

YOUTH FIRESETTING INTERVENTION PROGRAM PARENT GUIDE



*Rockwall Fire Department
385 South Goliad
Rockwall, Texas 75087
972-771-7770*



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Fire

Fire is a very important part of our daily lives. We use fire for heating, cooking, transportation, celebrations and holiday ceremonies. Fire also holds a strong fascination for many individuals through its hypnotizing, relaxing, and soothing effects. Along with the proper uses of fire also come the improper uses of fire. Many of the fire “abuses” result in property loss, injury, and death due to accidental and purposely set fires. Unfortunately, many of these destructive fires are set by children.

National Fire Facts:

- According to the National Safe Kids Campaign: Child curiosity fires are the leading cause of residential fire-related death and injury among children ages 9 and under.

Texas Statistics:

- Of those arrested, more than 50% are age 17 and under. More than 500 juveniles are arrested annually in Texas
- A working smoke alarm is not present in two-thirds of the residential fires where a child is injured or killed.
- Juvenile Fire Setters are responsible for \$9 billion in property loss. A fire is reported every 3 ½ hours in Texas.
- Annually these child set fires result in more than 138 injuries and 8 deaths.

Why do children set fires?

Since it has been determined that fire can be deadly, why do some children still set fires?

- **Fire curiosity/experimentation:** Children want to see how fire and other combustibles work. They experiment by lighting things on fire such as paper, spray paint, lighter fluid, gasoline, etc. Imitating behavior: Children imitate their parents by lighting candles, campfires, barbecue grills, etc.
- **Crisis fire setting:** Some children do not know how to cope with crisis. They may act out their anger and aggression by lighting fires as a cry for help.
- **Delinquent fire setting:** Some children are involved in criminal activity and set fires to destroy property or evidence.
- **Strategic fire setting:** Some children are involved in gangs and use fire to threaten, intimidate and hurt others.
- **Pathological fire setting:** Some children have medical or neurological problems that contribute to a life-long fascination with fire and a long history of fire setting.



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What to do if your child is setting:

1. Keep matches and lighters locked up.
2. Explain the dangers of fire to your child.
3. Supervise your children when they are around candles, campfires, fireplace fires, barbecues, stoves, etc.
4. Keep lighter fluid, gasoline, and propane locked up.
5. Take your child's fire curiosity and experimentation seriously. If you do nothing, it will likely get worse.
6. If there is a fire, quickly leave the building and call 911 from a safe telephone.
7. If your child is experimenting with fire call the Rockwall Fire Department Youth Firesetter Intervention Program at 972-771-7770.

Fire Related Myths and Facts:

Myth: A child can control a small fire.

Fact: Most fires start small and can quickly become uncontrollable. A fire doubles in size every 30 seconds.

Myth: It is normal for children to play with fire.

Fact: It is not normal for children to play with fire. Curiosity about fire is common. Use of fire without a parent's knowledge, approval or supervision is dangerous.

Myth: Fire setting is a phase that children will outgrow.

Fact: Fire setting is not a phase. If a child is not taught fire safety, the fire setting can easily get out of control.

Myth: Some children are obsessed with fire.

Fact: Very few children are obsessed with fire. There is always a reason for fire setting. That reason needs to be discovered and dealt with.

Myth: If you burn a child's hand, he will then stop setting fires.

Fact: Purposely burning a child's hand is child abuse and is against the law.



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The Rockwall Fire Department Youth Firesetter Intervention Program:

Since 2003, the Rockwall Fire Department's Youth Firesetter Intervention Program has been dedicated to helping youth and their families. This is accomplished through fire safety education and family counseling. The interventions include:

- Fire safety education classes are taught by a Rockwall Firefighter. These classes are offered free of charge, last Saturday and as otherwise requested. The classes teach fire safety behaviors, the dangers of fire, the consequences of fire setting, and Texas Arson and Fireworks Laws.
- Parents receive tips on parenting and fire safety, and information on Texas Arson and Fireworks Laws.
- Counseling services are made available to families within the City of Rockwall through the Rockwall Fire Department, if financing is available. The Fire Department refers the youth and their family to certified and licensed mental health providers.

