

because of a lack of adult supervision and attention. The kids are looking for attention," Burns said.

Burns said that her oldest boy, 14-year-old Kevin, is her only child who has been

allowed to use a hunting rifle thus far. He has used one for small game hunting and target practice at a nearby hunting club — with adult supervision at all times.

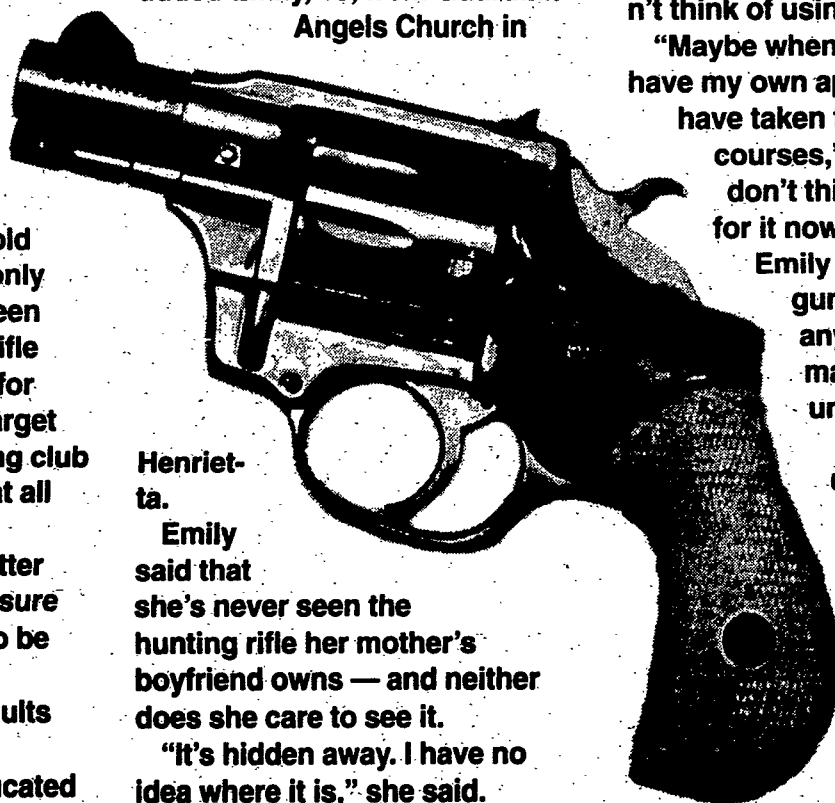
Then again, Jennifer Knitter and Emily Arden aren't so sure it's a good idea for teens to be handling guns in any circumstance — even if adults are present.

"I don't think they're educated enough or mature enough," said Jennifer, 18, from Sacred Heart Cathedral. Jennifer, a student at St. John Fisher College,

belonged to the former Teens for Peace, a diocesan group that spoke out against violence in the Rochester area.

"I really don't think teens should use guns at all,"

added Emily, 15, from Guardian Angels Church in



Henrietta.

Emily said that she's never seen the hunting rifle her mother's boyfriend owns — and neither does she care to see it.

"It's hidden away. I have no idea where it is," she said.

Emily added that some of her friends have access to guns in their homes, in case of an intruder's attack. However, she said, the friends don't seem very anxious to get their hands on the weapons.

"They know how to use the guns, but they still don't want to. They just don't like the fact that they could kill people," Emily remarked.

Sasha said that even if a gun were available to her, she wouldn't think of using it.

"Maybe when I'm older and have my own apartment, and have taken the proper safety courses," Sasha said. "I don't think I'd be ready for it now."

Emily said that using a gun in her home at any time would make her uncomfortable.

"I could understand a gun being used for hunting. But if you have a gun in your house, under the pillow, that's a little freaky," Emily said.

with their three sons.

"As parents, you teach them from Day One that guns are not toys," said Burns, from St. Columba/St. Patrick Parish in Caledonia and Mumford. She added that the guns in their home are kept locked up.

Burns speculated that the recent schoolyard slayings may have been averted if adults had been more involved in the teens' lives — with both gun issues and emotional issues.

"A lot of these shootings are

Coming next week: Flashing your flesh

Issue is complex, police official says

"Just the facts, ma'am" is a famous line from "Dragnet," a popular TV police show in the 1950s and 1960s. Sgt. Joe Friday used it in interviews when he investigated crimes.

Just the facts, however, don't explain why teens commit violent acts with guns, said Commander Annmarie Van Son of the Rochester Police Department.

"Focusing on the act itself misses the big picture," Van Son remarked. She oversees the department's Special Services Division, which includes Youth Services.

Van Son said she's unsure if creating stricter gun control laws will automatically cut down on teen gun violence. One way or another, she maintained, teens will find ways to obtain guns if they want to commit violent acts.

"Outlawing guns isn't going to work," she said.

A better preventive measure, she feels, is to address the circumstances that may lead teens to commit violent acts. First and foremost, she said, adults must take greater responsibility.

"We talk about how kids shouldn't watch violence on TV. As adults, it's easy for us to point at the kids. Well, who produces violence on TV? Adults," she said emphatically. "How do we get adults to do what they're supposed to do, so they don't create these kids?"

She added that children who come from abusive and negligent

households are also more likely to become violent.

"There are so many things we teach children that could lead them to do harm," Van Son said.

And the potential for this kind of violence appears to be intensifying. According to figures from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, juvenile arrests for violent crimes (murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault) rose by 60 percent in this country between 1987 and 1996.

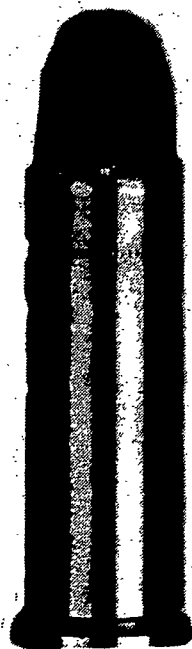
"I think people are more likely to shoot at each other than they used to be," Van Son said. "Undoubtedly, more people are arming themselves." She noted that this trend applies to both youths and adults.

Van Son said that school officials, as well as police officers, should closely monitor teens' emotional states, to assure the youths don't react to their frustrations with guns.

"You have to pay attention to detail. Adults who are in contact with students should be aware of a student who is depressed or distressed," Van Son said. "We need to make sure we're listening to those kids."

She said that her department also warns the teens themselves that they'll be held accountable for their actions.

"We are becoming, as a police department, less tolerant of violence. We vigorously investigate violent crimes and acts. With young people, we give them a 'heads-up' that we're coming if anything like that happens," Van Son said. "We take a hard look at students who have threatened others."



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