



CSTS podcast series episode 107: **PARTNERS IN SAFETY**

1.	NOTES	AUDIO
2.		JULIE STILL: My husband, Seth, and I have been married for 19 years, and we have three children.
3.		JULIE STILL: Seth and I are both born and raised Mississippi. We met at Mississippi State University and we never left.
4.		JULIE STILL: Seth is the wing chaplain in the Air National Guard. He joined in 2010.
5.		JULIE STILL: When he first approached me about joining the military, I was terrified. I didn't know anything about it except that he was going to probably deploy and be gone. And that was scary to me.
6.		JULIE STILL: Of course, with the fear is also a great pride. I love that Seth has a huge heart. I know that he truly felt called. As his wife, that makes me proud that he feels the calling and wants to help people.
7.	Transition to new beat	
8.		JULIE STILL: Seth was deployed for seven months.



9.		JULIE STILL: I didn't know what to expect when he returned. I knew that it was going to take time to adjust to him being home but I didn't expect that much of a change.
10.		JULIE STILL: He was still Seth, obviously. But just a little more guarded, and he was a tad angrier than before he left.
11.	Transition to new beat	
12.		JULIE STILL: When we first got married, I knew that Seth had a gun, but I didn't see it as any kind of threat at that point.
13.		JULIE STILL: The first time that I saw the gun as a direct threat to our family was after Seth returned. And he shared with me that he was having suicidal thoughts. I was terrified.
14.		JULIE STILL: I just remember coming home from a girl's night and pulling up to our cute little yellow house and standing at the step and not wanting to go inside. I remember having to force myself up the steps. I just had a bad feeling that he wasn't okay and I was afraid to go inside.
15.		JULIE STILL: The next day I decided to get the gun out of the house. I found the gun and I did something with it. I can't remember if I hid it or if I gave it to a friend.
16.		JULIE STILL: It was a relief to get the gun out of the house, of course. But it was sad and scary at the same time.
17.	Transition to new beat	



18.		<p>DR WEST: Julie Still is a spouse in a gun-owning household. Four in ten American households own guns. Yet she and her husband never talked about whether those guns were stored safely or not. Her willingness to initiate a tough conversation about the firearms in their home may have saved her husband's life.</p>
19.		<p>JULIE STILL: It took a long time before we really had a real conversation where we were on the same page about the gun. It took a lot of learning to communicate about how he was doing. He wasn't very he went in super open maybe with how he was feeling. And I was afraid to ask or afraid to maybe hear what he had to say.</p>
20.		<p>DR WEST: I'm Dr James West: Associate Professor of Psychiatry and a Scientist at the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. Today, in Let's Talk About Your Guns we'll hear about what it took for Julie Still to have a conversation about safe storage with her husband.</p> <p>We'll also talk to Dr. Leanne Knoblauch. She'll offer guidance for spouses who want to talk about firearm safety but aren't sure how to do it.</p>
21.		<p>DR WEST: Firearm safety in the home is built around five principles. Weapons should be stored unloaded. They should be taken apart or stored with a disabling device engaged. They should be stored in locked containers, and ammunition should be stored in a separate locked container. Finally,</p>



		firearm safety in the home involves having a plan for storing guns in an alternate location during times of crisis.
22.		DR WEST: Conversations about firearm safety can seem challenging. It's my hope that after listening to this podcast, you'll feel empowered to initiate a dialogue with your spouse about gun safety in a way that makes you both feel heard.
23.		DR WEST: Because this podcast isn't about whether you are for or against firearms. It's about how to have open and honest conversations about safe storage. Conversations that may save a life. <i>So now... Let's Talk about Your Guns.</i>
24.	Transition to new beat	
25.		DR WEST: Julie, we're so grateful to you for sharing your story. I do want to take a moment and tell our listeners that your husband Seth was our guest in the previous episode and that this is a continuation of that story. To start out can you tell me about what familiarity you had with guns and safety growing up?
26.		JULIE STILL: I grew up in a family we were and still are very big white tailed deer hunters. So I grew up around hunting rifles and, you know. My dad taught me gun safety. That was very important. And then we taught our children gun safety, you know, with rifles. Growing up, my mom kept a handgun in her car under her seat. And my dad, I'm sure he had one, but I don't think we really had them in the house.



