

Youth Fire Setters
Spring 2020 Career Development Series

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**Youth Set Fires:
A Connecticut Overview for
Social Services, Schools, &
Mental Health**

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Connecticut Youth Firesetting Stakeholders Group
2019 CT Youth Set Fires

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Agenda

- I. Introduction to Juvenile Firesetting
- II. Scope of the Problem: Incidence and Prevalence
- III. Responding to Firesetting
- IV. Working with Fire Service
- V. Program and Service Resources

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Kids and Firesetting: Who Are We Talking About?



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Firestarting vs. FireSetting

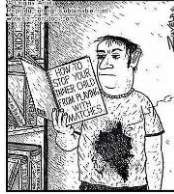
- “FIRESTARTING”
The use of fire by a person who has little or no understanding of consequences of fire and without intention to cause harm or damage
- “FIRESETTING”
The use of fire by a person for intentional acts designed to create a disturbance and/or to inflict damage and/or harm

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“Firesetters” VS. “Pyromaniacs”



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IN THEIR OWN WORDS

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Scope of the Problem: Incidence and Prevalence

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Prevalence – How Big is this Issue

- Capturing the complete picture about juvenile firesetting is difficult.
- ✓ Up until 2015, there has not been a central data collection system
- ✓ Police departments charge firestarter/firesetter with vandalism or criminal mischief
- ✓ Studies are often conducted on individuals who are involved in either the mental health system or Juvenile Justice System, thus giving our understanding from these studies a particular bias- these youth are either “sick” or “bad”.

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Who should be involved when there is an incident

- Many different agencies are involved when a fire occurs. Obviously the local Fire Departments, often the police and local authorities. (which you will see in a future slide). When a juvenile is involved, schools, parents and treatment providers may also be involved. It is important that all of the systems come together to address this issue and work collaboratively.

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Fire Risk to Children

- **In 2013 in the U.S., 321 children younger than age 14 died as a result of fire.**
- **33% of those children, were 4 and younger**
- **Between 2007-2011, an average of 49,300 fires occurred because of “fire play”, causing 80 civilian deaths, 860 civilian injuries and \$230 million dollars worth of property damage**

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School Fires in the U.S.

- Between 2009-2011 incendiary/suspicious fires accounted for 40% of all middle and high school fires. 24% in elementary schools.
- 71% occurred during the school day
- The most frequent point of origin was a school lavatory.

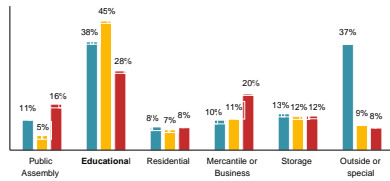


Source: FEMA, "School Building Fires", April 2014

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FIRES IN PUBLIC PLACES -2010-2014



Fires Civilian deaths Direct Property Damage

NFPA Intentional Fires 7/2017
NFPA INTENTIONAL FIRES 2017

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What percentage of juvenile arrests in CT. are for:

- Aggravated Assault?
- 9%
- Arson?
- 37%
- Kids may be put into the system for firestarting when education and/or treatment may be a more appropriate option.
- Often times an arrest is made just to assure the child gets help.

CT. Crime Statistics 2016

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**State of Connecticut
Division of Criminal Justice**

Richard J. Colangelo, Chief State's Attorney



**Connecticut's Fire-Related Statutes
& the Juvenile Suspended
Prosecution Law**

Presented by:

Francis J. Carino, Supervisory Assistant State's Attorney

March 2020

CGS §53a-111. Arson in the first degree: Class A felony (SJO).

(a) start a fire or causes an explosion with intent to destroy or damage a building, and

- (1) the building is inhabited or occupied or the person has reason to believe the building may be inhabited or occupied; or
- (2) any other person is injured, either directly or indirectly; or
- (3) such fire or explosion was caused for the purpose of collecting insurance proceeds for the resultant loss; or
- (4) at the scene of such fire or explosion a peace officer or firefighter is subjected to a substantial risk of bodily injury.

CGS §53a-112. Arson in the second degree: Class B felony (SJO).

