



Source: U.S. Fire Administration



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Children, Youth, and Fire – Fire Safety Tip Sheet for Caregivers

Children and fire are a dangerous combination. Children who set fires cause hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries every year. Some children decide to use fire and fire tools out of curiosity, boredom, or peer pressure. They just don't understand the danger. But other children decide to use fire because they are struggling with problems or emotions. These children need help. If they don't get that help, they might start more fires. Research shows that a child who has set one fire is very likely to set others. Parents and caregivers should focus on stopping dangerous fire behavior before it starts rather than punishing children after the fact.

What can you do?

Tips to keep your family safe:

- Keep matches, lighters, and novelty lighters in a high place where children can't reach them. If possible, use a locked cabinet or other secure place.
- Teach young children never to touch matches or lighters. They must tell a grown-up when they find matches or lighters.
- Purchase and use only child-resistant lighters. Lighters that look like toys can confuse children and cause fires, injuries, and deaths. Do not buy or use them.
- Supervise young children closely. Make sure that they stay a safe distance (3 feet) away from all fire sources. This includes stoves, lit candles, cigarettes, fireplaces, barbeque grills, and campfires.
- It is natural for young children to be curious and ask questions about fire, play with fire trucks, or pretend to cook. Use these opportunities to teach them about fire safety.
- Explain that fire moves very fast and can hurt as soon as it touches them. Tell them that this is why matches and lighters are only tools for grown-ups.
- Set clear rules with children and youth about using fire. They must always ask a grownup for permission, and a grownup must always be there when they are allowed to use fire.
- Talk with children and youth about the dangers and what can happen if they don't use fire correctly.

- Be a good example! Always use fire sources safely. This includes matches, lighters, candles, fireplaces, stoves, barbeque grills, and campfires. Never treat fire sources carelessly. Don't use them as toys or do tricks with them because children may see you and try to do the same thing.
- Talk with children and youth about what their friends or other children are doing with fire. What are they seeing online in video games, on TV, in movies, and on social media? Teach them specific ways to resist the peer pressure to use fire incorrectly.
- Praise children and youth for showing respect for fire and being responsible when they are allowed to use it.

References:

NFPA Educational Messages, 2018 Edition Desk Reference for the Fire Service and Fire and Life Safety Educators (EMAC)

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Children and Fire – Fire Safety Tip Sheet for Caregivers, www.nfpa.org