

Youth Fire Intervention Team



As you may know, the Youth Fire Intervention Team (YFIT) is partnering with the Minnesota State Fire Chiefs Association (MSFCA). The MSFCA is the fiscal agent for YFIT, and they have been successfully raising money in order to reimburse YFPI specialists who travel on their own time in order to conduct assessments, interventions and attend training.

A special thank you to the Lexington Fire Department, North Metro

Fire Department Relief Association and Carver County Fire Department

Mutual Aid Association for your generous donations.

The team recently created this new logo and are working on apparel options and business cards for specialists across the state. Look forward to seeing this logo around the state of Minnesota in the coming months. If your department would donate to YFIT, please have them send checks specifically marked for YFIT to the MFSCA at: 2704 Mounds View Boulevard, Mounds View, MN 55112.

Ten facts about youth firesetting that law enforcement professionals need to know

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Here are some tips to share with your county attorneys and law enforcement professionals about the seriousness of youth firesetting and the value of youth fire intervention programs.

1. Motivation may not be obvious - Youth set fires for many reasons. In order to understand the behavior, a comprehensive assessment must be completed by a youth fire intervention specialist.
2. Fire behavior is serious - There is no such thing as an insignificant fire. Although the fire may seem minor, the motivation behind it can be far more complex. Also, minor damage due to a fire is more often a result of dumb luck, not a conscious effort to keep damage minimal.
3. Size doesn't matter - Small fires are not necessarily less dangerous than large fires. In fact, all fires start small. Treat all firesetting behavior in a consistent and serious manner.
4. Firesetting and crime - Criminal statutes related to fire can be complex. Some fire incidents are clearly a crime, whereas others may not be. When in doubt, criminal charges should be considered. In some cases, criminal charges provide leverage to involve the family and reinforce a youth's cooperation with youth fire intervention programs.
5. Age is not a limiting factor - Even if a youth is below age of accountability and technically cannot be charged with a crime, intervention is still appropriate. If a youth continues starting fires, child welfare and family services should be a consideration.
6. Child development - Familiarity with the principles of child development is important to understand the youth's capabilities. However, basic tenets of child development may be impacted by learning disabilities and delays.
7. Youth may not know better - Despite a caregiver's assertions that the youth knows better, this is not necessarily true. When children are told not to play with fire but are confronted by adults modeling inappropriate fire behaviors, it is confusing. Conversations focusing on what not to do rather than what to do are also confusing for children.
8. Access and supervision - Access to ignition devices and lack of caregiver supervision are the most common factors in youth firesetting. Adults need to create a safe environment that includes limiting access to lighters and matches.

9. Community resources - Firesetting is a community problem. Community resources are necessary to prevent the behavior. Partnerships are important. Law enforcement, mental health options, burn centers, child welfare, and schools are great resources.

10. It's up to you - Law enforcement is often the first to encounter youth-set fires. Taking it lightly or dismissing it as criminal mischief or vandalism is a missed opportunity to head off dangerous behavior. Making proper reports to the youth fire intervention program will not ruin a child's life; in fact it may save a life. Scare tactics and threats don't work for changing the behavior, especially when an underlying crisis may be driving firesetting.