(a)(1) start a fire or cause an explosion with intent to destroy or damage a building and

- (A) such act subjects another person to a substantial risk of bodily injury; or
 - (B) such fire or explosion was intended to conceal some other criminal act; or
 - (C) such fire or explosion was intended to subject another person to a deprivation of a right, privilege or immunity secured or protected by the Constitution or laws of this state or of the United States; or
- (2) a fire or explosion was caused by an individual hired by such person to start such fire or cause such explosion.

CGS §53a-113. Arson in the third degree: Class C felony (SJO).

(a) recklessly cause destruction or damage to a building of his own or of another by intentionally starting a fire or causing an explosion.

CGS §53a-114. Reckless burning: Class D felony.

(a) Intentionally start a fire or cause an explosion, whether on his own property or another's, and thereby recklessly places a building, as defined in section 53a-100, of another in danger of destruction or damage.

CGS §53a-115. Criminal mischief in the first degree: Class D felony.

(a) (1) intentionally damage tangible property of another in an amount exceeding \$1,500, ...or

(4) with intent to cause an interruption or impairment of service rendered to the public and having no reasonable ground to believe that such person has a right to do so, damage or tamper with

(A) any tangible property owned by the state, a municipality or a person for fire alarm or police alarm purposes,

(B) any telecommunication system operated by the state police or a municipal police department,

(C) any emergency medical or fire service dispatching system,

(D) any fire suppression equipment owned by the state, a municipality, a person or a fire district, or

(E) any fire hydrant or hydrant system owned by the state or a municipality, a person, a fire district or a private water company, ...

CGS §53a-117a. Criminal mischief in the fourth degree: Class C misdemeanor.

(a) intentionally or recklessly

(1) damage or tamper with any fire hydrant or hydrant system owned by the state or a municipality, fire district or private water company; or

(2) damage, tamper with or remove any tangible property owned by the state, a municipality or a person for fire alarm, smoke detection and alarm, fire suppressant or police alarm purposes; or

(3) damage or tamper with any fire hydrant or hydrant system owned by the state or a municipality that is located on public land; or

(4) damage, tamper with or remove any tangible property owned by the state or a municipality that is located on public land for fire alarm, smoke detection and alarm, fire suppressant or police alarm purposes.

Public Act No. 19-135 AAC THE SUSPENSION OF DELINQUENCY PROCEEDINGS FOR FIRE STARTING BEHAVIOR TREATMENT. (Effective 7/1/19)

(a) Definition: "an act of fire starting" means:

- (1) conduct that causes an explosion or a fire to start, regardless of whether such explosion or fire results in an injury to a person or animal or damage to property, or
- (2) planning or preparing to cause an explosion or start a fire.

(b) Procedure:

- The court may order a child charged with a delinquency offense involving an act of fire starting, but not yet convicted, be evaluated to determine whether the child would benefit from participating in a fire starting behavior treatment program.
- If the court finds the child requires and is likely to benefit from such treatment and the suspension of the delinquency proceedings will advance the interests of justice, the court may order the suspension for a period of up to one year and order the child to participate in a fire starting behavior treatment program.
- During the suspension, such child shall be placed under the supervision of a probation officer who shall monitor the compliance of such child with the orders of the court.

Public Act No. 19-135 AAC THE SUSPENSION OF DELINQUENCY PROCEEDINGS FOR FIRE STARTING BEHAVIOR TREATMENT. (Effective 7/1/19)

- If the court denies the motion for suspension, the prosecution may proceed.
- Any time before the end of the period of the suspension, the probation officer shall notify the court of the impending conclusion of the suspension and submit a report on whether the child has completed the fire starting behavior treatment program and has complied with all other conditions of the suspension order imposed by the court.
- The court may dismiss the charges if it finds that such child has successfully completed the fire starting behavior treatment program and has complied with all other conditions of the suspension order.
- If the court denies such motion and terminates the suspension of the delinquency proceedings, the prosecutor may proceed with the prosecution.

(c) Eligibility: The program shall not apply to any child charged with a serious juvenile offense or any child for whom such evaluation and treatment was previously ordered.

