

Guns, more guns: What should the grown-ups do?

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Where were the parents? we ask when a kid commits a crime. In the case of the first-grader in Mount Morris, Michigan, who brought a gun to school and shot classmate Kayla Rolland to death on February 29, we know where the parents were: the mother was pursuing a drug habit and the father was in jail. The other adults in his life were thieves and drug dealers. The boy's "home" at the time was a crackhouse, where he didn't even have a bed. He lived amid drug deals, in a place where guns were left lying about. This schoolroom shooting was a catastrophe waiting to happen, and we can certainly point the finger at the parents.

But there were other people who also were not doing their jobs. Such as gun manufacturers who make guns that a six-year-old (or even a three-year-old) can shoot. A society that puts safety caps on medicines and poisons to prevent children from accidentally ingesting dangerous substances, a society that regularly recalls dangerous toys and hazardous cribs, still permits the manufacturing of lethal weapons that any child can fire. The technology exists—in the form of combination locks or finger-print identification codes—to restrict the firing of a gun to the rightful owner. The U.S. has yet to impose such requirements—measures that would do something to prevent deaths like Kayla Rolland's.

Opponents of gun control will point out that such precautions mean nothing if people are careless or willfully negligent. And so the debate over gun control returns to the familiar stalemate: Is the problem guns or is the problem people?

The case of a six-year-old murderer should help us get past that sterile debate. We can't legislate against carelessness and negligence, but we can give the Kayla Rollands some better odds of surviving in a society awash in guns.

Besides underscoring the need for trigger locks, the Michigan shooting points to the significance of "safe storage" laws, which hold gun owners responsible when their weapons are used by children to hurt themselves or someone else. Fifteen states

have such laws (Michigan does not), and a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* has found that they help reduce unintentional deaths by firearms.

Legislating these gun controls and others won't solve the severe social problems like those evident in Mount Morris, but they can provide a few more safeguards. The staggering number of children who die each year in the U.S. from firearms—about 5,000 (whereas the numbers in Germany and Great Britain are well below 100)—tells us that a number of things are desperately awry. The grown-ups should step in and do something.