

U.S. Fire Administration

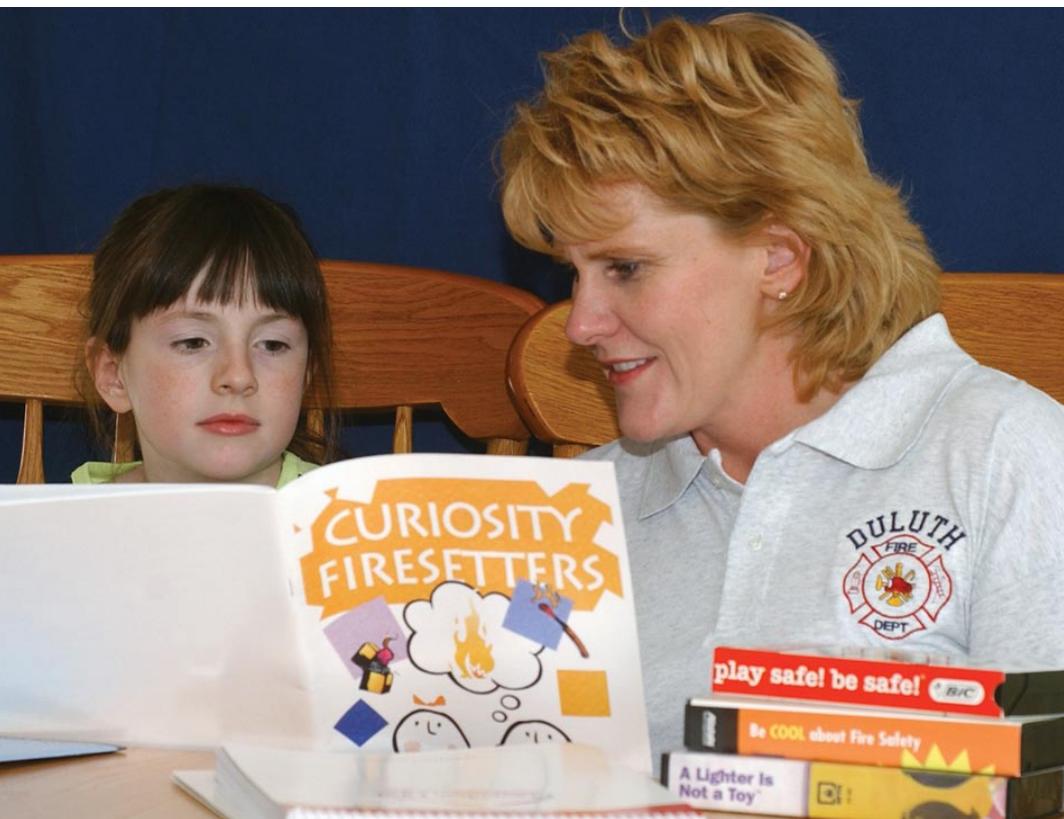
# Juvenile Firesetting

A Growing Concern

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Homeland  
Security



## Is Juvenile Arson a Problem?

- Fifty-four percent of all arson arrests in the U.S. are children under 18.<sup>1</sup>
- Arrests of juveniles for the crime of arson were higher, proportionally, than for any other crime.<sup>1</sup>
- Juveniles account for more than half of the arson arrests, with one-third of those children under the age of 15, and nearly four percent under age ten.<sup>2</sup>
- There were an estimated 13,900 child-play structure fires reported in 2002, with 210 deaths, 1,250 injuries, and \$339 million in direct damage.<sup>3</sup>
- For fires coded as child play and not intentional, 84 percent involved firesetters under the age of 10.<sup>4</sup>
- The average cost of a juvenile-set structure fire exceeded \$20,000.<sup>1</sup>
- Intentional fires ranked first among the major causes in structure fire dollar loss between 1999 and 2002.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> FBI Uniform Crime Reporting, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> National Fire Protection Association, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Fire Administration National Fire Incident Reporting System, 2005.

## Types of Firesetters

### Curiosity/Experimental

- Boys and girls ages 2 to 10.
- Lack understanding of the destructive potential of fire.
- Ready access to lighters, matches, or open flame.
- Unsupervised.

### Troubled/Crisis

- Mostly boys of all ages.
- Have set two or more fires.
- Use fire to express emotion: anger, sadness, frustration, or powerless feelings concerning stress or major changes in their life.
- May not understand the consequences of uncontrolled fire.
- Most likely will continue to set fires until needs are met or identified.
- Also known as “cry for help” firesetters.

### Delinquent/Criminal

- Usually teens with a history of firesetting, gangs, truancy, antisocial behavior, or drug/alcohol abuse.
- Fires are set with intent to destroy, or as acts of vandalism and malicious mischief.
- Targets are typically schools, open fields, dumpsters, or abandoned buildings.
- May involve restitution and criminal punishment.



## Pathological/Emotionally Disturbed

- Involves a psychiatric diagnosis.
- Fires may be random, ritualized, or with specific intent to destroy property.
- Chronic history of school, behavioral, and social emotional problems.
- Boys and girls of all ages.
- Set multiple fires.

**The first step in solving the problem is to understand better which children set fires and why they do it.**

## Intervention Strategies for the Child, Parent, and Caregiver

- General fire and life safety education.
- Specific juvenile firesetting education.
- Social services counseling.
- Mental health referral and therapy.
- Juvenile justice.

## Who should be involved?

### Everyone in the community...

Parents and caregivers, the local fire and police departments, mental health counselors and social services, juvenile justice, schools, churches, medical community, youth service workers, public and private business, insurance industry, and other community leaders.

### What can the community do?

- Prevent curiosity firesetting in the first place by providing fire and life safety education for children throughout the year.
- Organize and coordinate community-based screening, assessment, and intervention programs.
- Identify and provide for the child's and family's needs (fire safety education, counseling, social services, etc.) using community resources.
- Assist parents/caregivers and all who work with children to better understand children's involvement with fire, along with when and where to go for help.

### A note to parents and caregivers

- Teach young children that fire is a tool, not a toy.
- Keep matches and lighters out of reach, in high, ideally locked, cabinets.
- Supervise young children.
- Ask young children to tell you when they find matches and lighters, and put them away.
- Teach older children proper techniques for using fire and fire tools.
- Praise your child for practicing responsible behavior and showing respect for fire.
- Set a good example: use matches, lighters, and fire carefully.

## **About fire and fire safety**

- Fire is dangerous and can be deadly.
- Even small fires grow and spread quickly.
- Never leave the stove or a burning candle unattended.
- Install, maintain, and test smoke alarms.
- Plan and practice a home fire escape drill.
- Keep your home fire safe.

## **NFA Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialist Curriculum**

The National Fire Academy (NFA) Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Specialist (JFIS) curriculum is comprised of four classes in the Public Education curriculum. The JFIS classes are offered as NFA Resident Courses and via State Weekend and Direct Delivery. The JFIS curriculum addresses the *Juvenile Firesetting Intervention Professional Standard*, which is part of the NFPA 1035, *Public Fire and Life Safety Educator Standard*.

The target audience includes members of the fire service who have responsibilities related to juvenile firesetting intervention, interviewing, and prevention. It also includes practitioners who interact with children involved in firesetting and/or arson behaviors and their families. In addition to the fire service, professionals from many fields, including mental health, law enforcement, education, counseling services, and social services can benefit from the training.

For more information on the U.S. Fire Administration's Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program including publications, brochures, fact sheets, links of interest, kid's page, and the JFIS curriculum please visit <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/subjects/youth>



**Juvenile Firesetting is  
NOT a fire problem--  
It is a KID problem...**