

4-year-old shoots teenager in Jackson County

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When the upset 4-year-old announced he was going to get a gun, everyone figured he was headed to his bedroom to fetch a toy.

Instead, the boy returned with the real thing, firing a shotgun and wounding a 17-year-old Sunday evening in Jackson County.

Nathan Beavers was being treated at Ohio State University Medical Center in Columbus for pellet wounds to his arm and side. He is expected to recover.

Deputies were astonished to learn a 4-year-old boy was the triggerman in the 7:24 p.m. shooting at his grandmother's house along Spriggs Road, about 6 miles south of Jackson.

"He didn't say much," Chief Deputy Jim Ephlin said of the suspect. "He said he was mad at Nathan. He said, 'I'm going to go get a gun.' The others thought he was kidding and was going to get a toy gun."

The boy, apparently angered that Beavers stepped on his foot, retrieved a shell from a drawer in a back bedroom, grabbed a 20-gauge single-shot shotgun from a closet and loaded the weapon, Ephlin said.

He returned to the living room, and in front of another 17-year-old boy and other children, shot Beavers. "It's lucky it was birdshot," Ephlin said of the shell the boy inserted into the shotgun.

The boy's father said he was shocked that his son knew how to load and fire the shotgun. The boy has watched others shoot but never was taught how to handle a gun, he said.

"It was an accident. He just thought it was another toy gun. He didn't appreciate what it could do," the boy's father said.

"The guns are gone out of our house," he added. "They're not going to be around with the kids anymore. It's not worth it."

The boy is in the custody of his parents "until we see what the prosecutor wants to do," Ephlin said. The parents of the injured youth told deputies they did not want any legal action taken against the boy, he said.

Prosecutor Jonathan Blanton called the case a "weird, weird set of facts," but he doubts the boy will end up in the juvenile justice system. The boy's father said counseling was being arranged for his son.

Investigators will examine why the ammunition and gun were not locked up, Blanton said. Ohio does not have a law requiring that guns be secured away from children.

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