27.		DR WEST: So you and Seth got married and you knew he kept guns at home. And it sounds like you knew or at least you had an idea that he stored his handgun in a dresser drawer. Was that something that you talked about as a couple?
28.		JULIE STILL: I don't really remember having a conversation around the handgun. I knew he had one, but I never really saw it. It was just one of those things that was probably handed down from a family member that he just wanted to hold on to. And it was there in a drawer. Where we live, especially, it's, you know, every man has a gun. And so I didn't think anything about it. You know, I necessarily don't love the idea of a handgun. But, you know, it's just how it is. Every man has a gun. And so Seth has a gun.
29.		DR WEST: After you had children, did you have a conversation about the gun then?
30.		JULIE STILL: I don't know that the conversation changed when we had children. I feel like we were on the same page of it was never kept loaded or anything like that. We both knew we wanted to keep our children away from it and put it somewhere safe.
31.		DR WEST: And at what point did you start to worry that the gun in your home might be a danger?
		JULIE STILL: Since early in our marriage, I knew that Seth was kind of wired to have seasons is what I'll call them of he



		<p>would be just sad or maybe depressed, I'm not sure. But he would always kind of come out of them. So he would tell me like I have had thoughts where I wanted to kill myself and I would. But he would always say, but I would never do it. And then this conversation was the first time he said, but I think I could do it. And then, we were gonna get the gun out of the house. It's terrifying to hear someone you love say that they didn't want to be alive anymore.</p> <p>You think about keeping your children safe from a handgun, which you don't really think about one day having to keep your spouse safe from a handgun.</p>
	Transition to new beat	
32.		<p>DR WEST: Dr. Leon Knobloch studies how couples communicate, especially during difficult times. She's heard stories like Julie's before.</p>
33.		<p>DR LEANNE KNOBLOCH: Julie had a feeling that something was off and recognized that it might be a potentially big problem, which makes the communication a high stakes episode. It's risky to have that kind of sensitive conversation with your spouse when you know that it's a high stakes moment and you want to get it just right.</p>
34.		<p>DR WEST: What are some of the topics that couples might find it difficult to talk about?</p>
35.		<p>DR LEANNE KNOBLOCH: There are a lot of topics that are more high stakes and that makes them more difficult to talk</p>



		<p>about: finances, sexual intimacy, work life balance, in-laws, how much time we're spending on hobbies versus how much time we're spending with the family. All of those topics can be sensitive topics and spouses sometimes avoid those conversations because they know that it might not go well.</p> <p>And so in those high stakes conversations, which sometimes talking about guns are those high stakes conversations, you want to be extra ready to talk about it with your best self.</p>
36.		<p>DR WEST: And why are conversations about topics like these so challenging?</p>
37.		<p>DR LEANNE KNOBLOCH: It all goes back to trust, right? There's always a chance when you open yourself up that your partner is going to judge you or reject you or dismiss you. So anytime there is an issue where you feel like your spouse is going to react very negatively or you feel like the relationship is on the line those are situations where the stakes are high and it takes a lot of courage and it takes a lot of guts to be able to broach those topics with your partner. And so it's really important to put yourself in your partner's shoes before you enter the conversation, just so that you're prepared, so that you can think through the issue from your partner's point of view. And then consider what in this message might trigger my partner's negative reaction?</p>
38.		<p>DR WEST: Are there specific challenges in these conversations if they are about guns in the home?</p>



39.		<p>DR LEANNE KNOBLOCH: There are definitely challenges about spouses having conversations about guns in the home. What immediately comes to mind for me is this idea of face threat. And a face threat is just a message that either directly or indirectly criticizes another person's valued identity. So a face threat is something that causes us to lose face. You could go into those conversations incredibly well meaning. And accidentally trigger some face threats in your conversation that make your partner defensive. And that's going to be working exactly opposite of your intended goal.</p>
40.		<p>DR WEST: Face threats. Help me understand this.</p>
41.		<p>DR LEANNE KNOBLOCH: Let me give you some examples. A message could have a direct face threat, like you're so forgetful, right? A very direct message like that, has those face threats just built in. You're very forgetful. You're so forgetful. But an indirect face threat can happen frequently, even when we don't mean to. So what if we said, did you remember to lock the garage door? On one level, that could be just a very innocent question. Did you remember to lock the garage door? But if spouses have a pattern of one person sort of nagging for forgetfulness a lot, then the other spouse might immediately take that sentence as an indictment of their forgetfulness. So did you remember to lock the garage door is about hmmm are you so forgetful that I can't trust you to do this right? And so that example illustrates why talking about guns can be so challenging, because there are a lot of face threats involved.</p>



