



AVON
FIRE & RESCUE

www.avonfire.gov.uk

Playing with fire

A guide to getting support from the Firesetter Intervention Scheme for young people who set fires





What is firesetting and why do some children start fires?

The term **‘firesetter’** is used to describe those who fire set, play with fire or have a fascination with fire and have not been convicted through a court of law for their behaviour.

Children and young people of all ages can display an interest in fire and **firesetting** behaviour. Without help and guidance, firesetting can become more serious with the potential to lead to property damage, serious injuries or even death.

There are a number of different reasons why children and young people exhibit this type of behaviour which can include natural curiosity or using firesetting as a method of communicating **emotional distress**.

Early intervention is key in helping to address firesetting behaviour and this is why Avon Fire & Rescue Service offer their free and confidential service: **the Firesetter Intervention Scheme**.

What should I look for?

Have you noticed any of the following?

- Scorch marks and/or small burn holes in clothes, bedding, carpets and other soft furnishings
- Burnt matches or items such as charred paper or melted objects left lying about or in waste bins
- Missing matches or lighters
- Matches and lighters hidden in the young person's bedroom, under the bed, in drawers, in their school bag or coat
- Clothes smelling of smoke
- An unusual fascination with fires or the Fire & Rescue Service
- Learnt behaviours from another family member involved in firesetting

These are all signs that could indicate firesetting behaviour is taking place. Remember, every fire set by a child is a cause for concern, no matter where it is set or whether it is done with or without intent. Even the smallest fire can quickly get out of control and put people at risk.

If you notice the signs, don't ignore it, act on it.



Firesetting - what is the truth?

Myth buster

Myth

It is normal for children to play with fire.

Fact

Although curiosity about fire is common, playing with or setting fires is not typical and it is dangerous.

Myth

Firesetting is a phase that children grow out of.

Fact

This is not a phase. Young people need education or they will continue to experiment with fire.

Myth

If children only set small fires, you don't need to worry.

Fact

Any fire can quickly get out of control and endanger lives.

Myth

Telling children not to play with fire or punishing them if they do will cure the problem.

Fact

These measures are often not effective. Understanding why a child has an interest, teaching them about fire in a safe manner and limiting access to matches and lighters are often more successful.

Is there anywhere I can get help?

Avon Fire & Rescue Service has specially trained staff who can work directly with young people who display firesetting behaviour.

Over a series of visits, a Firesetter Intervention provides one-to-one fire safety education to children and their families to increase awareness of the dangers and consequences of fire and to understand the reasons that lead them to start fires.

Each intervention is individually tailored to the needs and abilities of the child. Visits last up to an hour and ideally are carried out in the child's home setting or an alternative suitable location, such as their school.

Anyone can refer a child into the Firesetter Intervention Scheme, all we ask is if you are not the legal guardian that you gain parental consent to refer into the scheme.

Make a referral when a child or young person displays certain behaviours:

- **Setting fires and/or playing with fire**
- **Been involved in making hoax 999 calls**
- **Been causing false alarms by setting off smoke or fire alarms**
- **Have a fascination with fire or needs reassurance with regard to their feelings about fire**

Contact us using one of the following:

search 'firesetters' at www.avonfire.gov.uk and complete the online form

email firesetters@avonfire.gov.uk

call 0117 926 2061 extension 393 and leave a message

What else can I do to help?



You can take actions around the home to reduce the opportunities for a young person to play with fire:

- Keep matches and lighters out of reach and sight
- Never leave children unattended near burning candles or open fires
- Explain the dangers of fire and the hurt it can cause
- Ensure the home has a working smoke alarm on every floor and they are tested weekly
- Make a fire escape plan and practise it with the whole family/household
- Undertake regular checks for the signs of firesetting behaviour
- Set good examples of fire behaviour - children learn by exploring, experimenting and copying adult behaviour

Never ignore firesetting behaviour - act on it by referring the child/young person into the Firesetter Intervention Scheme.

Remember
if there is a fire,
get out, stay out
and call 999