→ A parent group works together when children are at risk.

→ Matches are tools, not toys.

→ Have a home escape plan, a meeting point, and second story ladders.



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Stages of Child Development

Some reasons children set fires can be found in the following growth stages:

Age 0-2

- Children are mainly learning to control their bodies and to talk.
- They grow fast.
- They learn that their parent or care-giver is going to take care of them.
- They use all of their senses to learn about things.
- They seek approval from parent or caregiver.
- They don't understand what fire is and that it can hurt them.

Age 3-4

- Children are able to move around easily, and explore all things around them.
- They imitate adult behaviors and want to act like little adults.
- They learn best by doing.
- They begin to become more independent and challenge the rules.
- They begin to learn right from wrong.
- They begin to understand how things like lighters and matches work.
- They don't understand how dangerous fire is.

Age 5-7

- Children grow more slowly.
- They have short attention spans.
- They see all people as the same.
- They can understand how quickly fire can spread and how dangerous it can

Age 8-11

- Children want to do things well and become good at something.
- Puberty begins.
- They become aware of the differences between themselves and others.
- Family members are the most important people to them.
- They have a longer attention span.
- They like to learn new things and may experiment with fire.

Age 12-15

- Children grow fast.
- They can be very moody.
- Their friends become as important as their family.
- They are trying to figure themselves out.
- They are often bored and complain that is nothing to do.
- They can understand how others think if they don't agree with them.
- They often do things without thinking about the consequences, such as lighting fires.



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ADD/ADHD and Fire setting

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD) affects 3-5% of all children in the United States. The Rockwall Fire Department youth fire setter referrals show that approximately 20% of all referrals have been identified as ADD/ADHD. The following three characteristics have been identified by the National Institute of Mental Health:

- **Inattention:** Children have a hard time focusing on one task for any length of time. They may get bored or frustrated. Fire Safety lessons taught may be forgotten or not learned. The child may not pay attention to instructions on matches, lighters, or other combustible items and accidentally start a fire.
- **Impulsivity:** Children act quickly, without thinking about the results of what they are doing. They may see a lighter and immediately light it without realizing that a fire could start. In this category, risk-taking behavior has also been identified. The child may try to impress friends by setting fires.

- **Hyperactivity:** Children are always in motion. They have a hard time sitting still. They may continuously wiggle and be accident prone. While in motion, they may accidentally knock over a candle or wave a lighter around and start a fire. Hyperactivity can cause a child to be accident prone.

What parents can do if they think their child has ADD/ADHD...

- Talk with the child's teacher about his/her classroom behavior.
- Consult with the school psychologist/counselor.
- Make an appointment for your child with his/her physician for a thorough physical examination to rule out other medical problems. For further information, call the Texas Department of Health Services @ 800-735-2989.



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Parenting Tips:

Parenting is a challenge. It requires time, patience, energy, understanding, good communication, encouragement and discipline. Here are some tips to remember:

- Give your child your undivided attention. Turn off the television or music when talking with your child.
- Spend time with your child.
- Communicate understanding and love. Sometimes they just need someone to listen.
- Be honest and sincere.
- Accept their feelings, even if they are not the same as yours.
- Model appropriate behavior. Children learn by watching what you do.
- Teach age appropriate safety education.
- Encourage your child to participate in positive activities.
- Give them some responsibility.
- Praise your child for a job well done.
- Be reasonable. Set boundaries and establish rules based on a child's age and development.
- Use discipline consistently.
- Provide a safe home.
- Have fun as a family.

**Remember...
A child's wish is for their parents' time and attention**



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The Law

Arson

Some children set fires because they want to destroy someone's property or cover up a crime they have committed. Fire may also be used as a way to threaten or intimidate others.

Youth /involved/arrested for a first time arson related crime may be required to attend the Rockwall Fire Department's Youth Firesetter Diversion Program.

This program is taught by a Rockwall Firefighter one Thursday night a month. The program teaches fire safety education; the consequences of youth fire setting; decision-making; how choices affect the entire community; and Texas Arson and Fireworks Laws.

