

Sample Speaking Points for Media Interviews

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

What Is Youth Fire Misuse?

"Youth fire misuse" is any behavior involving the improper or unapproved use of fire, including: juvenile firesetting, fire lighting, juvenile arson, youth firesetting, child arson, fire play, experimentation, playing with lighters or matches, and other fire-related incidents (e.g. fireworks, explosives or bottle bombs, pulling a false alarm, igniting aerosols or accelerants, observing others misusing fire, etc.).

Is Youth Fire Misuse A Problem?

Yes, *Fire Is Everyone's Fight!* Although frequently overlooked by society, youth fire misuse represents a significant problem for families, schools, fire departments, and communities. Fire misuse behaviors are associated with devastating costs, injuries, and life-changing consequences.

Facts on Youth Fire Misuse

Note: the following are national statistics; you are encouraged to add local or state statistics.

- Many parents believe their children "know better" than to play with fire, when in fact fire misuse by youth remains a serious and widespread problem.
- Even though most fires set by youth are started out of curiosity or experimentation, the damage they cause in terms of both economic and human costs is real and devastating.
- Children "playing" with fire is a very dangerous behavior. Each year, children "playing" (i.e. intentionally-set fires not included) with fire cause on average 56,300 fires, 110 deaths, and 880 civilian injuries. (NFPA 2011)
- These fires cost \$286 million in property damage each year in the United States. Not included in these astronomical costs are other expensive indirect costs, such as medical care, fire department response, lost wages or business, etc. (NFPA 2011)
- Data extrapolated from fire department records (which include both intentionally-set fires and fireplay) show that every year, approximately 187,000 reported fires are caused by youth. Even more alarming, due to lack of reporting it is likely that this number under-estimates the actual number of youth-set fires by 300%. (NFPA 2009 - 2011)
- About 40% of the fires that kill young children less than 5 years old are started by kids "playing" with fire. (NFPA 2005)
- Approximately 40% of the fires that youth set in a home originate in the child's bedroom. Older children and teenagers are more likely to set fires outside or to other structures. (NFPA 2011)
- Fire is fast, hot, dark, and can quickly get out of hand. It can double in size every 30 - 60 seconds. This means your family may have less than 3 minutes to escape from your home.
- Fires that youth set to structures cause on average over \$22,600 in damages. (NFPA 2009)
- Choosing to misuse fire sets off an unstoppable chain of events with lasting consequences.

- Youth who misuse fire can be charged with a crime, may be prosecuted as an adult, and can have a permanent criminal record. Children under 18 years old account for nearly 50% of all arson arrests in the United States. (U.S. Department of Justice-FBI, 2000 - 2011)
- In many states, parents are held legally and financially responsible for their child's fire misuse.
- There are many reasons why youth misuse fire. It can be attributed to experimentation, curiosity, boredom, or peer-pressure. However, there are times when it is motivated by other things in a child's life. Fire misuse can be a sign that a child is struggling and needs additional support or help.
- Without appropriate intervention, many youth will continue to set fires throughout their lifetime placing themselves, family, neighbors, classmates, innocent bystanders, other citizens, first responders, and firefighters at high-risk for injury or death.

Community Programs and Resources Available

- No matter why a youth misuses fire, it is important to not ignore it and to get help. Trained professionals can assist and help provide additional support. Locally, (ORGANIZATION NAME) offers the (NAME OF PROGRAM) designed for youth (MINIMUM AGE – MAXIMUM AGE) years of age.
 - o The program uses local resources and incorporates the nationally acclaimed *Sean's Story: National Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention Toolkit*, which discusses the true story of a convicted juvenile arsonist and the long-term impact of fire misuse, including social, financial, medical, career, and legal consequences that youth and their parents typically do not consider.
 - o To sign up for the program or to obtain more information: (PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION HERE)
- Parents, teachers, and other concerned citizens are encouraged to contact (ORGANIZATION NAME, TELEPHONE NUMBER, WEBSITE) if they have questions, or need more information on how to keep our youth and communities safe from fire misuse.

National Programs and Resources Available

- Sean's Story: National Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention Toolkit: www.traumaburn.org/Seans-Story
- United States Fire Administration (USFA) "Prevent Youth Firesetting" and "Fire is Everyone's Fight" Campaigns: www.usfa.fema.gov/fireservice/prevention_education/strategies/arson/
- National Fire Protection Association (NFPA): www.nfpa.org
- SOS FIRES Youth Intervention Programs: www.sosfires.com
- Fireproof Children/Prevention First: www.fireproofchildren.com



Sean's Story: *My life torn apart by firesetting*

Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention Toolkit



The University of Michigan Trauma Burn Center is an internationally recognized leader in patient care, research, community and professional education, rehabilitation, and injury prevention.

