

DAVIE COUNTY
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE



JUVINLE FIRE SETTER PROGRAM

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BACKGROUND

Juveniles are responsible for a significant proportion of both the accidental and intentional fires that occur each year in the United States. Since the mid-1970's, national, state, and local officials have been turning more attention to the problem of juvenile firesetting and have experimented with various approaches to reducing it. Nonetheless, many experts believe that there are significant gaps in our knowledge and practice.

THE NATIONAL JUVENILE FIRESETTER/ARSON CONTROL AND PREVENTION PROGRAM (NJF/ACP)

The NJF/ACP began with a nationwide assessment of juvenile firesetter programming, conducted by the Institute for Social Analysis (ISA). Based on that assessment, ISA produced a comprehensive set of materials to heighten awareness of juvenile firesetter issues and to guide implementation of model programs. Instead of advocating a single program model, the NJF/ACP materials define seven components common to effective juvenile firesetter programs:

- a **program management component**, to make key program decisions, coordinate interagency efforts, and foster interagency support;
- a **screening and evaluation component**, to identify and evaluate children who have been involved in firesetting;
- an **intervention services component**, to provide primary prevention, early intervention, and/or treatment for juveniles, especially those who have already set fires or shown an unusual interest in fire;
- a **referral component**, to link the program with the full range of agencies that might help identify juvenile firesetters or provide services to them and their families;

- a **publicity and outreach component**, to raise public awareness of the program and encourage early identification of juvenile firesetters;

Evaluation

A comparison of the characteristics of the youth in four age groups--under 5, age 5 to 9, age 10 to 13, and 14 and up--generally supported the prevailing view (FEMA, 1978) that there are differences between younger and older juvenile firesetters. Among the juveniles screened by all three programs, the younger juvenile firesetters were:

- more likely to have acted alone;
- less likely to live in two-parent household;
- more likely to have a parent who smokes;
- more likely to have set a fire indoors or at their own residence;
- more likely to have done damage over \$100; and
- more likely to have started a fire involving injury or death.

Fortunately, however, few cases involved any injury, and most did not involve large amounts of fire damage. There have no deaths reported due to juvenile fire setters

Screening and Evaluation Decision Grid Fire Service Procedures

Telephone Contact Sheet	Screening	Files with demographic information on firesetters	The organization of first contact information to aid in routing firesetters to the most appropriate help	Adding paperwork to an already overloaded system
Juvenile with Fire Worksheets	Screening	Files with demographics and services received in service delivery points to track firesetter within the system	Increased communication between first contact and service delivery points	Creating an unnecessary trail of paperwork following firesetters
USFA's Interview Schedules	Evaluation	Classification of juveniles into low, definite, and extreme risk for firesetting and development of an intervention plan	The application of a widely accepted and applied system for evaluating and classifying firesetters	Currently there are no formal statistical studies of validity or reliability on this method
FRY Program	Recordkeeping	Files on firesetting incidents, demographics, psycho-social data and intervention steps	Numerical codes and values are assigned to data for quantifiable analysis of trends	Short on supplying information on the "why's" of firesetting

Adolescent Firesetter Decision Criteria

Evaluation An assessment of the severity of the firesetting and arson behavior. according to one of three risk levels--low, moderate, and high

Systematic documentation of the severity of delinquent firesetting behavior

No quantifiable summary score results, and no formal statistical studies have been conducted

Characteristics

- I. Individual Characteristics Evidence of difficulties in one or more areas of physical, cognitive, or emotional functioning. Studies suggest the presence of one or more of the following problems: a greater number of physical illnesses, history of sexual abuse, learning disabilities, overwhelming feelings of anger and aggression, overactivity, impulsiveness and frequent temper outbursts.
- II. Social Circumstances Single-parent families with absent fathers are typical. When marriages are intact, there is a high degree of discord. Overly harsh methods of discipline coupled with lack of adequate supervision is common in single-parent households. Violent patterns of family interaction also have been observed. A history of academic failure coupled with behavior problems in school are evident. Difficulties establishing and maintaining friendships are observed.
- III. Environmental Conditions Stressful events trigger emotional reactions which result in firesetting. Firesetting represents the emotional release of displaced anger, revenge or aggression. Firesetting has the immediately positive reinforcing properties of attention and effect. No attempts are made to extinguish firestarts. There is rarely consideration of the negative consequences or potential destruction prior to firesetting.

