

JUVENILE FIRE SETTERS

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

Juvenile Fire Setters

In Rochester, New York, a two year old, playing with matches, started a fire that took his life and the lives of five family members.

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In Roanoke, Virginia, a seven-year-old boy set fire to a chair in an abandoned building; the fire spread to an adjacent house and trapped an elderly woman.

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In Passaic, New Jersey, a firefighter was killed and hundreds of people lost their homes in a fire started by a group of teenage boys.

These tragic events are not isolated incidents. In a typical year, in the United States, 300 people are killed and \$300 million in property is destroyed in fires set by children. Children themselves are usually the victims of these fires accounting for 85 of every 100 lives lost.

The number of fires set by children is growing. It is a problem that needs the attention of parents, teachers, counselors, and community leaders, in cooperation with fire and law enforcement officers.

Why Children Set Fires

Most experts agree that the best way to understand fire-setting behavior is to look at where and why children set fires. They believe that there are two basic types of children who start fires.

Curiosity Fire Setters usually are 2-7 year olds whose fascination with fire leads them to “play” with it to find out how it feels, how it burns, and what it does. They do not understand fire’s destructive potential.

Although curiosity is a normal part of children’s growth and development, parents and other adults who discover that a child is playing with fire should take it very seriously.

Problem Fire Setters can also be very young, but generally are 5-17 years old. In contrast to the curious fire setter, however, these youngsters light fires because of emotional or mental disturbances ranging from mild to severe. A crisis in the child’s life, such as moving to a new area, a divorce or death could trigger fire-setting behavior. Or, a more serious disturbance could be the cause. Chronic behaviors such as a poor relationship with other children, cruelty to animals, and extreme mood changes are a few of the traits that data on juvenile fire setters has revealed.

For More Information On This Subject and Other Related Subjects Please Contact United States Fire Administration

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WHAT YOU CAN DO!

Parents...

Teach Your Child About Fire

- ~ Fire is a tool we use to heat our homes or cook our food.
- ~ It is not a toy.
- ~ Fire is dangerous -- it can kill.
- ~ All fires -- even small ones -- can spread quickly.
- ~ Even adults must follow special safety rules.

Control Your Child's Access to Fire

- ~ Keep all matches and lighters out of the reach of children -- even a 2 year old can operate a cigarette lighter.
- ~ Never allow anyone to use lighters or matches in an unsafe manner in your home.
- ~ Never leave stove or candle fires unattended.
- ~ Teach children to show you any unattended matches or lighters they find to your attention.

Parents...

Set a Good Example

- ~ Install and maintain smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.
- ~ Plan and practice home fire escape drills.
- ~ Regularly inspect your home for fire hazards.
- ~ Point out to your children the safety rules you and others are following throughout the day.

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Teachers, Counselors, & Community Leaders...

Take Responsibility for Fire Safety

- ~ Teach fire safety in pre-school through high-school programs.
- ~ Participate in training to learn about juvenile fire setters.
- ~ Help to raise awareness in your community to help juvenile fire setters - or help develop a juvenile fire setters program

~ WHERE TO GO FOR HELP ~

Your Local Fire Dept.

**Your State Fire Services
United States Fire Administration**

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