



RUSSELLVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT
POLICY MANUAL

Policy Number:
Section:
Original Date:
Revised Date:

PURPOSE

The purpose of this guideline is to outline consistent procedures when the Department is addressing the behavior of youth firesetting in partnership with community resources for the screening, education and referral of youths who have been identified as misusing ignition sources (matches, lighters or fireworks) or starting a fire, either unintentionally or maliciously.

POLICY

The responsibility to carry out this policy rests with any member of the organization who may encounter youth firesetting behavior. Fires involving a youth should be reported within 24 hours to the Fire Marshal.

The following information at a minimum shall be reported by the fire officer in charge:

1. A narrative from the fire company about the firesetting incident.
2. The fire incident report.
3. Photographs of what was set on fire.

If anyone was injured or unusual circumstances occur as a result of a youth set fire, contact an investigator and request that they complete the on scene interview.

Procedure:

Youth can be referred from: parents, caregivers, school officials, the fire service, law enforcement, mental health, child protection etc. If a family comes to a fire station with their child who has been involved with fire setting, the family should be directed to contact the Fire Marshal during normal business hours. Tours of the fire station should NOT be given to juveniles suspected of fire setting behavior. Children tend to view the tours as a positive reward for negative behavior.

Intake: When initial contact is made, the parent or legal guardian must sign a Release of Information (ROI - link) form permitting the program legal rights to release information to those parties who need to be involved. The ROI form is critical for the success of the case. If the parent refuses to sign the ROI form, criminal charging may be required in order to proceed with the intervention. Record of contact either electronic or written shall be established for all cases. This form offers a descriptive account of the contacts and scheduling with the family. The value is sometimes shown when a family refuses to complete the program and is referred back at a later date. Prior refusal is documented and a paper trail is established.

Assessment: The main component of the intervention is the assessment. The purpose of an assessment tool is to gain information necessary to determine an appropriate intervention strategy.

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It is recommended that two people, one being an intervention specialist, conduct the interviews in the home of the referred family so that they have an opportunity to gather information about the family condition and lifestyle. The family may also feel more at home and possibly provide more information. If only one intervention specialist is available, it is recommended to conduct the interviews at a neutral location, not the home, nor the fire station. Community centers, schools, libraries are appropriate.

Separate the parent from the juvenile for the screening process. Go through each section of the screening tool. If other juveniles are mentioned as having involvement with the fire it will be important to follow up with those families. Get contact information.

Based on the assessment scores, make a referral. Have the family sign an agreement that they will attend the firesetting education program and make a date to meet for the session. If the child is court ordered to attend and they fail to meet the contract, charges may be filed.

Firesetting prevention education begins during this process. Let the parents know that access to ignition devices is a key component of firesetting behavior. They need to take responsibility right now to eliminate access to lighters and matches, which may include locking them up.

The youth should be given a pre-test to determine the level of existing knowledge. After leaving the assessment, document your findings in a narrative form.

Intervention: The goal for intervention is to respond to the family's needs and provide appropriate referrals and education in order to stop the risky behavior. Just as every child is different, every intervention will also be different. If the firesetting behavior stems from curiosity, an educational intervention is appropriate. If the behavior stems from stress, crisis or mental health issues, the intervention will likely involve other service providers. If the behavior is delinquent, a restorative justice portion can be very effective.

The intervention strategies are decided by the Youth Firesetting Intervention specialist who is working on the case after carefully reviewing the assessment notes. It may involve consultation with other agencies involved with the family such as social services or mental health. For children in need of other services, the program will assist in finding an agency best suited for the family's needs.

Firesetting prevention education is one of the most critical parts of the Youth Firesetting Intervention and is the portion of the strategy that is best provided by the fire service educators. When children have an experience with fire it is critical that they gain an understanding of why their behavior was inappropriate. This involves helping the youth to understand and identify appropriate behavior, taking responsibility for their actions.

Many times a parent or other agencies that have not been educated in appropriate intervention strategies may think that they have offered direction to a child who was involved with fire. Parents visiting the program have usually attempted to educate their child about fire in one of the following approaches:

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1. Instilling fear in the child
2. Punitive measures only
3. Ignoring the problem so as not to put ideas into the child's head
4. Explaining unrealistic outcomes (you will be killed, you will go to jail)
5. Offering misinformation about fire to the child

Rarely do parents whose children have problems with fire give a detailed explanation of how and when fire should be used. Most adults do not know much more about fire than the children do. The parents are an important part of the educational process. The parent should accompany the child through the educational process, whether that is sitting through a class with them, or participating in one on one education. This will re-enforce the family's understanding of the firesetting behavior and help them learn how to prevent inappropriate fire use in the future.

Evaluation: Exit from the firesetting intervention program typically occurs after the education session is completed, a post-test is passed and if necessary a referral made to an outside agency. If one exits the program prior to completion they fail the program and the outcome should be documented in the juvenile's file. When the intervention is completed it is important to have evaluation forms for the participants filled out. This can grant insight into ways in which the program may be improved.

Follow-up: Once a person exits the program it is important that a follow-up procedure takes place. Follow up is established so that the youth and the family understand that the YFPI program continues to be concerned for their welfare. The timeframe for follow-ups will vary by agency but typically occurs within the first 3 months and again between six to twelve months following completion of the program.

Follow ups can be conducted over the telephone, written contacts or visits. The content of the follow up also needs to be considered and include a number of standard questions. The follow up also serves as an evaluation. If there has been behavior change, ie, no more firesetting behavior, practicing fire prevention and fire safety, etc., then the intervention can be viewed as successful.

Recidivism: Some children will continue to set fires. These children need more help from social services, juvenile justice or residential mental health treatment. These juveniles may need to be formally charged in order to get to the desired result of stopping the behavior. A child should not go through the program twice, but referred to an appropriate agency. The State Fire Marshal Division may be able to assist in this process.

Documentation: Juvenile information is protected. All files should be locked up in a specific location. Each file may include (if applicable): police report, fire report, contact form, assessment form, knowledge test, privacy form, release form and narrative. Every contact regarding the case should be documented in the file, name date time and reason for contact.

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