YOUTH FIRESETTER INTERVENTION SPECIALIST

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Welcome to the National Fire Academy's (NFA's) "Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist" (YFIS) course. The course will empower you with the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to perform the job performance requirements (JPRs) of an intervention specialist as outlined in the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1035, *Standard on Fire and Life Safety Educator, Public Information Officer, Youth Firesetter Intervention Specialist and Youth Firesetter Program Manager Professional Qualifications*, 2015 edition.

Intervention specialists provide services at the program delivery level. They help identify firesetters, conduct program intakes, provide screenings to identify risks of future firesetting, deliver educational interventions, perform follow-ups, and evaluate program services.

The target audience for this course is anyone who has worked (or will be working) with youth who are exhibiting firesetting behaviors. The course is appropriate for volunteer and career firefighters, fire investigators, Fire and Life Safety Educators (FLSEs), and allied professionals from criminal justice, mental health, social services and juvenile justice.

To achieve the optimal benefits of the course, we ask that you perform some basic research in advance of the course. Please come prepared to discuss the following information pertinent to your community:

- Is your community urban, suburban, rural or a mixture?

- How many youth firesetting incidents does your organization handle per year?

- What types of youth firesetting incidents do you handle most frequently?

- Are there particular age groups that represent a greater problem than others?

- What is the minimum age at which your jurisdiction can file criminal charges against a youth for fire-related incidents?

- If charges can be filed, what is the average number of youth who are charged per year?

- On average, how many injuries caused by youth firesetting does your community experience per year? How many deaths?

- On average, how much property loss is associated with youth firesetting per year?

- If your organization currently has a Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention (YFPI) program, please bring copies of the various documents that are used to support it, such as intake and screening forms. Please also bring a copy of any lesson plans for the educational component of your program.

- If your organization does not have a program, do not worry. The course includes many examples of support materials.

Because of the amount of information that will be shared, the NFA would like you to read the text content of the Student Manual (SM) in advance of attending the course. Doing so will better prepare you to participate in class discussions and networking opportunities with peers. The SM text is included with this pre-course packet.

Multiple activities will be included in each unit of the course, and there is a robust amount of appendix material for your future use. You will get this material when you arrive in class.

And finally, if you don't already have one, please obtain an NFA student identification (SID) number prior to attending the course. Directions on how to obtain your personal SID number are available at http://cdp.dhs.gov/femasid.

UNIT 1:
THE EXTENT OF THE YOUTH FIRESETTING PROBLEM

TERMINAL OBJECTIVE

The students will be able to:

1.1   Analyze national trends in youth firesetting and compare those trends to the statistics from their home communities.

ENABLING OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to:

1.1   Explain national trends and types of fires set by youth.

1.2   Relate how youth are experimenting with explosive and pressure-creating devices.

1.3   Discuss the youth firesetting problem in their community.

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I.   THE EXTENT OF THE YOUTH FIRESETTING PROBLEM

A.   Youth firesetting facts.

1.   Whether a youth is experimenting or purposely setting a fire, youth firesetting can be costly. The costs associated with youth firesetting include injuries, deaths, property damage and criminal sanctions.

2.   According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the majority of youth firesetting incidents (77 percent) occur outdoors.

3.   However, 92 percent of deaths associated with youth firesetting occur in home structure fires (Hall, 2010).

4.   Most child-related home fires are started with lighters or matches (Hall, 2010).

5.   Children under age 5 are more than eight times as likely to die in a fire that they themselves cause.

6.   Almost half (42 percent) of child-related home structure fires begin in the bedroom. The most commonly lit items in these fires are mattresses, bedding and clothing (Flynn, 2009).

7.   One very noteworthy fact is that even though we have been discussing young children as firesetters, statistically speaking, youth between the ages of 11 and 14 are at the greatest risk for setting fires.

Boys are at the greatest risk for setting fires. Annually, 80 to 85 percent of the identified firesetters are male (Boberg, 2006).

8.   Times, days and months of youth-set fires:

a.   There is no peak day for child-play home structure fires.

b.   The weekend is the clear peak time for outside and other fire types (Flynn, 2009).

c.   Both home structure and outside fires involving youth follow a similar trend, peaking in the after-school hours before dinner time (Flynn, 2009).

d.   Youth fire incidents peak during the month of July. One out of every four youth-related incidents that occurred outside was in the month of July. More than two out of every three (67 percent) outside and other types of youth-related incidents in July involved fireworks (Flynn, 2009).

9. Fireworks and fires.

   a. The risk of fireworks injury was the highest for teens ages 15 to 19 and children 5 to 9, both with at least 2 1/2 times greater risk than the general population (Hall, 2010).

   b. Two out of five (40 percent) people injured by fireworks were under the age of 15 (Hall, 2010).

