearm should consider seeking legal advice before obtaining, carrying, or using a gun for self-defense.

Weapon Types

Selecting the right type of firearm for self-defense requires careful consideration. This will depend on a variety of factors, like whether or not they intend to carry the weapon outside the home or place of work, the physical stature of the person, the size of their hands, their familiarity with firearms, and a variety of other factors. This article also does not address the options of alternatives to carrying a gun, such as less than lethal weapons like pepper spray and other methods of self defense such as martial arts. More discussion on those topics is included in Chapter Nine of *Staying Alive*.

If you are not well versed on firearms, you should identify someone who can help you properly select a firearm before purchasing one. Do not assume that someone who owns a number of firearms is well suited to advise you. Certified firearms instructors who are experienced in teaching defensive firearms use can be an excellent resource for people who do not have much experience with firearms. This is because they have taught others how to safely handle and use firearms. This experience helps them understand how challenging it can be to learn to operate a gun effectively.

Ammunition

After choosing a gun, you will need to consider the type of ammunition you will need. This will depend heavily on what caliber of gun you have chosen. Caliber designations can be confusing at times, and it is extremely important to

use the proper ammunition for your firearm. Using an incorrect type or caliber of ammunition can result in serious injury or even death. Some types of ammunition are more prone to malfunction in semi-automatic firearms. Other types can over-penetrate walls or other barriers, increasing the risk to innocent bystanders, like family members in your home. There are a variety of types of ammunition made specifically for self-defense. This is another area where the advice of experts can be helpful. As with the purchase of a firearm, research ammunition types with care.

Safe Storage

Owning a gun entails a significant responsibility for safety. This means not only safe handling but storage as well. Safe storage requires not only the security of the weapon but of ammunition. There have even been cases where children have accidentally set off ammunition by tapping on the primer. These risks are even higher if there are children in the area where the weapon will be carried or stored, or if the area is frequented by adults who are irresponsible due to mental capacity or character. An example would be if you are caring for a family member who has Alzheimer's or has a history of being careless. Though accidental deaths involving firearms have declined and are relatively rare, even well-behaved children can allow curiosity to overcome parental warnings relating to firearms safety (Brock, 2013). As with the other considerations we have discussed, be sure to conduct research and make a well-informed decision.

Carrying a Firearm

Before you carry a firearm, check with your state's applicable laws as there may be places you cannot carry a weapon, whether concealed or not. In many states, laws prohibit carrying guns in hospitals, schools, and government buildings. Certain businesses may post 'no carrying' signs. Responsible gun ownership means acknowledging these signs and acquiescing to the wishes of the organizations that post them. While carrying a firearm in an open manner can have a deterrent effect, there are some negative outcomes that can result from this practice. The most common problem is that people will see the weapon, become alarmed, and call 911 to report that someone has a gun. Perhaps a more significant concern involves the loss of surprise that carrying a

firearm in plain sight entails. There is also the concern that open carry could make it more likely that a criminal will try to take your firearm from you.

Concealed carry means that the presence of the weapon is kept from view of others. People usually choose this option because they want to avoid alarming others, or they do not want criminals to know they are carrying a firearm. Concealed carry can however, be an impediment to drawing the weapon when needed. Like firearms, concealed carry holsters should be selected with considerable care.

Experts recommend that you not carry a gun in your waistband, belt, or pocket because this increases the likelihood that the weapon will be dropped or taken from you in a scuffle or you will accidentally discharge the weapon while drawing it. You should use a holster chosen based upon your decision of how to carry a weapon. You should also take into consideration where you spend most of your time. If this is in a car or in an office, then perhaps a shoulder holster should be considered. Carrying a gun on your hip can interfere with sitting in a vehicle or office chair. If you spend a lot of time wearing shorts or a swimsuit, then perhaps you should consider a fast-action gun bag, which is a duffel bag or fanny pack that has been modified to safely carry a pistol.

There is specialty clothing that can help hide the shape of the gun, and allows you to carry while wearing a suit or other business attire. There are a variety of specialized concealed carry holsters that fit into ordinary clothing as well as undergarments, including options designed specifically for women. There are also holsters available that make it more difficult for an attacker to grab the weapon from the holster.