Behavior

Curiosity: Includes children 3 to 7, predominantly boys, with poor impulse control or hyperactivity, who are very curious and learn by doing, intend no harm or damage, and may seek help or try to extinguish fire. According to David Wilcox, Ed.D., of the Massachusetts Coalition for Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Programs, in more than 80 percent of cases that involve curiosity firesetting handled by the coalition, the behavior stops after the child and caretakers receive educational intervention.

Crisis: Includes mostly males between 5 to 15, although the number of females is rising. The child often intends damage. The object of the fire may be symbolic, usually related to family stressors. The child may have other psychiatric symptoms, history of impulsive or aggressive behavior, poor self-esteem and poor coping skills. These children are in crisis, feel disempowered and are unable to express their feelings appropriately. "So they find the one thing that grabs everyone's attention, but it also sends the signal that something is terribly wrong," Wilcox said. "A lot of other issues are always uncovered."

Delinquent: Includes older males or females 10 to 16, who set fires in conjunction with their peers, usually in a "crisis profile" for years, who may want to harm others or destroy property. Experimentation with accelerants is likely, as is a history of defying authority, possible gang involvement, cruel behavior without remorse, and a refusal to take responsibility for actions. "If the peer group voices its approval for the behavior, then trying to change the behavior will be difficult. These adolescents start doing wild things with fire," Wilcox said. Peer counselors - kids who know firsthand the dangers of fire - are the best intervention strategy for delinquent firesetters. These counselors can foster peer approval for being safe and smart.

Pathological: Includes mostly males 12 to adulthood, who collect fire tools and have a repetitive firesetting pattern, are destructive of their own and others' property, have poor peer and interpersonal skills, perform poorly in school, have a history of aggressive behavior, tend to blame others, and have a chaotic family life that may include psychiatric illness, possible history of physical or sexual abuse, and low self-esteem masked by narcissism. According to Wilcox, this behavior profile is rare. In the past 12 years of his working with the coalition, only about 10 cases out of 60 belonged to this severe classification.

Tips for Caregivers

Parents are the most influential people in a child's life. All others, though they may contribute significantly (teachers, scout leaders, coaches, other family and friends), are of secondary importance. Parents have the primary responsibility to serve as role models, to be a source of comfort and support, to nurture and to teach, as well as provide the necessities for their children. A major portion of these responsibilities is to ensure a safe environment and teach safe behaviors. Effectively done, these lessons will impact not just the child but the community as a whole. Below are just a few of the things parents can do to help:

- ***Set a good example*** - Install and maintain smoke alarms and fire extinguishers per manufacturers directions, and always use fire in a safe manner.
- ***Take responsibility for fire safety*** - Point out to your children the fire safety rules you follow throughout the day and discuss the dangers of fire.
- ***Control access to fire*** - Keep all ignition devices out of reach of children and teach them to notify an adult if they find them.
- ***Identify telltale signs*** - Check in waste baskets, under the beds, and in closets for burned matches or other evidence your child is misusing fire and, if you find evidence, react positively by using it as a teaching opportunity.
- ***Develop a positive identity*** - Children with positive self esteem are less likely to fall victim to peer pressure, and they tend to make better decisions and look towards their future.
- ***Empower your child*** - Teach your child a home escape plan, how to crawl low in smoke the importance of maintaining smoke alarms, and give them an understanding of situational awareness so they can provide *themselves* with a safe environment.

- ***Provide boundaries*** - Help your child understand responsible behaviors in various settings (home, school, neighborhood, etc.) and provide clear and consistent consequences for violating these rules.
- ***Nurture and support*** - A well nurtured child will seek advice and counsel prior to making decisions they don't fully understand, and they will show an interest in helping others.
- ***Invest time in your child*** - By committing time for them and making them your companion you help them acquire values such as integrity, honesty and responsibility.

