

The Fire Smart program is an educational intervention program designed to educate parents and children about fire safety and the consequences of fire. If your child has played with fire, has deliberately set a fire, or if you are unsure of how to teach your child about fire safety, this program is important to your family. Each family meets individually with a trained fire service educator. The educator will discuss the situation with the family and recommend education or counseling. Educational services are free. Financial assistance with counseling may be available.

What is Firesetting?

Firesetting is the term used to describe the behavior of children who have begun to use fire in a way that is dangerous or not approved by a parent or caregiver. The term firesetter does not mean that a child has a problem, however, could benefit from additional education about the dangers and proper uses of fire. Through education and, in some cases, counseling, children can learn the skills to change this dangerous behavior. The FIRE SMART program can help children who have been involved with fire.

Understanding Firesetting

Determining the motivation for the firesetting will help determine how to deal with it. Most children fall into the following classifications:

Curiosity or Experimentation	Reactionary	Deviate Behavior
<p>About 70% of firesetters are in this category. The child is curious. The opportunity is there because the child has access to fire tools and is not supervised. He or she decides to "see what fire will do." They typically do not think about or understand the danger of their actions.</p>	<p>These firesetters are usually older, upset about something and not good at self-expression. They typically light a fire as a way to let grown-ups know they need help. Their firesetting is in reaction to a problem.</p>	<p>Usually teenagers. These firesetters light fires for many reasons. Most of the time, it is a prank or because of a dare. Sometimes it is to conceal other crimes like vandalism or theft. Most firesetters in this category do not realize they are breaking the law and could go to jail.</p>
<p>Example: A 5-year-old finds his parent's lighter on the table. He is bored and decides to set some papers and sticks on fire. His home life is stable, with no recent stresses, and he seems sorry for what he did.</p>	<p>Example: A scared 10-year-old watches her parents fight, hoping they will stop. Not knowing how to express her feelings, she takes a lighter into her room and sets her bedding on fire. What happens the next time if nothing changes?</p>	<p>Example: Other kids dare a 15-year-old to light toilet paper on fire in the school bathroom. Wanting his friends to like him, he starts the fire even though he knows it is wrong.</p>

Anyone Can Call

Anyone who cares about the safety of a child can call for help. Families, friends, neighbors, teachers, and you! For more information, please contact the St. Joseph Fire Prevention ([hyperlink to email](#)) and ask about the FIRE SMART program. It is important to take the early signs of firesetting seriously.

What You Can Do

-Set a good example. If you smoke, be responsible when using matches and lighters. Children learn by watching.

-Keep matches and lighters out of children's sight and reach. Even toddlers can use lighters and matches to start a fire.

-Teach your school children to "stop, drop and roll" if their clothing catches on fire. Tell them not to run, but to stop, drop to the floor, and roll over and over until the fire is out.

-Teach children the safe and proper ways to use fire. Be sure they understand it should only be used by a responsible grown-up.

-Smoke detectors save lives! Make sure you have a working smoke detector in your house, and practice your family escape plan.