

# Is Fire Setting a Problem?

Children are naturally curious about fire. When this curiosity becomes experimental, it is dangerous, and even deadly.

As reported by the United States Fire Administration, youth fire setting behavior annually causes:

- 100,000 fires
- 350 deaths
- 3,000 injuries
- \$300,000,000 in property loss

Youth fire setting behavior is grossly underreported. Families may not know that confidential help is available.

## Chester County's Youth Fire & Injury Reduction Education Program

The Chester County Youth Fire and Injury Reduction Education (Y-FIRE) Program is a confidential program designed to reduce the risk of fire injury and death caused by youth with fire setting behaviors.

Our goal is not to give the child a "record" or to send them to "Juvie," but to implement appropriate intervention strategies.

The program works with the following partners to provide education and intervention resources, materials, & training:

- Families and School professionals
- Community programs and Social services
- Fire service and Law enforcement



**Chester County Fire Marshal's Office**  
601 Westtown Rd, Suite 012  
West Chester, PA 19380  
Phone: (610) 344-4338  
Web: [www.chesco.org/des](http://www.chesco.org/des)

# Youth Fire Setting Behavior

A Guide for Parents and Caregivers



**Chester County  
Fire Marshal's Office**





## Why do youth set fires?

There are several reasons why youth have fire setting behavior:

### Curiosity & Experimental

Lack of understanding of the destructive potential of fire. Ready access to lighters, matches, or open flame. Typically unsupervised.

### Crisis & Troubled

Use fire to express emotion. May not understand consequences of uncontrolled fire. Will likely continue to set fires until needs are met or identified.

### Criminal & Delinquent

Fires set with the intent to destroy, or acts of vandalism / mischief. Targets are typically schools, open fields, dumpsters, abandoned buildings.

### Pathological & Emotionally Disturbed

Involves a psychiatric diagnosis. Fires may be ritualized, or with specific intent to destroy. Chronic history of school, behavioral, social, and emotional problems. Usually sets multiple fires.

## What to look for:

### Around the house:

- Matches and lighters disappearing
- Matches and lighters found amongst your child's belongings
- Burt items such as toys, paper, garbage, or garden refuse
- Burn marks on household items

### Your child's behavior:

- Extreme interest in fire
- Setting fire to destroy something
- Setting fire to hurt someone

## What to do:

If you are concerned that your child is involved with fire setting behavior, start by making your house fire safe (tips in this brochure).

Contact the Chester County Y-FIRE Program by calling (610) 344-4338.

We will schedule a time to come to your home and interview you and your child. The results will be reviewed and intervention recommendations will be made.

Our recommendations can include, but are not limited to: fire prevention education, mental health services, community programs, and/or social services.

## Fire Safety:

### Teach your children about fire

- Fire is a tool, not a toy
- Big fires start as small ones and can grow and spread very quickly
- Fire is dangerous and can hurt or kill if not properly used
- Set a good example when using matches and lighters
- Praise your children when they practice fire safe behaviors
- Teach children to tell you when they find unattended matches and lighters

### Practice fire safety in your home

- Install smoke alarms in your home, test and maintain them regularly
- Plan and practice home fire escape drills with your family
- Teach your children how to report an emergency to 9-1-1
- Keep matches and lighters out of reach of children
- Never leave open flames, kitchen stoves, or lit candles unattended

