

Why Children Set Fires

Most experts agree that the best way to understand firesetting behavior is to look at where and why children set fires. They believe there are two basic types of children who start fires.

CURIOSITY FIRESETTERS usually are 2-7 year olds whose fascination with fire leads them to “play” with it to find out how it feels, how it burns, and what it does. They do not understand fire’s destructive potential.

Although curiosity is a normal part of children’s growth and development, parents and other adults who discover that a child is playing with fire should take it very seriously.

PROBLEM FIRESETTERS can also be very young, but generally are 5-17 years old. In contrast to the curious firesetter, however, these juveniles light fires because of emotional or mental disturbances ranging from mild to severe. A crisis in a child’s life, such as moving to a new area, a death or divorce could trigger firesetting behavior.

The Majority of juvenile firesetters are **ordinary children in need**: some are curious and experimental about fire; some troubled (in need of counseling and other services).

The issue of juvenile firesetting has many variables, such as age, motivation for firesetting behavior, type of fires set, ignition materials used to set the fire, etc. The behavior of firesetting children is a symptom of a problem, communicating a need in a very powerful and destructive manner. The end results of child firesetting are costly to the child, his or her family, and the entire community in lives lost, injury, loss of environmental resources, and property damage, regardless of age or motivation for firesetting.

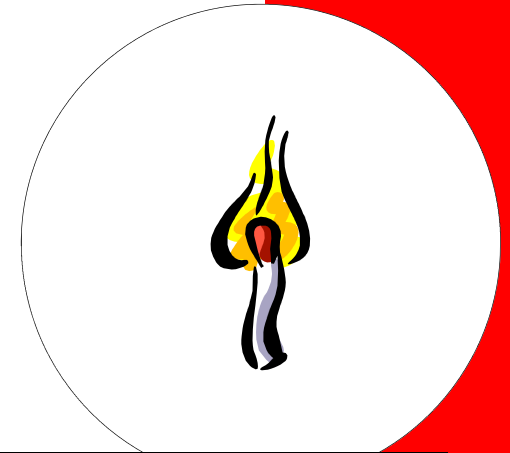
The Meridian Fire Departments mission is to preserve lives and property by providing services to prevent and control fires, accidents, and other emergencies, while maintaining the highest standards of professionalism, efficiency, and effectiveness .



Meridian Fire Department

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JUVENILE FIRESETTERS

*WHAT YOU
CAN DO!*

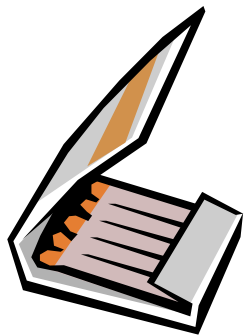
Meridian Fire
Department

Juvenile Firesetters

The number of fires set by children is growing. It is a problem that needs the attention of parents, teachers, counselors and community leaders, in cooperation with Meridian Fire and Police Departments.

Each year, over 1.1 million people in the United States suffer a burn injury that requires medical treatment and approximately 4500 people will die from their burn injury.

Children playing with matches or lighters is a leading cause of home fires and one in which the children and others present are often hurt. Children are twice as likely to die in a fire that they start themselves. Children have a natural curiosity about fire and are tempted to play with matches or lighters left within their reach. In many cases, children who start fires have a history of fire setting behavior.



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Parents.... The First Line of Defense

Install and maintain smoke detectors

Plan and practice home fire escape drills

Keep matches and lighters out of the reach of children; preferably in a locked cabinet

Report all fires regardless of the size to the fire department

Seek assistance if your child has started a fire or is playing with ignition sources



Teachers, Counselors, Leaders Know who can help

Teach Fire Safety in all grade levels

Help to raise awareness in our community about Juvenile Firesetters and the programs available to them and their families

Report all fires regardless of the size to the fire department

Seek assistance from the Meridian Fire Department if you suspect fire setting behavior

What You Can Do

National statistics indicate when programs are not provided for children involved in juvenile firesetting, there will be an 81% probability of the fire setting activity being repeated to achieve the excitement and/or attention.

By contrast, the national statistics indicate that when intervention programs are provided to the children who are juvenile fire setters then there is a 90% probability that the offenders will not repeat the activity.

There are effective educational programs in fire and life safety that have been developed for children. The Meridian Fire Department has trained Juvenile Fire Setter Intervention specialists who can evaluate and educate a juvenile who is involved in the act of fire setting. Most interventions take place at the Meridian Fire Safety Center. The center is equipped with an actual burned-out room that allows juveniles an up close view of the destruction of fire.



Fire in the hands of children destroys! Regardless of the child's age or motivation