

What Parents Can Do

- Teach very young children that fire is a tool we use to cook food or heat the home. It is not magic. It is certainly not a plaything. It is dangerous and only for adults to use carefully. (Use the example of driving a car or using power tools.)
- Keep all matches and lighters out of the reach and sight of children. Even a two year old child can work a cigarette lighter.
- Young children should be encouraged to notify an adult if they find matches or lighters and be rewarded or praised for doing so.
- Set a good example. Care should always be taken with matches, cigarette lighters and with fire in general. The home should be fire safe.
- Teach older children how to use matches, lighters and fire safely and responsibly. Stress how important it is for them only to light fires under adult supervision.

MFS J-FLIP may help!

Because it is:

- educationally based
- tailored for each child
- free
- confidential
- delivered by specially trained MFS firefighters
- the child, parent/carer and firefighter working together

For help phone the
J-FLIP coordinator
8204 3611

Country callers
1300 737 637

SA Metropolitan Fire Service
99 Wakefield Street
Adelaide 5000

samfscommunitysafety@sa.gov.au
www.mfs.sa.gov.au

J-FLIP

Juvenile Fire Lighters Intervention Program

Helping families and carers
stop children's fire play



The SA Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) Juvenile Fire Lighters Intervention Program (J-FLIP) aims to reduce death, injury and property damage caused by children's unsafe fire play and fire lighting.

The program content varies according to the age and maturity of the child.

The child meets with a practitioner, who is an experienced firefighter, over a number of weeks.

A crucial aspect of the program is the development of trust between the child and the practitioner. This must occur for the program to be successful. Together, the practitioner, the child and the parents/carers develop a greater awareness of fire safety issues in the home and actively work towards a safer home environment.

Through the use of role play, discussion and activities, the practitioner develops within the child a greater respect for fire and awareness of its consequences. At the same time, the benefits of fire are explained and the child is taught that fire is a tool and not a toy.

The Practitioners

The practitioners are professional MFS firefighters who have been trained to work in this specialised area.

Why Do Children Start Fires?

The following are the most common reasons why children start fires:

Curiosity / Fascination

Approx 3-16 years of age

Associated with the attraction to the colour, light and energy released by flames.

Attention Seeking

Approx 6-12 years of age

Associated with a change in the family situation (e.g. parental separation, new baby), learning or social difficulties.

Peer Pressure

Approx 10-14 years of age

Associated with learning difficulties or low self-esteem.

Anger / Revenge

Approx 8-14 years of age

Associated with difficulties relating to peers or family problems.

Malicious Mischief

Approx 13-16 years of age

Associated with family and social difficulties. Younger children tend to light fires in or around the home and only rarely set out to cause damage by their fire lighting.

By contrast, older children are more likely to light fires away from the home and may be motivated by malicious intent.

Common Misconceptions

Myth

All fire lighters are pyromaniacs!

FACT

Pyromania is a very rare condition. Fire lighting is a behaviour which can have many reasons and which can be stopped. It is sometimes a symptom of more deep-seated problems.

Myth

It is normal for children to play with fire!

FACT

While curiosity about fire is common, fire play is not normal and can be deadly.

Myth

Fire lighting is a phase that the child will grow out of!

FACT

Fire lighting is not a phase. Fire lighting behaviour can continue and escalate. It is dangerous and must be dealt with immediately.

Myth

If you burn a child's hand, they will stop lighting fires!

FACT

Purposely burning a child's hand is child abuse and is against the law. Burns can create fear and scars. The reason behind the fire lighting must be discovered and addressed.

Myth

Shocking a child with graphic images of burns or burns victims will stop a child playing with fire!

FACT

Doing this only instils fear and does not teach the child anything about fire and safety. More importantly, respect should be shown for burn survivors who are trying to recover (emotionally and physically) from their burns.

Myth

Having a firefighter or person of authority talk sternly to a child will stop fire lighting behaviours!

FACT

Scare tactics do not get to the root of the problem, and these children may continue to set fires.