10. The good news about child-set fires:

   a. Since 1980, all child-related structure fires have decreased 79 percent, and home structure fires have decreased 81 percent (Flynn, 2009).

      - Civilian deaths caused by child-related fires have declined by 84 percent. Injuries have decreased by 61 percent (Hall, 2010).

      - Property loss (adjusted to inflation) has declined by 38 percent (Hall, 2010).

   b. Outside and other fires have decreased 95 percent since 1980 (Flynn, 2009).

   c. Since 1995:

      - Outside and other fires involving children have decreased 86 percent.

      - Home structure fires have decreased 57 percent.

      - Structure fires as a whole have decreased 42 percent (Flynn, 2009).

   d. In 1994, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) set a mandatory safety standard requiring the manufacturing and importation of cigarette lighters to be child-resistant. The standard requires that lighters resist the efforts of 85 percent of the children to operate them in a specified test. More than 95 percent of the estimated half-billion lighters purchased annually in the United States are covered by the standard (Flynn, 2009; CPSC, 1993).

   e. In a 2002 evaluation of the effectiveness of the 1994 CPSC lighter safety standard, the CPSC found a 58 percent reduction in fires caused by children younger than 5 compared to children over the age of 5 (Smith, Greene and Singh, 2002).

B. Youth firesetting and arson.

1. The crime of arson has the highest rate of juvenile involvement compared to all other crimes.

2. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), nearly half of all arson arrests in the U.S. are of juveniles under the age of 18. Nearly one-third of those arrested were under the age of 15, and 5 percent were under the age of 10 (FBI, 2006).

3. Of the youth arrested for arson in the U.S. in 2006, 79 percent were white (FBI, 2006).

4. In 2008, there was an estimated 6,600 juveniles arrested for arson in the U.S. Of those arrested, 56 percent were under age 15, and 12 percent were female (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), 2009).

5. After being relatively stable for most of the 1980s, the juvenile arrest rate for arson grew 33 percent between 1990 and 1994 (OJJDP, 2009).

6. The youth arrest rate for arson declined substantially between 1994 and 2008, falling 46 percent (OJJDP, 2009).

7. Following a 19 percent decline between 2006 and 2008, the juvenile arrest rate for arson in 2008 reached its lowest point since 1980 (OJJDP, 2009).

C. School fires.

1. The most deadly school fire in American history occurred on Dec. 1, 1958, at the Our Lady of the Angels parochial school on Chicago's West Side. Three nuns and 92 students were killed.

   The fire was started by an angry student.

2. According to the National Fire Data Center (NFDC) (2007), from 2003 to 2005 there was an estimated annual average of 14,700 fires on nonadult school properties which caused an average of 100 injuries and an estimated $85 million in property loss (Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), 2007).

3. Causes of school fires:

   a. Structure fires in preschools and day care centers are predominantly due to cooking (64 percent), followed by heating (7 percent) and electrical distribution (6 percent) (FEMA, 2007).

    b.   The causes for fires in kindergarten or elementary schools mostly involve cooking (27 percent), incendiary or suspicious activity (25 percent), and heating (12 percent) (FEMA, 2007).

    c.   The primary cause of fires in middle, junior or senior high schools is due to incendiary or suspicious activity (47 percent), followed by cooking (15 percent) and heating (7 percent) (FEMA, 2007).

4.   Time, day and month of school fires.

    a.   According to the NFDC, overall, the average peak month for school fires was July. The lowest incidence of school fires occurred between December and February (FEMA, 2007).

    b.   The NFDC states that the sharp increase in July school fires is driven by the number of elementary school fires. This suggests that elementary schools may be more attractive targets for incendiary or suspicious fires during the summer when fewer staff members monitor the school campuses (FEMA, 2007).

    c.   Middle, junior and senior high schools had more fire incidents in the fall and spring, which are the beginning and end of the school year (FEMA, 2007).

5.   Where school fires start:

    a.   The three leading areas where school fires begin are the bathroom, kitchen and small assembly areas (FEMA, 2007).

    b.   Of all school structure fires, 25 percent begin in bathroom trash cans, and they are of incendiary or suspicious nature (FEMA, 2007).

    c.   Of all school bathroom fires, 78 percent occur in middle, junior and senior high schools (FEMA, 2007).

6.   It is very important that the youth firesetting intervention program personnel have a good working relationship with the schools and school district(s) in their community.

    a.   There has to be an element of trust formed between the youth firesetting intervention program and the school personnel, or the school personnel will be reluctant to contact the youth firesetting intervention program staff, the fire department, and law enforcement if there is a school fire situation.

b. Many schools and school districts fear that if they report school fires, it will damage their reputation and cause the fear in their community that their school is a "bad" school, thus lowering the school's or district's rating. This might result in a loss of funding opportunities.

c. The following video explores how devastating a school fire can be not only for the school and community, but also for the firesetter.

