

Youth and Fire Misuse: What You Can Do

Children and fire can be a dangerous and deadly combination. If you discover a child is misusing or has a fascination with fire, please do not ignore or minimize it. Get help by contacting a youth firesetting intervention program, burn center, or your local fire department. There are immediate things you can do to keep your family, home, and community safe. Educate the child on the proper uses of fire and the dangers of unsafe fire-related activities.

Practice the following safety tips:

- All adults in the child's life need to take an active role in eliminating access to ignition (fire) sources and increasing supervision.
- Set a good example by using matches, lighters, and other fire sources in a safe and careful manner. Never misuse fire as a source of amusement. Children will imitate the behavior you show.
- Discuss the potential impact friends can have on misusing fire and ways to overcome peer pressure.
- Praise your child for showing responsible behavior and respect for fire.
- Calmly but firmly explain that matches and lighters are tools for adults only. Older children may only use them (after obtaining permission) in a safe manner and while under proper adult supervision.
- Inspect your home for ignition sources the child could access (e.g. candles, lit cigarettes, stoves, bonfires, BBQ grill lighters, fireplaces, pilot lights, fireworks, etc.) and remove or secure them:
 - Keep matches and lighters high out of the reach and sight of children, in a locked cabinet.
 - Using a combination lock to secure matches and lighters is better than using a keyed-lock, as the child may see where the key is kept.
 - Instruct any smokers in the home to completely extinguish smoking materials.
 - Remember, child-resistant lighters are not child-proof. They must be kept away from children.
 - Do not use candles unattended in the home; there are other flameless, fire-safe alternatives.
 - Remove stove knobs and securely store them when not in use.
 - BBQ grills, fireworks, fireplaces, candles, bonfires, and fire pits should only be used when there is constant adult supervision. When you are done using these items, extinguish them completely and remember to return any lighters/matches to a secured cabinet.
 - Keep accelerants, such as gasoline and propane, outside the home and locked up.
- If a child has been experimenting with or setting fires, adults need to regularly search the child, their bedroom, belongings, backpack, garage, yard, etc. for matches and lighters. For example:
 - Check the child's backpack and clothing when they come home.
 - Be on alert for lighters and matches obtained from outside the home.
 - Change how you do these searches (e.g. different rooms, different times of the day, etc.) so the child doesn't know when or where to expect the search and try to hide lighters/matches elsewhere.
 - Explain to the child that the reason these searches are occurring is because their fire misuse behavior is dangerous and must stop immediately.
- Install and maintain smoke alarms: Working smoke alarms save lives, cutting the risk of dying in a home fire in half. Make sure everyone in your home knows the sound, understands the warning, and knows how to respond to a smoke alarm that is alarming.
- Make a home escape plan. Discuss the fire escape plan with everyone in your household, and practice it at night and during the daytime at least twice a year.
- All caregivers, family members, household guests, and babysitters must be educated on the above safety recommendations and be committed to eliminating the child's access to lighters/matches and other fire sources. If the child stays at another household, educate the supervising adults.

To view additional safety tips, visit www.traumaburn.org

KS Klas, 3/13