

Factors Influencing Youth Firesetting Behavior

There are four common factors that influence firesetting behavior among children and adolescents.

These factors impact all types of firesetting and include

- 1. Easy access to ignition materials.** Easy access to ignition materials often proves deadly for children who start fires. In many homes where a child has been involved in starting a fire, the child easily discovered the ignition source or already knew where it was located and how to obtain it.
- 2. Lack of adequate supervision.** The lack of adequate supervision is a factor that can influence all ages of firesetting among children and adolescents. Parents are often shocked to discover their child has engaged in firesetting over a prolonged period of time.
- 3. A failure to practice fire safety.** A failure to practice fire safety is a factor that often affects children and their parents in the following ways:
 - a. Young children often lack understanding of the dangers associated with firesetting and safety rules about fire.
 - b. Older children and adolescents may not have received school-based fire safety education about the dangers of the inappropriate use of fire, penalties for such behavior, and direction on what to do if a fire occurs.
 - c. Parents/Care providers may not be aware of the significance of youth firesetting, appropriate fire safety education, penalties, or what actions to take in the event a fire occurs. They may not be aware of local youth firesetting prevention and intervention programs.
- 4. Easy access to information on the Internet.** Information regarding firesetting, designing explosives, and how to do tricks with fire is a problem that demands attention. Technology has made explicit media available to youths on many dangerous and often illegal activities. They are able to experiment with fire or incendiary materials and instantaneously post results for the world to see and oftentimes replicate.

Awareness of these factors can help you educate your community about what can be done to prevent firesetting by children and adolescents.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). *Youth Firesetter Prevention and Intervention*, February 2011.



Children often don't understand the dangers of firesetting.