II. "SEAN'S STORY"

III. YOUTH USE OF EXPLOSIVE AND PRESSURE-CREATING DEVICES

A. Youth have experimented with constructing and using incendiary/explosive/ pressure-creating devices for decades.

B. Experimentation and purposeful acts of destruction have expanded dramatically as a result of easy access to information.

C. Youth have easy access to instructions on how to make/use devices.

D. Many websites provide visual examples of youth engaged in dangerous behaviors involving incendiary/explosive devices.

E. Easy access to information combined with natural curiosity and peer influence can combine to create disastrous consequences.

IV. UNDERSTANDING YOUR LOCAL YOUTH FIRESETTING PROBLEM

A. Understanding the youth firesetting problem in your community is the first step in developing your firesetting intervention program.

B. Collecting the available information on the youth firesetting problem in your community will demonstrate to the community the need for a firesetting intervention program and will answer the following questions:

1. Who is setting fires in your community?

2. What kinds of fires are being set by juveniles?

3. What costs are associated with these fires (injuries, lives lost, property damage, loss of environmental resources, etc.)?

C.   The pre-course assignment for this course required you to conduct research on the topics listed above.

D.   Finding data on the occurrence and effects of youth firesetting at the local level may have been a challenging process.

E.   Knowing or attempting to discover the extent of the problem will encourage individuals and agencies to support a program to meet the needs of the community.

F.   Demonstrating the need for a program based on current youth firesetting data from your community is the first step in identifying and justifying the need for a firesetter intervention program.

G.   Remember, many youth who set fires never get reported to the fire or police departments. The development of your firesetting intervention program might be the catalyst to get these fires reported!

V.   SUMMARY

UNIT 2:
WHO SETS FIRES AND WHY?

TERMINAL OBJECTIVE

The students will be able to:

2.1   Classify the typologies of youth firesetting.

ENABLING OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to:

2.1   Explain the significance of fire in America's culture and how children learn about fire.

2.2   Distinguish myths from facts related to youth firesetting.

2.3   Describe the dangers and penalties of youth firesetting behaviors.

2.4   Analyze the four common factors that contribute to firesetting behaviors involving children and adolescents.

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I. FIRE IN OUR SOCIETY

A. Fire has been a part of society since the beginning of mankind.

B. Fire is an essential part of our everyday life.

   1. The fireplace, campfire and bonfire are all symbols of fire that are central to the soul of humankind.

   2. Fire has been associated with religions and religious ceremonies worldwide.

   3. Fire also plays a large part in ceremonies such as birthdays, weddings, baptisms and funerals.

   4. References to fire are found in many forms of entertainment such as movies, songs, Broadway musicals and sports.

   5. Humans use fire in many different ways every day for cooking, heating, lighting, medicine, transportation and defense.

C. Fire carries an innate fascination and mysticism for most people — children included.

II. HOW CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT FIRE

Why children find fire fascinating and how they learn about it:

A. A child is celebrating his first birthday. There are balloons, presents, relatives and a birthday cake right in front of the child. His mother leans over and lights a match to a large candle in the shape of a number "1." Everyone is smiling and singing "Happy Birthday," and the child is told to blow the candle out.

B. Children see fire mostly controlled and for positive and pleasurable uses. It's natural for children as young as age 2 to become fascinated with the glow and warmth of fire.

C. The coloring and flickering of the flames provide a visual stimulus that serves as a form of entertainment and relaxation for the beholder. Its crackling sound appeals to the ear.

D. It is common for children to want to learn more about fire and even go so far as seeing if they can "make" fire.

E.   The family goes on a camping trip. During the day, the family gathers plenty of firewood for the nightly campfire. At night, the family builds a campfire so they can roast marshmallows, stay warm and tell stories by the glow of the fire.

F.   At a family gathering, a charcoal or gas grill is used to cook food.

G.   It has been a stressful week at work, and a mother prepares a relaxing bath with candles, bubbles and hot water.

H.   In a family where smokers are present, children may see lighters used many times each day.

I.   It is July 4th, and there are numerous fireworks celebrations throughout the community. This pyrotechnical extravaganza sets the sky on fire.

J.   In the winter, a family may use a wood-burning stove or fireplace.

K.   A child sits down to watch his favorite television stunt show. The scene depicts a stuntman setting himself ablaze and then skateboarding over three parked cars.

L.   Science class experiments show how different colored flames are created by burning different types of materials and how a combination of certain chemicals can cause an explosion.

