



Connect with Kids

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Playing With Fire

By CWK Network Producer

*"I don't want any more people to die or anything, from fire."
-Jared, 11 years old*

The latest numbers from the Justice Department show that 44 percent of all those arrested last year were young people, under the age of 25. And for one particular crime, arson, even younger kids were involved. Over a quarter of all those arrested for starting fires are 15 years old or younger.

At age 10, Jared and some friends lit a fire next to a dumpster in their apartment complex. "This bush got burned, this bush got burned, this tree got burned," Jared says, showing the scene of the crime. He was arrested for arson.

According to the Department of Justice, over 26 percent of arrests for arson are kids under the age of 15. Jared was one of them.

"The police came out, it was a big deal, and I was kind of glad because he needed to understand the lessons of playing with fire," says Doria Brown, Jared's mother.

There were two lessons: First, instead of Juvenile Hall, Jared agreed to take a 6-week class on fire safety. Second, he got a sobering message from his mom. "He understood what eviction meant after I got through with him," Doria says.

Studies have shown that boys make up 80 to 90 percent of all children who set fires. But beyond that, there's no psychological profile. Some are curious, some look for excitement or attention, and a few even want to hurt people. The key, experts say, is to simply look for signs. "Touching matches and lighters? Take them by the fire station, let them talk to some of the firefighters, let the firefighters tell that kid some of their experiences, maybe that will get that kid at the point so that kid won't want to do it again," says Lt. Kenneth Reese, a fire investigator.

Jared did go by a fire station as a part of his fire education class, and now he says, "I wanna be a fireman because, like, I want to save people's lives."

Juvenile Arson

By CWK Network, Inc.

Juvenile arsonists' mindsets are such that many psychologists tend to shy away from treating them. Marlene Gralnick, program coordinator for Suffolk (NY) County's new Juvenile Firesetter Intervention & Treatment Program, said that she is having a problem finding therapists willing to work with teen and pre-teen arsonists. Unfortunately, Gralnick's experience with therapists isn't rare – juvenile arson carries a certain stigma. Some parents tend to be hesitant to get help for their child, which leads to the most tragic statistic of all – 90 percent of those who die in fires started by children are children themselves.

What Parents Need to Know

Homes are very susceptible to fire. Fabrics, plastics and other materials can go up in smoke or flames in a moment of seconds. Therefore, it is pertinent that parents take time to inform their children of the dangers of fire and the importance of not playing with fire. These guidelines can help a family be more prepared:

- Have a fire escape plan. Each family should work together to construct an escape plan from the home. This plan should include several routes of escape. If only one escape route is developed, it could be worthless if it is in flames. Go through the plan and assign each family member two escape routes from their rooms. One could be the door. The other could be the window if the door is inaccessible during a fire. Close the door of the room where a fire exists to slow the spreading. And close the door of your escape route if you are not going out through the door to prevent the fire from entering that room. Tell kids to stay low because smoke tends to be worse in the top parts of a room. The escape plan should include a meeting spot outside the home where the family can congregate in the

event of a fire. Many fire escape items, such as ladders, are available through catalogs and stores. Check out these items and see if they would work to protect your family in the event of a fire. Children should be taught never to reenter a burning home. Calls to 911 can be made from a neighbor's home.

- Have monthly fire drills. Set aside one time a month for a fire drill. Practice the escape plan and going to the meeting place.
- Have smoke alarms throughout the house, outside each bedroom and near the stairway leading upstairs. Test the alarms every month. This can be done on the same monthly day that your family does a fire drill.
- Teach kids the importance of not playing with the stove, electrical outlets or matches. Leave matches out of children's reach.
- Do not set towels, potholders or other flammable items near a stovetop. They can easily catch on fire.
- Keep the area in front of a toaster oven clear. Many fires are started when a stack of items in front of a toaster oven accidentally pull down the lever, starting the toaster oven and starting a fire. Be even safer and unplug your toaster oven (and other appliances) when not in use.
- Have electrical problems checked by a certified electrician. Problems like lights that flicker could be signs of fire-causing trouble.
- Keep dryers clean, lint-free and in good working order.
- Do not store flammables in attics or garages. If an item says, "store in a cool dry place," attics or garages are not proper storage areas.
- Visit your local fire station. You may want to call first or schedule a tour with a scout troop. Fire departments have a great deal of information to share, and it is presented in a kid-friendly way.

The more kids know about fire safety and the more fire-safe a home is, the better off they will be in the event of a fire.

Resources

- [Fire Safety for Kids](#)
- [National Fire Protection Association](#)
- [U.S. Fire Administration](#)
- [U.S. Department of Justice](#)

Websource Video Link: [Websource/Video_Shorts/2015_updated_video_shorts](#)