Date of Incident _____ Time of Incident _____

<p>Box A: Incident Information Number of injuries _____ Number of people displaced _____ Dollar loss estimate (per report) \$ _____</p>	<p>Box F: Where did the incident take place? <i>Property use</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Single family home <input type="checkbox"/> Apartment <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicle <input type="checkbox"/> Wildland <input type="checkbox"/> Yard/park/landscaping <input type="checkbox"/> Vacant lot <input type="checkbox"/> Street/alley/sidewalk <input type="checkbox"/> School <input type="checkbox"/> Dumpster/trash <input type="checkbox"/> Church <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial building <input type="checkbox"/> Other residence <input type="checkbox"/> Other Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Other_ <p>Area of origin:</p>	<p>Box I: What material was ignited or attempted?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Paper/tissue/cardboard <input type="checkbox"/> Bedding/bed <input type="checkbox"/> Clothing <input type="checkbox"/> Furniture <input type="checkbox"/> Part of a building <input type="checkbox"/> Flammable liquids/aerosols <input type="checkbox"/> Fireworks/explosives <input type="checkbox"/> Toys <input type="checkbox"/> Trash/leaves/grass/twigs <input type="checkbox"/> Bushes/trees/shrubs <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural crops <input type="checkbox"/> Wildland <input type="checkbox"/> People/animals/self <input type="checkbox"/> Insects <input type="checkbox"/> Other
<p>Box B: Referral source</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Parent/guardian <input type="checkbox"/> Fire investigator <input type="checkbox"/> Other fire department <input type="checkbox"/> Law enforcement <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health agency <input type="checkbox"/> Juvenile justice <input type="checkbox"/> School <input type="checkbox"/> Other 	<p>Box G: What was the ignition source?</p> <p><i>Form of heat</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Match <input type="checkbox"/> Lighter <input type="checkbox"/> Candle <input type="checkbox"/> Flare <input type="checkbox"/> Multi-purpose lighter (BBQ) <input type="checkbox"/> Gas stove <input type="checkbox"/> Wood burning stove <input type="checkbox"/> Electric stove <input type="checkbox"/> Explosive devices <input type="checkbox"/> Fireworks <input type="checkbox"/> Other <p>Accelerant used? Yes / No</p>	<p>Box J: Intervention provided (check all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Parent/child interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Screening instrument completed <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Safety Education <input type="checkbox"/> Gave smoke alarms <input type="checkbox"/> Referral to mental health agency <input type="checkbox"/> Referral to juvenile justice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> None available <input type="checkbox"/> Family no show <input type="checkbox"/> Family refused service <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to contact <input type="checkbox"/> Other
<p>Box C: Family Unit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Biological parents <input type="checkbox"/> Mother only/single parent <input type="checkbox"/> Father only/single parent <input type="checkbox"/> Step-family <input type="checkbox"/> Adoptive family <input type="checkbox"/> Foster family <input type="checkbox"/> Mother w/partner <input type="checkbox"/> Father w/partner <input type="checkbox"/> Grandparents <input type="checkbox"/> Other female relative <input type="checkbox"/> Other male relative <input type="checkbox"/> Friends-no relation <input type="checkbox"/> Extended family/many relatives <input type="checkbox"/> Other 	<p>Box H: Where was the ignition source obtained?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Home <input type="checkbox"/> Convenience store <input type="checkbox"/> Other retail store <input type="checkbox"/> Restaurant <input type="checkbox"/> Motel/hotel <input type="checkbox"/> School <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoors <input type="checkbox"/> Other person/friend <input type="checkbox"/> Other 	
<p>Box D: Caregiver at time of incident</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Parent/Guardian <input type="checkbox"/> Sitter (approximate age) <input type="checkbox"/> School <input type="checkbox"/> No one <input type="checkbox"/> Other 		
<p>Box E: Incident Involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Juvenile acted alone <input type="checkbox"/> Other known juveniles involved <input type="checkbox"/> Other unknown juveniles involved <input type="checkbox"/> Other 		

Brief description of the incident:

Description of the Intervention/Fire Safety Education provided:

Signed _____

Date _____

{Relationship to child}

Signed _____

Date _____

{Relationship to child}

Witness _____

Date _____