

Dear Citizens of the Northwestern District:

National statistics show that arson is the number one crime committed by juveniles. In fact, juveniles account for more than half of all arson arrests in the United States.

The Northwestern District Attorney's Office has worked with community partners to create The Northwestern Juvenile Fire Intervention Response, Education and Safety Partnership (NoFIREs) to serve as an educational initiative aimed at reducing youth-set fires in the home, school and community.

Local and state police and fire departments, court personnel and social services agencies and mental healthcare providers refer children to NoFIREs. NoFIREs then conducts an initial screening of these children and engages them and their families in an appropriate fire safety education program.

Fire setting is a troubling trend, which, if left unaddressed, may result in young people who engage in even more dangerous behavior. That is why we place a high priority on prevention and intervention efforts – offering educational programs specifically tailored to this problem, helping young people to understand the dangers of fire and to learn to manage their behavior.

Sincerely,



Loren Davine
Executive Director

What is the Northwestern Juvenile Fire Intervention Response, Education and Safety Partnership?

NoFIREs' core mission is to protect our youth, their families and the communities in which they live from the dangerous and sometimes fatal act of setting fires.

A collaboration of fire, law enforcement, mental healthcare providers and social service agencies, NoFIREs is committed to providing a consistent, coordinated and appropriate response to youths ages 5 through 16, who set fires or engage in fire-related behavior. The components of this approach include intervention, education and prevention, and referrals for clinical treatment and counseling and /or to services agencies.

How does NoFIREs work?

When there is a fire-related incident involving a juvenile, the authorities may recommend the offender to the NoFIREs program. NoFIREs is a referral-based program, accepting referrals from the following agencies:

- State and local police departments
- District Attorneys' Offices
- Fire departments
- Schools
- Court personnel
- Department of Children and Families & DMH
- Medical & Mental Health Providers
- Other social service agencies

What happens after a referral has been made?

A screening interview of the youth and the youth's family will be conducted and a determination will follow as to whether the child is an appropriate candidate for the program. If the child is determined to be suitable for the program, a fire safety educational intervention program may be

recommended, referrals may also be made to social services agencies and/or for clinical mental health counseling and treatment.

The screening interview

The screening interview is the first step into the program. Once the referral is made, a screener will contact you to schedule an appointment to meet with you and your child at your home. Two screeners, a firefighter or police officer and a mental health professional, who have been trained to conduct screening interviews. The purpose of the screening interview is to become informed about the youth and the fire-related incident as well as the child's experience with fire. The fire related incident will be discussed and specific questions will be asked about the incident, such as frequency, location, method of ignition, degree of sophistication, whether it is a group or solitary act, damage caused by the fire and the reaction of the youth and significant people in his or her life to the fire. The screener will also ask details about the youth's development, personality, family dynamics and history, education and medical status. Parents will be interviewed as well with similar questions asked.

Fire Safety School

The NoFIREs Fire Safety School includes classes which run approximately 2 hours, once a week, for 5 weeks, depending on the program and needs of the child. The program focuses on preventing further fire-related incidents by encouraging the youth to adopt safe and healthy behaviors associated with fire.

Fees

There is a \$350 program fee. Fee waivers are available based on family income. No one will be refused services for inability to pay.

Profiles of Juvenile Fire Setters

The “Curious Fire Setter” is typically a male, 3-7 years of age, who learns about fire by playing with it. These spontaneous and unsophisticated fires are commonly set in hidden areas such as a closet or under a bed and are started with ordinary items found within the household, such as matches, lighters and candles. He usually attempts to control or extinguish the fire, and without intervention may continue to set fires in increasingly covert ways.

The “Crisis Fire Setter,” is usually a male, between 5-10 years old, with no history of behavior problems. He may have experienced recent trauma such as death, divorce, physical or sexual abuse or other problems. He often remains on the scene and readily admits to his actions, often without any indication of remorse. His fire setting behavior can be seen as a “cry for help.”

The “Delinquent Fire Setter” is peer dominated and between the ages of 10-17. Members of a group, these adolescents frequent public locations, such as vacant lots or school restrooms, where they start fires, often using an accelerant such as gasoline or lighter fluid. Risk-takers who oppose authority, Delinquent Fire Setters can engage in school bomb threats or false alarms. When caught, they deny, blame or otherwise try to avoid responsibility for the fire.

The “Pathological Fire Setter” is typically a male, between 7-16 years old, and usually has a history of emotional, psychological and educational problems. The fires are skillfully set, usually in or around the home, and carefully designed to avoid detection. The Pathological Fire Setter generally has an extensive history of fire setting, sets fires as a means to control or frighten others and vehemently denies involvement in setting the fire.

A word to parents, guardians and caregivers:

- If your child expresses curiosity or has been playing with fire, calmly but firmly explain that matches and lighters are tools for adults only
- Never use matches or lighters as a source of amusement for children
- Store matches and lighters out of children’s sight and reach, preferably in a locked cabinet
- Never leave matches or lighters in a bedroom or any place children may go without supervision
- Teach young children to tell an adult if they find matches or lighters
- If you suspect your child is intentionally setting fires, get help. Your local fire department or school can put you in touch with trained experts

**Excerpts from the National Fire Protection Association website*



NO FIRES

Northwestern Juvenile Fire Intervention Response, Education and Safety Partnership

A Community Response to Youth-Set Fires

www.nofiresjifs.com

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