**If your child has misused fire.**

If your child has deliberately set a fire; if you are unsure of how to teach your child about fire safety…Call the fire department, we can help!

Juvenile Firesetters is an intervention program designed to educate children and parents about fire safety and the consequences of misusing fire.

Each family meets individually with a trained fire service youth fire interventionist. The youth fire interventionist will discuss the situation with the family and provide fire safety education. If a child needs additional intervention, such as counseling, they can help find the family with this service. Fire department services are free, and financial assistance is available for counseling through most insurance companies.

Who can make a referral? Anyone who cares about the safety of a child can call for help: Families, friends, neighbors, teachers and you. The program takes approximately 1 ½ hours. All information discussed is confidential. To schedule an appointment, call the South Kitsap Fire & Rescue.

**Why do Kids Play with Fire?**

Children misuse fire for a variety of reasons. By determining the motivation for the firesetting, we can best determine how to deal with it. There are five basic classifications - curiosity / experimentation (most common), reactionary, delinquent, strategic, and pathological firesetting.

* **Curiosity/Experimentation**

The majority of children who misuse fire (about 70%) are in this group. They are typically younger in age and are curious about fire. The opportunity is there because the child has access to fire tools and is not supervised at the time of the incident. He or she decides to "see what fire will do." They usually don't think about or understand the danger of their actions.

Example: Six-year-old Michael finds his parents’ lighter on the table. He is feeling kind of bored, so he decides to light some papers and sticks on fire. His home life is stable and there haven't been any recent stresses. He seems sorry for what he did.

* **Reactionary**

If a child is upset about something and not good at expressing themselves, they may use fire as a way to let grown-ups know they need help. Their firesetting is in reaction to a problem, a new baby in the family, divorce, family problems, moving, a death, problems at school or with friends.

Example: Mom and stepdad are fighting loudly. Amy (age 11) is scared and wants them to stop. She doesn't know how to communicate how she feels, so she takes a lighter into her bedroom and sets her bedding on fire. When the parents notice this new emergency, they stop fighting. What's likely to happen the next time the parents fight if nothing changes?

* **Delinquent Behavior**

Sometimes kids will light a fire as a prank or dare. Sometimes it's to cover up another crime. Most of the kids in this group, typically adolescents, don't realize they are breaking the law and could go to jail. They know what they are doing is wrong, but they may not understand the consequence of fire or potential liability to them and their family.

Example: Other kids dare 14-year-old Brad to light toilet paper in the school bathroom. Brad wants his friends to like him. Even though he knows it is wrong, he does it anyway.

* **Strategic Firesetting**

In some cases, children will escalate to deliberate acts of firesetting, with no regard for life or property (including their own life). They know what they are doing is wrong, and they understand the consequences. They may use fire for retaliation, as part of a group initiation, or to cover up a major crime.

* **Pathological Firesetting**

This type of firesetting is rare and may be connected to a mental disorder or problem. Pathological firesetting may occur for obscure reasons, not easily understood by those other than mental health professionals.

**The Fire Problem**

Fire is the third leading causes of "accidental" death in the United States.

Most fires and fire fatalities happen in residential properties - homes and apartments. Young children and older adults are at greatest risk.

Children who misuse fire start many of the fires that kill young children. These fires are often started by children who find matches or a lighter and are curious about fire.

Arson is the second leading cause of residential fires. Over 50% of all arson is committed by people under the age of 18 (typically adolescents 12-17 years old).

If your child misuses fire, contact the fire department. We can help! If you would like educational materials on this subject and fire safety, please contact our office at 360-895-6512.

We would be happy to answer any questions or email you additional information.