		<p>You don't want to imply that your partner is not able to make his or her own decisions. You don't want to imply that you're smarter than your partner and that you can tell your partner what to do. You don't want to imply that your partner is not in control of his or her emotions or is a loose cannon or is not trustworthy. You don't want to imply that your partner is a bad person or weak.</p> <p>There's a lot of face threats that could be floating around in a conversation about guns, and to do these kinds of conversations effectively, spouses need to know how to deal with some of these face threats.</p>
42.		<p>DR WEST: So face threats can be real barriers to effective conversations. Can you suggest specific ways that partners can overcome or avoid activating face threats?</p>
43.		<p>DR LEANNE KNOBLOCH: So I would begin with messages that are really encouraging and supportive and compliment them for the good decisions that they've made. Say, you know, you're a great father, you're a great husband, and I have concerns about the gun storage. I wonder if we could talk about that. You might say my experience with guns is different from yours. And I want to learn how you're thinking about this gun and some of the reasons why you're storing it here and could we consider maybe other options?</p> <p>You have to really listen. You have to listen to what your partner is saying and you have to brainstorm with them some solutions that might be potentially satisfactory to both people. You also want to ask questions rather than say, we need to</p>



		<p>move this gun, it's not safe for us and our children. You might say instead, let's brainstorm some options, some things that we both would be happy with in terms of storage.</p> <p>We all want the autonomy to make our own decisions. And when people speak to us in ways that don't protect our likability and our independence. We react negatively, that triggers us and when those messages are coming in. So they stop hearing the content and all they can think is, Wow, my spouse is telling me what to do or wow, my partner thinks I'm a bad person.</p>
44.		<p>DR WEST: So let's use the example of the loaded handgun that's stored in the dresser drawer. And the spouse knows that that increases the risk both to her husband and but also to the other members of the household. Kids could find it. It raises the risk to her should there be, you know, interpersonal conflict in the marriage. And so she wants to make the suggestion of, okay, can we lock this up or can we store the ammunition clip somewhere else? And are there suggestions that you would have for that conversation thinking about this concept of face threat?</p>
45.		<p>DR LEANNE KNOBLOCH: You could frame it like. You're putting us in a dangerous situation. You're putting your family at risk. You could come in with sort of that no holds barred kind of a message, or you can frame it like you're our protector and we appreciate the lengths that you go to protect your family. And at the same time, let's think about whether the way that we're going to protect ourselves is more dangerous or less dangerous than some other strategies that</p>



		<p>we might consider. So one message is you are the danger. And the other message is you are the protector. And there is a danger. So let's figure out, since we're both united in this goal of protecting our family, which you do so well, let's think about in this situation, if the rewards outweigh the costs, if the danger is actually higher from this avenue or this avenue.</p> <p>Do you see how that sort of shifts the blame from you're making a poor decision to we have a teenager in our house who is facing a lot of challenges and for their safety, it would probably be best if we didn't have the gun in the house.</p> <p>So I think that that is a really good strategy because it gets the job done without making the gun owner defensive.</p>
46.		<p>DR WEST: Wow, that sounds so strategic. Does it have to be that way?</p>
47.		<p>DR LEANNE KNOBLOCH: I don't mean it to sound that strategic. It's just reflecting in advance about how you want the conversation to go and you're ready. You've done your homework, but don't we always do our homework for big situations? Don't we always get prepared for those moments that we know are going to be super important in our lives?</p>
48.		<p>DR WEST: Let's say let's say you didn't send the message as effectively as you had hoped, and now your partner has become defensive. How would you suggest you manage that defensiveness once it's entered into the conversation?</p>



49.	<p>DR LEANNE KNOBLOCH: No matter how much we plan and no matter how well we reflect on things going in, the unexpected can happen or we can say something accidentally or that we didn't even know would trigger our partner. So it's not uncommon. It happens pretty often that we get in these situations and we see that our partner has become defensive. When that happens there is a couple of important strategies. One is you want to get right in there and nip it in the bud as fast as you can because a spiral of increasing defensiveness is only going to make it harder for your partner to listen and absorb your message. So you want to watch carefully for signs of defensiveness and as soon as you see it, you want to jump in and counteract it.</p> <p>So if someone says. Are you saying I don't know how to take care of my own guns? You might say, Oh, I didn't mean that at all. What I was saying instead is I think that you make really good decisions and you're a great protector of your family. What I meant to say was I really respect your judgment and I love how you think through things so carefully. So in this moment. I was wondering if we could talk about this issue, not because I'm critical of the decisions that you're making, but because I love the family so much. And I would rest a lot easier if we had a calm discussion about this.</p> <p>Obviously, if it's an emergency situation where the health and safety of family members is at risk, you're going to have to make bolder moves than you otherwise would but if you have time and space to get at it gently, that might avoid triggering</p>
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		<p>your spouse and have him or her be much more open to what you're saying.</p>
50.		<p>DR WEST: So in a crisis, you do what you have to do. You say what you have to say. But it seems to me what you're suggesting is that these conversations are most effective before there's a crisis and that maybe this should be something spouses talk about on a regular basis.</p>
51.		<p>DR LEANNE KNOBLOCH: For sure. For example, any family who has a gun in their home when they change the batteries in their smoke alarm, or when there's daylight savings time or with every new year, they really consider that gun, its storage, its function, and what potential dangers are in the home. And then it becomes not a taboo topic, not a topic that, oh, I have no idea how this is going to go because we've never talked about it, but a topic that we revisit with pretty regular frequency. And so if the time comes or we need to reevaluate and make a change, that's okay, because we've been reevaluating the situation pretty regularly.</p>
52.		<p>DR WEST: Do you feel that having challenging conversations like this improves communication between couples overall?</p>
		<p>DR LEANNE KNOBLOCH: Absolutely. Having challenging conversations that are effectively navigated builds intimacy between couples.</p> <p>The more that you can get through these turbulent waters together, the more you can come back and say, we have gotten through some challenging times. And we're stronger</p>



