



Children and Firesetting: What Adults Need to Know



┌ New York-Presbyterian
└ Weill Cornell Medical Center



Did you know that...

- Misuse is the leading cause of fire related burn injuries and deaths among kids less than 15 years old.
- Over 50% of kids who start fires are aged 4 - 9 years old.
- One-third of all intentionally set fires are started by children under the age of 15.

Fire

We use it in our daily lives for cooking, heating, celebrations, traditions, and many other activities. When used safely, fire helps. When misused, fire can destroy property and lives, causing serious burns and even death.

What is juvenile firesetting?

Simply put, juvenile firesetting is the misuse of fire by a child or teenager. Children learn at a very early age that fire is an important part of life, but what they may not know is that using fire or fire-related tools can be dangerous.

- As they grow up, most kids learn to understand and respect the use of fire. Some children, however, intentionally start fires, even if they know the dangers to themselves and others.
- All use of fire by a child requires adult action.

The first step to addressing the problem is to understand why a child is using fire.

Why do kids set fires?

Some children use fire because they “want to learn” or are “curious” about how fire works, how it feels or what it can do. In many cases, these kids are:

- 8 years old or younger
- Learning about the world around them
- Unaware of how fire can cause serious harm to people and property

Other children purposely set or use fire — often as a way to control or deal with problems with friends, family, school, peer pressures, violence, abuse, or other crises. In many cases, these kids are:

- 5 years of age and older
- Using fire out of “boredom”
- Setting more than one intentional fire

These children may have a history of behavioral health issues, problems at school or participation in other high-risk activities.

Regardless of the reason for the behavior, all firesetting should be taken seriously.

How can I keep my child from setting fires?

By following these steps, you can teach your child about the dangers of fire, how to stay safe, and what to do if he/she is around other kids who are using fire:

- Set an example for your child about using fire safely: Explain the safety steps you take when you use fire to cook, light a candle, start a campfire, install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, or any other activity that involves fire.
- Teach your infant or toddler about the uses and dangers of fire. Reinforce the information as your child grows.
- Keep matches, lighters, and chemicals (such as propane, gasoline, body spray, aerosol cans, perfume) out of the reach of all children.



- Teach your child not to touch matches or lighters and to call an adult right away if they find these items.
- Keep young children away from candles, stoves, BBQs, campfires, and all other sources of fire. Supervise older kids around these.
- Talk to your child about being friends with kids who play with or set fires. Encourage your child to find other friends to spend time with or activities to do.
- Monitor what your child is watching on television and the internet. Often, homemade video clips of dangerous stunts with fire are shown on TV and posted on popular websites visited by kids. Talk to your child about the dangers of these activities.

What can I do if I think my child has been playing with or is setting fires?

If you have any reason to think that your child has been starting fires or using matches/lighters, take action right away. Ignoring the problem can make it worse:

- Trust your instincts.
- Keep matches, lighters, candles, and chemicals (such as propane, gasoline, body spray, aerosol cans, perfume) out of the reach of all children.
- Talk to your child about fire safety.
- Follow up and get help immediately. Call the Juvenile Fire-setter Intervention Program at the Burn Center at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital at (212) 746 - 5417. Or check with your local fire department for programs in your area.

What is a juvenile firesetter intervention (JFI) program?

A juvenile firesetter intervention program is a team approach to help kids who set fires. The Burn Center at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital offers a JFI program. The program goals include helping children and families to:

- Understand why a child is using fire
- Address the firesetting behavior

Members of the team include a juvenile firesetting specialist, fire safety educators, and mental health providers who work together with families to help stop fire setting and address any issues that may cause this behavior.

How can I contact the Burn Center's Juvenile Firesetting Program:

If you know of a child who is setting fires and is in need of help, or to learn more about the Burn Center's JFI Program, please call (212) 746 - 5417.

References:

1. US Fire Administration. The Fire Risk to Children. Topical Fire Research Series 4;8(1-6). 2004.
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3. Cole RC, Crandall R, Kourofsky CE, Sharp D, Blaakman SW et al. Juvenile Firesetting: A Community Guide to Prevention and Intervention. Pittsford, NY. 2006.
4. Stadolnik RF. Drawn to the Flame: Assessment and Treatment of Juvenile Firesetting Behavior. Professional Resource Press. FL: 2000.
5. Cole RC, Crandall R, Kourofsky CE, Sharp D, Blaakman SW et al. Juvenile Firesetting: A Community Guide to Prevention and Intervention. Fireproof Children/Prevention First, Pittsford NY. 2006.



The William Randolph Hearst Burn Center at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center is one of the largest and busiest burn centers in the nation. We treat nearly 5,000 patients—one-third of whom are kids—each year.

By providing all phases of treatment—from the emergency response to rehabilitation—to patients and families who have suffered a burn injury, the Burn Center provides the expertise, resources, and continuity of care needed to get the best results.

To make an appointment to see a doctor or if you would like to learn more about burn prevention, please call the Hearst Burn Center at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center:

Main Office/Appointments: (212) 746 – 5410

Burn Outreach/Education: (212) 746 – 5417

**William Randolph Hearst Burn Center at
NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital**

525 East 68th Street, L706, New York, NY 10065

<http://nyp.org/services/burn-center.html>

If you or your family member gets burned, call 911 and seek immediate medical attention!

This information is brief and general. It should not be the only source of your information on this health care topic. It is not to be used or relied upon for diagnosis or treatment. It does not take the place of instructions from your doctor. Talk to your health care providers before making a health care decision.

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