

What can a parent do to help?

If you discover a child is fire-setting, it is important to not over-react. The goal is to teach the child to respect fire, just as they would other dangerous things. Educate the child about how to use fire properly and safely. Inform the child about the dangers of fire-setting and why you are concerned. Parents need to take an active role in controlling the child's access to fire-related items, as well as setting good examples of safe ways to use fire. Remember, parents are usually the first people in a child's life to demonstrate how to work with fire. Parents are also the first line of defense in helping children learn the appropriate way to interact with fire.

These are some ways parents can help educate children about fire:

- Teach your child about the practical uses of fire
- Educate the child about the dangers of fire
- Don't allow anyone to use lighters or matches in an unsafe manner
- Inform child to let an adult know about any unattended matches or lighters they may find
- Don't leave children alone with an open flame
- Keep all matches and lighters out of reach of children
- Don't leave stoves or lighted candles unattended
- Install and maintain smoke alarms and fire extinguishers
- Plan and practice fire escape drills in your home
- If you suspect the child is using fire inappropriately, address the matter immediately and seek professional help

Allen County Juvenile Firesetters Task Force

Remember, curiosity about fire is natural, but setting fires is not! If you know a child who has been setting fires, please don't ignore this call for help! These dangerous and illegal behaviors need to be addressed before it is too late!

**Call today to set up
a free assessment!
(260) 427-1483**



Allen County Juvenile Firesetters Task Force

A collaboration of agencies helping children and their families through troubled times



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Fire-setting by children is a serious matter and should be treated as such. Too often, these behaviors are dismissed as a “phase” or “curiosity.” Children that set fires are not simply “playing.” There are serious ramifications of fire-setting, including death, injury, destruction of property, and legal involvement. The FBI estimates that there is an average of 560,000 arson fires per year. These fires cause an average of 750 deaths, 3,700 injuries, and 1.5 billion in property losses. Nearly half of these fires are caused by children 15 and under.

The Allen County Juvenile Firesetters Task Force was formed to identify and help those juveniles that have begun to experiment with fire-setting. The task force is made up of professionals from a variety of local agencies, such as fire departments, probation departments, department of corrections, hospitals, schools, mental health facilities, and social service agencies.

Referrals for an assessment can be made by anyone, including parents or caregivers, schools, counselors, doctors, or anyone else who interacts with the child. You can set up a time for an assessment by calling **(260) 427-1483**. At the assessment, the parent and the child will meet with the Safety Educator of the Fort Wayne Fire Department and a counselor. Once the assessment has been completed, it will be determined what level of intervention is needed for the child.



Oftentimes, the child will not be forthcoming about their fire-setting behaviors. However, there are some warning signs to be aware of. These include:

- An intense interest or preoccupation with fires
- Evidence of damaged or burnt property (e.g. holes in carpet, frayed fabric, burnt papers, etc.)
- Matches and lighters out of place or missing
- Fire propellants (e.g. gas, kerosene) misplaced or a decreased amount of these propellants
- Burn marks on the child, child’s clothing, or child’s belongings

Although the characteristics of juvenile fire-setters can be quite varied, they may demonstrate the following qualities:

- Impulsivity
- Poor social skills
- Quick to anger, especially in stressful situations
- Limited awareness of self
- Acts in other antisocial ways

There are many reasons why a child may set a fire. These include:

- Reaction to something in their lives or environment (e.g. death, divorce, move)
- Wanting to have a sense of control
- Release of strong emotions
- Feeling alienated due to learning disabilities, chronic failure, etc.

There are four types of firesetters.

- 1) **Curious Firesetters:** These children initially set fires because of curiosity or by accident due to poor judgment. Often they don’t understand the destructive nature of fire. They frequently have easy access to lighters, matches, etc. The child will generally set fires while he/she is unsupervised.
- 2) **Troubled Firesetters:** These children set fire due to mental or emotional issues. They set fires to act out emotions of anger, frustration, sadness, or feeling powerless. They will most likely continue to set fires until their needs are identified and met. These fire-setters are often considered to be “crying for help.”
- 3) **Delinquent Firesetters:** These children usually have a history of starting fires. They often demonstrate other antisocial behaviors, such as lying, stealing, truancy, or drug use. They often set fires for excitement and as deliberate acts of vandalism.
- 4) **Severely Disturbed Firesetters:** These children usually have a chronic history of behavioral issues. Most of the time, these fire-setters will end up in correctional facilities or mental facilities.