		<p>and we can get through more challenging times or we've worked through some really hard topics. Our communication is getting much more effective. We can use these communication skills to get through other challenging times.</p> <p>The more couples build a history of being able to work together and overcome obstacles, the more they can rightly feel good about their bond and their intimacy, and they can recognize that the next challenge is going to be right around the corner. But they're in a place where they're well positioned and they have a great track record of being able to handle it effectively.</p>
53.	Transition to new beat	
54.		<p>DR WEST: Julie Still agrees. Seth was in crisis and she had to act. They had an open and honest conversation about the suicidal thoughts he was having. He was relieved. Since that time, they've had regular conversations about the guns in their home. Today they're even closer than before.</p>
55.		<p>JULIE STILL: I feel like our communication is so much better now and just being able to trust each other and be honest and ask the hard questions.</p> <p>I know when he tells me now that I'm not, you know, tempted by the handgun, I believe him and I trust him.</p> <p>Seth didn't need me to fix him. He just needed me to hear him and support him. And that's what I tried my best to do.</p>



56.		DR WEST: Do you have any advice for other couples who might be hesitant to dive into these challenging discussions?
57.		JULIE STILL: I would say I would hope that you love each other and respect each other enough that you can have an open, honest, real conversation without hurting each other. Being married to someone, you have, like, this unique ability to make someone feel the most loved, but you also have the ability to hurt them more than anyone else in the world. And I think you just have to be very careful with that power. And I would say approach the topic gently and with love and not the opposite.
58.	Transition to new beat	
59.		DR WEST: In this episode of Let's Talk About Your Guns. We learned about tough conversations about guns, safety and risk with those who are the closest and most important people in our lives, our spouses and partners. We thought about barriers to conversation, things like face threats and ways that we can overcome them. These conversations are so important and they're best done long before a crisis comes along. This isn't about being for or against guns. It's about getting people close to us to make safer choices and prevent suicide by putting some time and space between an impulsive thought and a fatal act.
60.		DR WEST: Thank you to Julie Still and Dr Leanne Knobloch for participating in this discussion.



61.		<p>DR WEST: You've been listening to Let's Talk about Your Guns. This podcast is made possible by The Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine. It's produced by Podville Media for the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress at the Uniformed Services University.</p>
62.		<p>DR WEST: Be sure to subscribe to the show on your favorite podcast app and leave a five-star review.</p> <p>Thanks for listening.</p>
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Let's Talk About Your Guns

episode 107: **PARTNERS IN SAFETY**

SOCIAL SNIPPET

1.		<p>DR LEANNE KNOBLOCH: There's always a chance when you open yourself up that your partner is going to judge you or reject you or dismiss you. So anytime there is an issue where you feel like your spouse is going to react very negatively or you feel like the relationship is on the line those are situations where the stakes are high and it takes a lot of courage and it takes a lot of guts to be able to broach those topics with your partner. And so it's really important to put yourself in your partner's shoes before you enter the conversation, and consider what in this message might trigger my partner's negative reaction?</p>
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Let's Talk About Your Guns
episode 107: PARTNERS IN SAFETY
EPISODE TITLE AND DESCRIPTION

EPISODE 6

EPISODE TITLE: PARTNERS IN SAFETY

EPISODE DESCRIPTION: Four in ten American households own guns. Yet many couples may never discuss safe storage until there is a crisis situation. In this episode, we discuss how to talk about guns, safety and risk with those who are the closest and most important people in our lives: our spouses and partners. We hear from Julie Still, whose conversation about safe storage with her husband may have saved his life. We'll also hear from Dr. Leanne Knobloch, who offers guidance for spouses who want to talk about firearm safety but aren't sure how to do it.

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<https://www.cstsonline.org/suicide-prevention-program/podcasts>