

Children Setting Fires

FIRE (ARSON) IS A CRIME!

Several fires have been started in wooded areas on Fort Knox by children playing with gasoline and matches. Gasoline and matches are a serious and deadly combination. Besides burning wooden bridges, brush piles, and leaves children could become a victim by catching themselves on fire. Arson continues to increase at Fort Knox and nationwide, exacting an incredible toll on families and communities. Thousands of people die each year from fire related injuries and more than half of all people arrested for arson are children. Children of all ages set fires. Michigan Arson Prevention Committee reports that each year children set about 100,000 fires nationwide, about 20,000 of those are set in homes. Children make up about 20% of all fire deaths, and about 30% of the fires that kill children, are set by children. Between 25-40% of all fires are set by children according to the United State Fire Administration. Why do children or any child light fires? More importantly, what can we do to stop them?

According to National Fire Protection Association, the principle reason most children play with fire is out of curiosity. Troubled children may act out their anger or frustration by setting fires. Abused children may cry for help. Older children may set fires due to peer pressure, or as part of gang activity. It is normal for young children to express a natural curiosity about fires, don't try to scare them away from fire. Rather teach them to respect it, like we teach our children to respect traffic. Too often, child fire setters are not given proper guidance and supervision. Consequently, they repeat their fire setting behavior. What can we do to reduce child fire setting?

- Teach your children that fire is dangerous and that matches and lighters are tools only for grown-ups to use.
- Keep matches and lighters up high, out of sight and children's reach, preferably in a locked cabinet or drawer.
- Store all flammable liquids such as; gasoline, charcoal lighter fluid, and mowers in an approved storage location and locked garages to prevent access to kids.
- Never leave a child alone with an open flame, such as a candle.
- Teach children the nature of fire. It is HOT, FAST, DARK and SMOKEY, and DEADLY!
- Talk to your children about the realities of the law. A fire that is set can lead to the felony charge of arson. This is a serious CRIME.
- As parents, set a GOOD example. Most children learn how to use fire by watching us, the adults (parents). If we don't treat fire with respect, our children certainly won't.
- Don't ignore the obvious. When children use fire in ways that are harmful or dangerous, seek help, support, and guidance of a professional.

- You may contact the Fort Knox Fire Department at 624-6016/1876

All across this country there are headlines like the one in "The Birmingham News, Church arson arrests have parents talking with their kids". Parental awareness and involvement is the key to prevent or stop children fire settings. Parents must be aware of their children moods, feelings, and relationships both within and outside the home.

Focus Adolescent Services says that children who set fires may have one or more of these characteristics:

- Curiosity with fire
- Lack of understanding fire's danger
- Recent change in family life (death, separation, divorce, move, abandonment)
- Parental alcoholism or drug abuse
- History of behavioral problems such as; lying, stealing, truancy, bullying, cruelty to animals, and substance use
- Poor peer relationships and or social isolation
- History of physical, emotional or sexual abuse and or neglect
- Blaming others and or unwilling to accept responsibility for one's own actions

Unfortunately, families and even law enforcement personnel are often reluctant to take action on what they think and hope is a one-time occurrence. Sometimes families simply ignore the seriousness of the behavior. According to the Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Prevention, juveniles are arrested for a greater share of this crime, arson, than any other. If an investigation reveals that there is sufficient evidence indicating malicious and willful fire setting, then a juvenile can be charged with arson. The penalty for arson varies greatly depending on the intention and damages rendered.

If you know or suspect that a child is setting fires, the worse thing one can do is nothing!

A child who is curious about fire may be any age. Any child who misuses fire may be anyone's child.