

Child Fire Setting and What to Do

Child Fire Setting

Utah is known for having a lot of children. Not surprisingly Utah has a high percentage of child-started fires. However, these children are not all driven by the same motivation. The differences in motivation require differences in response.

Motivation

Children who set fires have several possible motives. Among these are:

- Most children are "Curiosity" fire setters who are driven by an instinctive fascination with fire and a normal desire to learn about and experience the world.
- "Cry for Help" fire setters account for a smaller but significant group. These children light fires as a response to the stress and pressure they are feeling in their lives.
- "Delinquent" fire setters are those that start destructive fires as a form of anti-social behavior. It could as easily have been a rock through the window as a fire for these adolescents.
- "Extreme" fire setters are a very small percentage of children who suffer some form of severe mental illness.

Child Assessment

A "reasonable person" assessment of the child's general health, their family and school conditions, and how well they have handled other problems, can be used to identify children that require additional assistance.

A child's past success at handling stress, their physical wellbeing, and their self-esteem are combined with their physical environment and parental support to produce their level of coping skill. A lack of coping skill can lead to increased stress. Increased stress can lead to reduced inhibitions. Reduced inhibitions can lead to fire play. Fire play can lead to disaster.

Education

- All Juvenile Fire Setters should receive basic fire education.
- "Curiosity" fire setters will gain the most from education.
- "Cry for Help" fire setters whose coping skills are insufficient should be referred to mental health professionals.
- "Delinquent" adolescent fire setters should be referred to the juvenile court system.
- "Extreme" fire setters may require both court and mental health intervention.

Parent Response

Supervision

- Matches and lighters must be kept out of the reach of children.
- Know where your children are and what they are doing.
- Teach children to be responsible for their decisions and actions.

Children Need to Understand

- Matches and lighters are tools and must be treated with respect.
- Fire doesn't discriminate. It will burn everyone and everything it touches.
- People and objects don't "un-burn."
- Big fires start small and move fast.

For more information, contact the Fire Department at 801-260-7300.