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Connecticut's Fire-Related Statutes & the Juvenile Suspended Prosecution Law

Presented by:
Francis J. Carino, Supervisory Assistant State's Attorney

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Diagnostic and Behavioral Characteristics

- Juveniles involved in firesetting are typically a diverse population.
- Recent findings indicate stronger correlations with ADHD and Conduct Disorder.
- Incidence of ADD/ADHD is highest (40-60%) among the younger populations (ages 3-8).
- Among the conduct disordered population, firesetting appears more commonly within the higher risk population.

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Family Dynamics

- Families of firesetting children appear to be more highly chaotic, poorly supervised, and display harsh and rigid parental discipline styles.
- May also display increased adult/marital conflict, exhibit greater adult mental illness, and are more likely to have adult criminal histories.
- Adult family members model irresponsible, aggressive and/or reckless use of fire.
- Families have often been resistant to outpatient or community based services. Treatment drop out rates are high.



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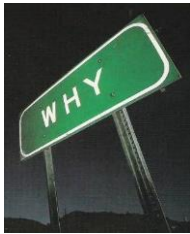


Firesetting Intent and Motivation

- Curiosity/Interest/Fascination
- Crisis
- Delinquency
- Thrill Seeking
- Severe Disturbance/Pathology

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Motivations are:

- Helpful in describing the behavior, not the child
- Helpful in guiding intervention pathways
- Not mutually exclusive, a youth can have high risk behaviors that fall into more than one typology.
- Ways to describe a behavior, a shorthand, but don't replace a good understanding of the youth and youth's behavior with fire.

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Curiosity Motivated Firesetting

- Curiosity*
- Fascination*
- Experimental*

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Curiosity Motivated Firestarting



- Most often are boys (85-90%)
- Most frequently seen among younger children (5-8) but can occur at older ages.
- Can be single episode or repeated pattern of experimental fire use.
- Simple, easily accessible combustibles (paper, leaves, twigs) are common.
- Higher levels of curiosity can lead to increasing complexity of fuels, use of accelerants, etc.
- Responsible for high mortality and injury rates.

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Crisis Motivated Firesetting

- Revenge*
- Anger Expression*
- Cry for Help*
- Self Harm and Self Injury*
- Stimulus Seeking*
- Cognitively Impaired*
- Thought Disordered*

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Crisis Motivated Firesetting

- Most frequently boys (75%), latency age (7-11) or adolescent age.
- May or may not have previous firesetting behavior.
- Firesetting is response to any number of internal or external crisis.
 - Within the Family System
 - At School
 - Some response to 'traumatic event'
 - A Response to Peer or Social Issues
 - There may be concurrent psychiatric issues emerging as well
- Frequently a history of some form of abuse/neglect, socially isolated and awkward, aggressive, or serious emotional disturbance.
- Power, control, mastery, emotional expression are common themes.

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Delinquent Motivated Firesetting

*Delinquent
Crime Concealment
Peer Group Pressure
Attention to Cause*

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Delinquent Motivated Firesetting



- Occurs within, or as the result of, a peer dynamic that encourages irresponsible or reckless use of fire.
- Approximately 75% males with increasing activity by females.
- Varying levels of aggressiveness or antisocial motivation.
- Fires most frequently occur outside the home (schools, vacant buildings, wooded areas).
- Use of accelerants is common.
- Can be a socialization activity for the group or attempt by one member to gain social standing.

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Thrill Seeker *Risk Taker*

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Thrill Seeker / Risk-Taking

- Experimentation with explosives fire and pressure-creating devices, can serve as the ultimate risk. Today's technology creates a surplus of opportunities
- Often adolescents take these risks without thinking about the consequences
- Caregivers often have no idea what is being researched
- These kids enjoy attention – seeking, often influenced by their peers, often oppose authority figures
- Fires are usually set outside

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Pathologically Motivated Firesetting

***Disordered Coping
Severely Disturbed
Sensory Reinforcement
Pyromania-***
(often referred to as this diagnosis)

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Pathologically Motivated Firesetting

- Very rare when compared to other motivations.
- Child has chronic history of pervasive and severe disturbance and abuse.
- Multiple deficit areas with some combination of compromised cognition, distorted thoughts, and disturbed relatedness.
- Fires are often part of a disturbed response pattern or maladaptive coping mechanism.
- Often numerous fires, secretive, set in isolation.



