

BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS

There are many reasons children set fires. Sometimes fires are started out of curiosity, but it's sometimes a sign of behavioral problems that need professional help.

This quiz will help you tell the difference.

Circle the answer – yes or no – that best describes your child.

- YES NO** Plays alone.
- YES NO** Finds it hard to make close friends
- YES NO** Fights with peers.
- YES NO** Wets the bed.
- YES NO** Sleeping problems (insomnia, sleepwalking, etc.)
- YES NO** Health problems.
- YES NO** Runs away from home.
- YES NO** Extreme mood swings.
- YES NO** Violent outbursts.
- YES NO** Shy.
- YES NO** Tells lies, often.
- YES NO** Steals.
- YES NO** Nightmares.
- YES NO** Plays with fire.
- YES NO** Destroys own toys.
- YES NO** Destroys other's toys.
- YES NO** Fights with siblings.
- YES NO** Sets several fires over the past months/year.
- YES NO** Disobeys adults.
- YES NO** Frequently tardy or absent from school.

- YES NO** Has an eating disorder.
- YES NO** Has learning problems.
- YES NO** Physically harms others.
- YES NO** Misbehaves at school.
- YES NO** Intentionally harms self.
- YES NO** Intentionally harms animals.
- YES NO** Jealous of peers or siblings.
- YES NO** Fascinated with matches, lighters or fires.
- YES NO** Unusual fears or phobias.
- YES NO** Experienced a recent change in home life.



If you have circled "yes" for any or all of the questions listed above, it does not mean your child is definitely a firesetter, but it may mean your child should be evaluated by a professional to properly diagnose and treat the cause of this behavior. Contact your local fire department or mental health agency for more information.

A FAMILY MATTER

In the time it takes you to read this sentence, a child could change his life and the life of his family with the strike of a match.

Make fire safety a family priority. Learn everything you can about fire safety and make it a habit.

SMALL HANDS BIG FIRES

Juvenile Firestarter Awareness



FIREPLAY

A DEADLY GAME

Fireplay is a deadly game that should not be dismissed as a “phase” or simple “curiosity.” Fireplay causes an average of 49,000 fires per year. These fires account for only a small portion of all fires but a large portion of fire related deaths. Children must be supervised and educated about fire’s destructive power.

Fire departments nationwide are implementing special programs to identify and stop juvenile firesetting. Early detection and treatment are essential to prevent normal childhood curiosity from turning into disaster.

Juvenile firesetting can be prevented when parents, teachers, firefighters, law enforcement and caregivers become aware of firesetting.

PROFILE OF A FIRESETTER

CURIOUS FIRESETTERS

Many young children are fascinated by matches and lighters but don’t know about how destructive fire can be. Children set fires because of curiosity or poor judgement. Young children love to imitate adults who light cigarettes, candles or fireplaces. Unfortunately, many lack parental supervision or education about fire safety.

TROUBLED FIRESETTERS

Mental or emotional disturbances can cause firesetting behavior. Troubled firesetters can range from preschoolers to teenagers. These children often set fires as a way to express anger, frustration and feelings of powerlessness.

DELINQUENT FIRESETTERS

These are usually teenagers or pre-teens with a history of starting fires. They set fires as a way to create excitement or destroy property. Usually strongly influenced by their peers, they use fire to cause malicious mischief or rebel against authority. Abandoned buildings, open fields and schools are common targets. Most of these firesetters have a history of antisocial behavior, lying, stealing, truancy and drugs.

SEVERELY DISTURBED FIRESETTERS

These youth often have a long history of behavioral problems. They usually show symptoms of borderline personality disorder (BPD) or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Many of these firesetters are receiving treatment at mental health or correctional institutions.



FIRE PREVENTION

Federal Emergency Management Agency of the U.S. Fire Administration recommendations:

- Always keep matches and lighters out of reach of small children.
- Be emphatic. Tell the child “No! We don’t play with matches and lighters. They are a tool that can hurt you.”
- Always supervise a young child in a room where an open flame is present (fireplaces, candles, heaters, etc.).
- Teach young children that matches and lighters are tools, not toys. Demonstrate how you carefully use these tools, with adult supervision only.
- Never leave young children unattended, even for short periods.
- Hire only experienced, trained caretakers.
- Teach children about the risks of fire when they first show interest. Discuss the proper use of fire and how destructive fire can be if not used safely. Contact your local fire department about fire safety education programs for kids.

TREATMENT

Firefighters who interview juvenile firesetters and their parents are trained to evaluate the child’s firesetting behavior. If the fire is set because of simple curiosity or poor judgement, a recommendation may be made for enrolling the child in an intensive fire safety education program. These programs are usually successful in “extinguishing” firesetting curiosity.

In case of a troubled or disturbed child, parents are referred to mental health services to get professional guidance. If parents refuse to get help for their child, legal action may be necessary. Sometimes the firesetter has to be referred to child protective services or juvenile police. Adolescent firesetters are evaluated to determine if their fires were set with intent. Some may have mental disorders that need psychiatric therapy.

DON'T LET SMALL HANDS CAUSE BIG FIRES.



MOST FIRE RELATED INJURIES OR DEATHS OF CHILD-SET FIRES HAPPEN TO THE CHILDREN THEMSELVES.