As with all aspects of carrying a gun, take time to study what works best for you. Talk to others who carry guns. Gather adequate information so you can to make an informed decision. Whatever holster you decide on, you will need to practice with it.

What Kind of Training Should You Receive?

There are many sources of quality firearms training, including local law enforcement agencies, and instructors certified by the National Rifle Association. There are also several highly regarded advanced firearms training centers that specialize in teaching people how to safely and effectively

handle, carry, and use firearms for defensive purposes. As one example, Gunsite Academy in Paulden, Arizona has an excellent reputation and offers a variety of defensive firearms training programs for civilian, law enforcement and military personnel.

Training should also be approached in a thoughtful, thorough manner. According to Tom Givens, a writer for Concealed Carry Magazine, one way to do this is to remember the five 'A's of learning how to use a gun: Acceptance, Awareness, Avoidance, Action, and Aftermath (Givens, 2013).

Acceptance is the opposite of denial. When something bad happens, thinking "How can this be happening?" wastes time and can endanger your life. To be effective in any crisis, especially when it involves a gun, you have to train yourself to skip denial and deal with the situation as it is. The Bureau of Justice Statistics states that 5.8 million crimes involving murder, aggravated assault, robbery, and rape were committed in 2011 (Givens, 2013). As mentioned previously, the statistical likelihood of being victimized in certain ways varies by region. At the same time, we have seen countless examples of horrific crimes of violence in some of the nation's most peaceful communities.

Awareness is a difficult practice to follow in today's world. The proliferation of distractions in the form of iPods, smartphones, and other mobile devices all vie for our attention. The result is an ever more distracted society that pays less and less attention to the world around us. One example of this effect is a viral video which depicts a woman walking through a mall, texting on her phone. Not paying attention to her surroundings, she walked right into a fountain, falling into the water.

Avoidance includes steps to avoid dangerous situations. Having a gun should not mean that you put yourself in dangerous situations because of the feeling of security that a firearm can provide. Remember that you will survive one hundred percent of the situations you do not get into (Givens, 2013). If you would normally avoid a specific location if you were not carrying a gun, do not go into that place with a gun. A gun is a useful tool to help you survive bad situations, but it does not guarantee that you will not be attacked.

Action can be difficult for anyone who has not experienced a crisis before. Sometimes, despite your best efforts, bad things will happen in your vicinity. Be prepared to act, and act fast. This requires that you learn how to present your weapon quickly, bringing the gun out of its holster and into a position

where it can be used effectively. This also includes retrieving it quickly from safe storage at home. You should also be able to quickly reload your weapon and perform basic remedial action – clearing a malfunction - should your weapon jam.

Aftermath is a concept that many people take for granted. If you are involved in a shooting, you may be detained as the incident is investigated. Be prepared to defend yourself legally, just as you have physically. As in the extreme example of Jeffrey at the beginning of this chapter, there is also an emotional price to pay for shooting someone. For a person with a normal range of emotions, the violent act of shooting or killing someone is a life-changing event. Be prepared to have a mental health professional help you deal with the trauma.

Training is not just a one-time event. If you decide to carry a gun, you should be prepared to take the time to practice periodically. Initially, as you are learning to shoot, you should consider practicing more frequently. As you become familiar with your weapon, you can learn more advanced tactical concepts, such as firing from different positions and later, adding speed drills to get better at presenting your weapon and getting on target more rapidly.

LTC David Grossman's book, *On Combat*, is an excellent resource for this decision. This book will help you gain a better understanding of what to expect if you find yourself in a situation where someone is trying to kill you and there is little time to make the decision to use deadly force (Grossman, 2011).

As a final caution, having a gun can sometimes subconsciously influence a person to put themselves in dangerous situations because of the feeling of security that a firearm can provide. For example, do not walk down a dark alley in a high-crime area that you would normally avoid if you were not carrying a gun. Avoid altercations and dangerous individuals just like you would as if you were unarmed. A gun is a useful tool to help you survive bad situations, but it does not guarantee that you will not be attacked. Remember that you will survive one hundred percent of the situations you do not get into (Givens, 2013).

For more discussion on the above questions and suggestions on how to answer them, read the book [Staying Alive](#).

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