



RABBI JONAH DOV PESNER, *Director*
ISABEL P. (LIZ) DUNST, *Chair, Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism*

Arthur and Sara Jo Kobacker Building
2027 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, at Kivie Kaplan Way, Washington, DC 20036

(202) 387-2800

@theRAC

www.rac.org

RAC Reads Guide

NPR All Things Considered – *What If We Treated Gun Violence Like A Public Health Crisis?*

Prepared by the Religious Action Center and Kathryn Fleisher

Introduction: The following guide is intended to facilitate conversations about “[What If We Treated Gun Violence Like A Public Health Crisis?](#)” – an episode of NPR’s *All Things Considered* with Alison Kodjak. *All Things Considered* is a daily radio show with stories and reports from NPR reporters and correspondents based throughout the United States and the world. The hosts interview newsmakers and contribute their own reporting about the biggest stories of the day. This episode, from November 15, 2017, compares the public health responses to the Zika and Ebola viruses to the public health response to the plague of gun violence in the United States. Despite gun violence affecting, injuring, and killing more Americans than Zika and Ebola combined, the public health response to such has been extremely minimal. This episode delves further into this inequity and tries to imagine what might be possible if American lawmakers took gun violence as seriously as they took fatal diseases.

RAC Reads is a program by the Religious Action Center to encourage reading groups that explore contemporary social justice topics in the context of Jewish teachings and values. The discussion guides are designed for families, congregations and communities. As such, not all of the facilitation tips and discussion questions may be applicable in all cases. Feel free to take from and adapt the information provided here as you structure your own conversations. We hope that this guide will spark engaging and challenging discussions among Reform Jews about the complexities of gun violence. For more information about the RAC’s current work on gun violence prevention, visit our website at www.rac.org.

Discussion Questions:

1. The Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of reading, learning, and asking questions. If we hold ourselves to high standards regarding lifelong learning, why don’t we hold our public officials to that same standard and require them to invest in researching and data gathering in relation to gun violence? How can we go about demanding that this research takes place?
2. In the episode, it is said that, “Back in 1997, lawmakers added a provision in the bill that funds the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention barring the agency from doing anything that would ‘advocate or promote gun



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control.” How might you argue that given this provision, the CDC should still continue to gather data on gun violence?

3. The tension between gun violence being about access to guns and being about access to mental health services continues to derail efforts to prevent gun violence. Do you believe that these two issues should be considered together or separately? Why?
4. The Jewish people are a communal people; we emphasize our connections to one another more than we emphasize any one individual. Should we allow our preference for the community above the individual to permeate our justice work related to guns? How might this help or harm our gun violence prevention efforts?
5. How might race play into the way that public health officials respond to diseases like Zika and Ebola as opposed to gun violence which disproportionately impacts people of color?