Parents, remember, the punishment for juveniles in Texas, just got tougher... If a child is 15, 16, or 17 years old and commits a violent crime or is arrested for a third felony offense, the child can be tried as an adult.

If the child is 15 years old and commits a violent felony or is arrested for any offense, the District Attorney's Office can decide to try the child as an adult.

Children 10 years of age and older, can be detained, and referred to the juvenile court for criminal prosecution. A juvenile's criminal record no longer automatically goes away at age 18.

Texas law:

- **Education Code** A student shall be expelled from school if the student, on school property or while attending a school sponsored or school related activity on or off school property if he/she attempts or commits an act of arson.
- **Penal Code:** A person commits an offense if the person starts the fire, regardless of whether the fire continues after ignition, or causes an explosion with intent to destroy or damage.
- **Second Degree Felony-Up to 20 years not less than 2 years in prison w/ \$10,000 fine unless bodily injury or death occurred whereas a First Degree Felony-Up to 99 years not less than 5 years in prison w/ \$10,000 fine.**



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Home Fire Safety Tips:

The Rockwall Fire Department wants you to be safe..

- Make sure your home has a working smoke alarm. Test your smoke alarm once a month and change the battery once a year. Have the smoke alarm inside and outside the bedroom.
- If your smoke alarm chirps, it is time for a new battery. Smoke alarms should be replaced every ten years.
- Practice crawling low under smoke. In a fire, smoke and heat rise and the cleaner, cooler air is near the floor.
- Keep matches and lighters locked up.
- Keep your stove-top empty. Turn pots and pans handles in. Never leave cooking unattended.
- Do not overload electrical outlets.
- Extension cords shall be used for temporary power only.
- Keep fire extinguisher near kitchen and garage areas.
- Know two ways out of every room in your house. Have your family practice your home escape plan.
- If you live in a two-story home, purchase a fire escape ladder for the upstairs bedrooms. This will assist family members in escaping a fire.
- Teach children that matches and lighters are tools not toys.
- Practice stop, drop, and roll. If your clothes catch on fire, don't run. Gently drop to the ground, cover your face, and roll over and over until the fire is out.
- If you are burned, cool the burn with cool water and get medical attention or call 911.
- Keep home exits and entries clear. In a fire, you must be able to leave quickly.
- Keep all harmful substances such as pool chemicals, gasoline, propane, and lighter fluid locked up.



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Home Escape Plan

Use the area below to draw your **HOME ESCAPE PLAN...**

- Always have **two exits** out of every room.
 - Every home should have at least one smoke alarm.
 - Make sure you have a family meeting place outside and in front of your home.
 - Never re-enter a burning building.
 - Once out of the house, call 911.
 - Meeting Place: a tree, a neighbor's house, a mailbox, etc.
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Parent Resources...

Counseling Institute of Texas (972)494-0160
Timberlawn Mental Health System (214)381-7181
MADD (214)637-0372
Rockwall Fire Department (972)771-7770
Rockwall Police Department (972)771-7717
Rockwall County Juvenile Services (972) 882-0280
Rockwall County Sheriff's Office (972)882-0300
Rockwall County Fire Marshall's Office (972)882-0300
Rockwall County Child Protective Services Board (972)771-6366
Rockwall County EMS (972)772-4148
Rockwall County helping Hands 972-636-HELP
Texas Department of Human Services (972)771-8386
Texas Youth Hotline 800-210-2278
Suicide Crisis Center (214)282-1000
Poison Control 800-764-7661
Alcoholics Anonymous (214)887-6699
Betty Ford's Center/ Five Star Kids Program (972)753-0552
Texas Department of Protective Services 800-252-5400
Texas Child Protective Service (800)252-5400
Texas Department of Health Services (800)735-2989
Texas Education Agency (512)463-9734
Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (512)0474-7190
American Red Cross of Dallas (214)678-4800
Texas Abuse/Neglect Hotline 1-800-252-5400
Foster Care & Adoption Inquiry 1-800-233-3405
Child Care Information 1-800-862-5252
Texas Runaway Hotline 1-800-210-2278
Office of Consumer Affairs 1-800-720-7777



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