

# Arson Prevention Juvenile Fire Setters

## Where to go for Help

Most fire brigades have specialised juvenile firesetter programmes. These are sometimes known as 'FACE' (Fire Awareness and Child Education) teams. If you find that your child is displaying an unhealthy interest in fire you should contact your local brigade for advice.

## Juvenile Fire Setting - How to Reduce the Risk

The term 'firesetting' is well used by those in the fire industry but perhaps not so well known to most of us. Widely used in the United States and adopted generally as the accepted term meaning: 'people who start deliberate fires'.

Around 40% of all fires that are deliberately started in the UK are thought to be caused by juveniles. In 2000, 5,300 fires were started by children under the age of ten. These fires led to 13 deaths and over 1,000 injuries. The estimated cost of these fires was £40 million. Some of these fires will be started by children playing with matches and lighters out of curiosity; the rest involve young people using fire as a form of vandalism.



## Curiosity Firesetter

Children aged between 2-7 years are often fascinated with fire and this leads them to "play" with it. They do not understand the destructive potential of fire or the implications of their actions. They usually start the fire with matches or lighters in bedrooms or other empty rooms often when they have been left alone for very short lengths of time. They have been known to start fires in hidden locations such as wardrobes and under beds. All too often they are together with other children when this 'fireplay' occurs.

Although curiosity is a normal part of a child's development, fire play and fire setting if left unchecked can have devastating consequences.

## Problem Firesetters

The problem firesetter children can also be very young, but they are typically aged between 5 -17 years. Unlike the curious firesetter, these youngsters light fires for many reasons. These can include boredom or lack of alternative entertainment; malice or peer or group pressure to name but a few. An emotional crisis in the child's life such as parents going through a divorce, the death of a relative or

even a new baby in the family can also trigger firesetting behaviour.

Poor relationships with other children, problems at school, cruelty to animals and extreme mood changes are just a few of the signs that a child may have a firesetting problem. Of course, not all juvenile firesetters suffer with these problems nor will all young people with them be firesetters.

## Reducing the Risk

### Teach your child about fire

- Fire is a tool we use to heat our homes or cook our food with
- It is not a toy
- Fire is dangerous - it can and does kill
- Only adults should use fire and even they must follow safety rules for fire
- All fires, even small ones can spread quickly
- Many homes do not have any form of 'flame' heating or cooking, consequently children from such homes have never seen fire for themselves, except perhaps on TV-and that is not real!

### Control your child's access to fire

- Keep all matches and lighters out of the reach of children
- Never allow anyone to use lighters or matches in an unsafe manner in your home. Children watch and emulate such behaviour
- Never leave fires or candles burning when there is no adult present

- Teach children to bring any unattended matches or lighters they find to you or another adult. Better still to take the adult to where they have found them

### Set a good example

- Fit smoke alarms in your home. Regularly test them and replace the batteries. Local Fire Brigades will advise you of the best place to put them and many will provide and fit them free of charge
- Draw up a 'fireplan' or home fire escape drill and practice it
- Get children to understand that if a fire does start for any reason they should not be frightened of the repercussions. They should tell an adult and they should all 'get out, stay out and call the fire brigade out'
- Regularly inspect your home for fire hazards
- Always use safety sense when making or using fire
- Point out the safety rules you and others are following during the course of your day.