

I am a psychologist and I work with a fair number of adolescents. I'm sure all of us can remember moments in our adolescence when we acted on an impulse that we later regretted. The same is true today for many adolescents, although the outcomes are sometimes fatal. Suicide is now the leading cause of death in adolescence—higher than traffic fatalities. Fortunately, education about the risks of drinking and driving has had a major impact on teens' choices. The same cannot be said for the use of guns.

As guns have become more available, the number of adolescent suicides using a gun have also increased. A teen with a loaded gun in the home who has depression is a suicide note away from pulling the trigger. It's a real risk, especially in rural areas, where limited access to a mental health professional along with shaming messages about seeking out mental health treatment, exist.

The fact that a teen can go to a gun show and purchase a gun without a background check only adds fuel to the fire. We don't let teens drive a car without a license and passing a driving test, but we do allow them to buy a gun from a private dealer without a background check.

I believe it is the duty of every citizen to realize that common sense dictates that you don't put a loaded gun in the hands of a teenager who purchases a weapon at a gun show without a background check. It's also true that you don't put one in the hands of a convicted felon or a person with serious mental illness without a background check. The fact that 83% of Oregonians agree indicates that it is a relatively small minority, aided and abetted by national organizations like the NRA, holds the rest of us hostage to their narrow definition of second amendment rights.

Did our founding fathers ever imagine a time when common sense would be upended by the constitution? I don't think they would have imagined a time when gun rights trumpeted common sense. You don't give a depressed teenager, a convicted felon or a seriously mentally ill adult a gun without a background check. So let's lower the rate of teen suicides by limiting access to weapons through gun shows that sell weapons without background checks. It's tragic when a teen uses a weapon in the house owned by their father or other family member, it's a double tragedy for both the family and the state of Oregon when the gun was purchased from a private dealer at a gun show without a background check.

Sincerely,

John McManus, Ph.D.