

Categories of Juvenile Firesetters

Based on the Characteristics and Motivation these categories are not mutually exclusive and are simply meant to help determine the best course of intervention. What we really want to know when doing an assessment is: the chance they will do it again and what can be done to minimize that chance. Do they need education and/or counseling?

**Characteristics that are present with almost every
firesetting event:**

- Lack of adequate supervision
- Easy access to ignition material
- Lack of safety awareness on the part of the child and/or parents

Curiosity Firesetting

- Usually young, age 2-6 or 8
- They are exploring and experimenting
- They can/will get in to any every area of the house
- No particular social/economic class
- Usually the child's first fire

Crisis Firesetting

- Any age but usually 2-10 years old
- They are having trouble dealing with something in their life
- Setting fire makes them feel better or gets attention
- Often set fire the same day as a bad event or a bad day
- Often abuse involved
- May live in a chaotic environment
- The fire is usually not premeditated but impulsive
- Usually have little remorse
- May or may not try to put the fire out
- May lie about how the fire started or deny their involvement

Delinquent Firesetting

- Knows better than to have set the fire—though may not understand the full potential danger
- Often carry a lighter at all times for no good reason
- These are risk-takers or kids who complain of being bored
- Lack good judgment and social skills
- May scare themselves when the fire gets out of control
- Usually teenaged
- Impulsive
- There is often peer pressure or peer involvement—may brag about it
- The fire often involved an accelerant
- May try to put it out at first but give up easily and run

Strategic Firesetter

- Usually teenaged
- May use fire to get even or to attack someone—premeditated fires
- I'm not okay, you're not okay
- Usually in trouble at school, home, work, everywhere
- Lack of remorse and care less about consequences—may brag about it
- May be gang related

Pathological Firesetting

- Usually has long history of firesetting and psychosocial problems
- Often set “smart fires”—well thought out, planned
- May show a distinctive pattern, even ritualistic
- Often proud of it and will gladly show their scars
- May have many fire-related materials like candles, matches, lighters
- May say things like ‘I’m burning myself because I’ve been bad.’