HOW TO PREVENT FIRESETTING BEHAVIOR

A parent can do a lot to prevent children from being involved with fire. Children look to parents for guidance, leadership, and as a role model. Listed below are some tips to help you deal with firesetting behaviors you might encounter.

- Lead by example. You cannot expect your child to treat fire any differently than you do.
- Explain WHY they cannot use fire. Simply saying "Don't" is not good enough. Think about how you react when you are told that.
- Treat matches and lighters like tools. Give these items the same respect you would other dangerous tools around your home (for example: knives, kitchen appliances, hammers, etc.).
- Keep matches and lighters out of the reach of all children. Remove all unnecessary matches and lighters from your home completely. Most children are only involved with fire because it is available.
- Reward children for making right decisions when it comes to matches and lighters. Also, make clear the punishment for the wrong use of matches and lighters.
- Encourage your child's school to promote fire safety in the classroom.

REMEMBER: If you are uncomfortable with your ability to deal with your child's firesetting behavior, call Portland Fire & Rescue for additional help.

Portland Fire & Rescue

has a program to deal with children who have been involved with fire.

The Juvenile Firesetter Program

is an educational program designed to educate parents and children about fire safety and the consequences of fire. Each family meets individually with a firefighter trained in firesetter intervention techniques. The firefighter will discuss and help the family better understand how to deal with the problem. If a child is beyond what fire safety education can resolve, we can provide assistance by referring you to the most appropriate help for your needs.

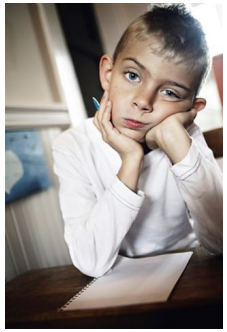
If you have any questions related to firesetting or fire issues in general, please call:

PORTLAND FIRE & RESCUE JUVENILE FIRESETTER PROGRAM MANAGER

(503) 823-3806

"Your Safety Is Your Responsibility"

Children and Fire



Don't Mix

Portland Fire & Rescue

Always Ready, Always There
(503) 823-3700

What is Firesetting?

We call children firesetters when they have begun to use fire in a way that is dangerous or not approved by a parent. The term firesetter does not mean that a child has a problem. The majority of children should be gaining all of the information that they need to be safe with fire at home and in school. These are areas that you can help to control.

FIRESETTING MYTHS

MYTH: It is normal for children to play with fire.

FACT: While curiosity about fire is common, use without a parent's approval or knowledge is dangerous to the child and anyone around them.

MYTH: If you burn a child's hand, they will stop.

FACT: Burns only create fear and scars. The reason behind fire use must be discovered and addressed.

MYTH: It is a phase that the child will grow out of.

FACT: It is not a phase. It is a dangerous behavior. You cannot afford to wait for fire behavior to change. It only takes one match to cause serious injury or death!

MYTH: Some children are obsessed with fire.

FACT: In reality, very few children are obsessed or would be considered pyromaniacs. There is almost always a reason behind the behavior.

FIRESETTING DIFFERENCES

By determining the motivation for the firesetting, we can best determine how to deal with it. Most children fall into one or more of the following classifications:

Curiosity:

- Children are usually young
- Fire is usually paper or other valueless objects
- Children will be secretive
- Children will usually fear the consequences of their actions
- Children may have ready access to matches and lighters around the home
- Children may not fully understand the parent's rules regarding fire use around the home
- Parents may be setting a bad example for children as they use matches and lighters for everyday tasks

Treatment:

Family Fire Safety Education

Troubled:

- Children may be any age
- There may be no apparent reason for the firesetting behavior
- Firesetting may occur during times of personal or family stress
- Firesetting may accompany other "acting out" behaviors
- Children may also be experiencing problems in school or with friends
- Firesetting is often meant to destroy clothes, toys or other items or personal property that belongs to them or to others

Treatment:

Family Fire Safety Education and/or Counseling Assistance

Delinquent:

- Usually older children and adolescents
- Firesetting is usually in association with other rebellious behavior
- There may be other children involved
- Firesetting may occur with other acts of vandalism
- Children show little or no regard for others around them
- Firesetting behavior is often accompanied by anger, depression, or other unresolved feelings that the child may have

Treatment:

Family Fire Safety Education and Counseling Assistance

IF YOU NEED HELP:

When firesetting goes beyond what you are able to deal with, call your local fire department. Most fire agencies can provide fire safety education for your family. Many have specific programs to deal with children who have been involved with fire. Do not put off dealing with this behavior. Fire is a devastating and deadly force.