

## Blueprint of a Firesetter

The majority (80%) of juvenile firesetters are Caucasian males from middle class homes.

### A Juvenile Firesetter:

- ☑ May come from a severely disturbed home environment with one or no biological parents living in the home.
- ☑ May have poor school or work performance.
- ☑ Is a loner, social misfit, or has few friends.
- ☑ May be easily controlled by peers.
- ☑ May have been sexually abused.
- ☑ May be a bedwetter.

**PUNISHMENT AND "SCARE TACTICS" WILL NOT ALWAYS SATISFY A CHILD'S CURIOSITY**

### Possible Warning Signs:

- ☑ Talking about fire.
- ☑ Playing with matches or lighters.
- ☑ Asking how certain materials will burn.
- ☑ Carrying fire starting materials in pockets or having them in their room.
- ☑ Trying to burn items.
- ☑ Displaying cruelty towards animals.
- ☑ Previous brushes with the law.

The average age of a juvenile arsonists is 11.

90% of those who die in fires started by children are children.

## Prevention & Intervention

**AGE 5 & UNDER:** Meet your child's curiosity early on. Fireproof your home. Teach children not to touch matches or lighters.

- 🚒 Teach that adults, not children use fire.
- 🚒 Keep matches and lighters out of sight and out of reach.
- 🚒 Praise children for reporting any matches or lighters they may find.
- 🚒 Never leave children alone near any open flames.
- 🚒 Set a good example: children may imitate adults who light cigarettes, candles, etc.

**AGE 5 & OLDER:** If an older child is curious about fire, show him/her the proper and safe way to use matches or lighters.

- 🚒 Explain that fire is a tool.
- 🚒 Agree that matches and fire can be used only when supervised and in a safe matter.
- 🚒 Discuss what to do if a fire is started.
- 🚒 Teach to respect fire just as with any other tool.
- 🚒 Always teach and practice home fire safety.

### IF YOU SUSPECT JUVENILE FIRESETTING:

1. Keep matches, lighters, and all flammable liquids up out of reach. Lock them up if needed.
2. Set rules about the use of matches and lighters.
3. Make sure the child has adequate adult supervision both at home and away.
4. Install at least one smoke alarm in your home.
5. Establish a home Fire Escape Plan and have your entire family practice it often.
6. Seek help. Your local fire service is the leading agency involved in early intervention that:
  - 🚒 Recommends prevention programs for first-time firesetters, who were motivated by accident, curiosity, or experimentation.
  - 🚒 Evaluate, educates, counsels, and recommends services to stop firesetting behavior and identify any related problems.

# JUVENILE FIRESETTERS

Curiosity  
or  
Serious  
Problem?



MIAMI VALLEY FIRE DISTRICT  
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## The First Strike

Curiosity about fire is normal, but the playing with fire is dangerous.

Whether it is a result of a curious child playing with matches or the malicious act of a troubled delinquent, juvenile fire setting is a serious problem that may escalate without proper intervention.



Arson is the leading crime committed by juveniles and it is the fastest growing crime in the U.S.

Fire is the leading cause of accidental death in the home for children 5 and under and many are a victim of their own fire play activity.

50% of juvenile-set fires occur in people's homes and buildings.

Approximately 2/3 of the 67,000 fires set by children each year are "*curiosity fires*."

48% of children state that they could get matches without asking.

Nearly half of all children have engaged in fireplay.

# FIRE

Holds a strong fascination for children.

## Low Risk - Curious - 7 years old and under

Children are often fascinated by matches and lighters and may set fires accidentally. They have a lack of fire knowledge and awareness of fire's destructive nature.

These Children may:

- Imitate a smoking parent or guardian by lighting cigarettes and fires, using matches or lighters, not using solvents.
- Ignite household items.
- Set fires in the morning, close to home, often when their parents or guardians are sleeping.
- Start fires in hidden places such as in closets or under beds.
- Try to extinguish the fire.

They lack adequate parental supervision and fire safety education. Parents may try to stop the behavior or they may even deny their child's involvement.

Treatment: fire awareness education.

KIDS COMMIT 55% OF SCHOOL ARSONS.

## Moderate - Troubled/Crises-Related, Age 7-14

Children often set fires as a way to "act out" anger or frustrations or as a response to peer pressure without thinking about the consequences. They may have mental or emotional disturbance or poor coping/problem solving skills. Fire setting may be a "Cry For Help."

- They create simple fires when alone, using matches or lighters - sometimes solvents.
- They destroy something personal when acting out of jealousy or revenge - a symbol of crises.

These children may live in a chaotic home environment, with neglect or abuse, a history of foster care, and possible problems with stealing, shop lifting or truancy. They may have easy access to ignition sources and tend to be sick or show signs of depression, nervous disorders, poor eye contact, or difficulty speaking. Parents focus on the act, not the reason for the behavior.

Treatment: counseling to identify the problem and appropriate action to take.

## Extreme Risk - Delinquent/Strategic-Related, 13-18 year old

These children are impulsive, but know the dangers of fire. They start them for fun, possibly for revenge. They may have run-ins with the law. They can be cold and calculating, not taking consequences seriously, wanting to injure or kill. They play with fireworks, smoke bombs, false alarms, and use accelerants or incendiary devices.

These juveniles set fires:

- With others (may be gang-related) at school, in dumpsters, alleys, brush, fences, or trash cans.
- That are larger, possibly to cover up other illegal activities and cause harm or destruction.
- That are well-planned in multiple origins, and they rarely get caught or hurt.

They may be from a dysfunctional family. Their parents defer responsibility and are fearful of legal/financial implications. They may be peer-dominated with a history of school problems, substance abuse, or physical, emotional, or psychological problems. Treatment: fire safety programs and positive interaction with local firefighters.

## Severely Disturbed - 15-16 year olds

These children may have a life-long fascination with fire and a possible history of medical/neurological problems, severe emotional/psychological disorders, or mood swings. Usually intelligent, sneaky, devious, often successful in any endeavor for good or bad. They show little self-control, appear violent, and may be a loner or an insomniac.

- They may have a history of fire setting.
- The fires may be ritualistic with a distinct pattern.
- They are proud of their fires, acting on emotion.
- Their fires may be very refined and destructive.

The child may be a short male with physical limitations, lack of coordination, and vision or hearing problems or he may come from a neglected, unstructured home with substance, and/or physical abuse.

Treatment: intervention, education, aversion therapy, behavior modification, and psychotherapy.