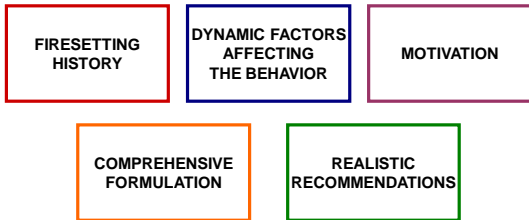
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Assessment Constants

While the venue in which the assessment is conducted can raise a variety of issues, there are still specific areas that all firesetting assessments need to cover. These include:



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Firesetting Behavior

- What do we mean when we talk about firesetting behavior and firesetting history?
 - What actually happened and how did it happen?
 - How often has it happened?
- Why are these issues important?
 - Past behaviors yields insight into potential future behaviors.
 - Details of past behaviors yield insight into developing ongoing safety parameters.
 - Before we discern what dynamic factors may contribute to firesetting and what the motivation is, we need to know the details of what happened.

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Firesetting Behavior History

- How often has this behavior occurred?
- What are the intrinsic and contextual factors which may have contributed to the incidents?
- Have the fire starts changed over time?
- How have they changed?
- What about the behavior has changed over time?
- The firesetting history needs to give you a clear picture of the details of each incident and any pattern of change in the behavior over time.

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Evidenced Based Treatment Interventions

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Multidisciplinary Collaboration



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- This population is best served through an array of services provided by community-based collaborative intervention programs that use the expertise of fire service, law enforcement, education, and mental health services. (Bumpass, et al, 1985; Cole, et al, 1993; Kolko, 1999a, Sakheim and Osborn, 1996, Sharp, et al. 2006)
- Advantages far outweigh the drawbacks.
- "important advance" in this area (Kolko, 1999)

Fire Safety Education



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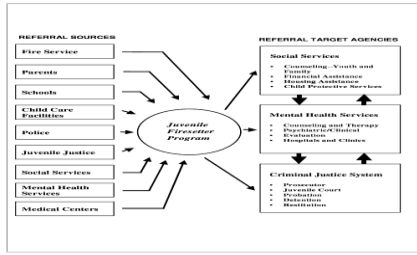
- Regardless of the seriousness of the behavior, fire safety education has been considered a universal component of community-based programs.
- Delivered by trained instructors in individual or group format.
- Fear-inducing techniques are ineffective teaching tools and at times produce results that are counterproductive.
- Parent fire safety education focuses upon access, responsibility, and supervision.
- Parent education serves to reduce parent fears and can increase their sense of control and safety.



Program Model

The National Juvenile Firesetter/Arson Control and Prevention Program

Figure 4.1
Juvenile Firesetter Referral Network



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Federal Emergency Management Agency/United States Fire Administration

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Model JFS Program

- Step 1- Interview/Information
- Step 2- Screening/Oregon Screening Tool
- Step 3-Mental health risk assessment if necessary
- Step 4- Education and/or treatment
- Step 5- Follow up and case closure

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CASE STUDY

In your groups read the following cases and identify the following:

- Typology
- Services recommended
- Intervention recommended.

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Summary

- Treat clients and families as individuals
 - Don't make assumptions based on the fire setting behavior
 - Remain cognizant that the behavior is most likely a product of other issues
 - Determine the clients strengths and interests and use them to your advantage
- Determine the motivation of the fire(s)
 - firestarting or firesetting
 - Curiosity to pathological
- Design an appropriate treatment plan based on the issues, not solely focusing on the firesetting
 - There is no cookie cutter approach

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Summary

- Ensure fire education runs concurrently with treatment or as quickly as practical
- Work off the strengths of the fire service partner
 - The fire service generally uses people specially trained for a JFS
 - They may be able to connect easily with the client by the nature of their profession
 - Children usually admire firefighters and see them a friend
- Provide parent resources
 - Where applicable, make the parent a partner
 - Ensure the parents understand their responsibilities

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Conclusion

- Firestarting or firesetting behavior must not be viewed any differently than any other pathological or maladaptive behaviors.

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