M.   To a child who is growing, developing and learning, fire may be misinterpreted as being safe; without supervision, it can be very dangerous.

     1.   A child (and even adolescents) might not understand the dangers of fire or may not have been taught fire safety.

     2.   Concepts like danger, what is real and not real, and their own invincibility are not easily understood by a child.

III.   MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT CHILDREN AND FIRE

A.   **Myth:** A child can control a small fire.

     Fact: Most fires start small but can become uncontrollable quickly.

B.   **Myth:** It is normal for children to play with fire.

     Fact: It is not normal for children to play with fire. Curiosity about fire is common. Use of fire without a parent/caregiver's knowledge, approval or supervision is dangerous.

C.   **Myth:** Firesetting is a phase that children will outgrow.

        Fact: Firesetting is not a phase. If a child is not taught fire safety, firesetting can get out of control easily. It is a dangerous behavior; you can't afford to wait to change it.

D.   **Myth:** Many children are obsessed with fire.

        Fact: Very few children are obsessed with fire. There always is a reason for firesetting. That reason needs to be discovered and dealt with.

E.   **Myth:** If you burn a child's hand, he or she will stop setting fires.

        Fact: Purposely burning a child's hand is child abuse and is against the law. Burns only create fear and scars. The reason behind the fire use must be discovered and addressed.

F.   **Myth:** If you take a child to the burn unit to see burn victims, he or she will stop playing with fire.

        Fact: Going to the burn unit only instills fear and does not teach the child anything about fire and safety. More importantly, we need to be sensitive to burn survivors who are trying to recover (emotionally and physically) from their burns, and we should not put them on display.

G.   **Myth:** Putting a child in the back of a police car or having a firefighter talk sternly to them will stop firesetting behaviors.

        Fact: Police officers will put a child in the back of their patrol car only if they have legal authority and it is appropriate to do so. Scare tactics don't get to the root of the problem, and these kids typically continue to set fires.

H.   **Myth:** Firesetting is related to bedwetting.

        Fact: This correlation has never been proven. It is based on Freudian Domination theory; prehistoric man showed power by urinating on fires and putting them out.

I.   **Myth**: Over 50 percent of youth firesetters have mental health disorders and/or learning disabilities.

        Fact: Current research reveals that fewer than 25 percent of youth firesetters have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder and/or learning disability. However, this is not to say that youth firesetters (and perhaps family members) are not challenged by some type of undiagnosed disorder.

IV. DANGERS AND PENALTIES OF YOUTH FIRESETTING

A. The danger of fire today is greater than ever because of the high number of petroleum-based building materials.

B. Fires burn quicker and hotter, and smoke is more toxic than in the past because of these materials.

C. In the hands of a youth, fire can be more deadly than a loaded firearm. Consider the following analogy:

A firesetter in an apartment complex or school can be likened to a serial sniper. Here's why:

1. Fire can intensify quickly and can consume everything in its path, including life.

2. A serial sniper kills those he or she comes in contact with, regardless of age, sex, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

D. In addition to the dangers of firesetting, many parents or caregivers are unaware that a youth can be prosecuted for starting a fire once he or she reaches the state's age of accountability.

E. Arson.

1. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program defines arson as "any willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, personal property of another, etc. Only fires determined through investigation to have been willfully or maliciously set are classified as arson" (FBI, 2002).

2. Year after year, the FBI's UCR shows that between 50 and 60 percent of all arson arrests in the United States are of youth under the age of 18 (FBI UCR, 2002-2007).

3. However, in the U.S., how the crime of arson is defined, enforced and punished is up to each individual state.

V. TYPOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING

A. Curiosity/Experimentation.

1. Most children experience fire interest between the ages of 3 to 5. This age group often asks questions focusing on the physical properties of fire, such as how hot fire is, its color, or what makes it burn.

2. Children often express their interest in fire through play by wearing fire hats, playing with toy firetrucks, and cooking food on their toy stoves.

3. Fire interest by young children is normal and can be effectively addressed through age-appropriate education by adults.

4. Children can be taught to understand fire as a productive and useful part of their lives.

5. Unfortunately, many adults fail to adequately address their children's interest in fire.

6. It has been estimated that curiosity-motivated firesetting represents greater than 60 percent of all fires set by children (National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and U.S. Fire Administration (USFA)).

7. The curiosity-motivated firesetter is a child who is exploring his or her interest in fire through experimentation.

8. Curious and experimental firesetting refers primarily to young children, ages 2 through 10. The median (average) age of a curiosity-motivated firesetter is 5 years old (International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA), 2010).

9. In general, curiosity-motivated firesetting by younger children is unintentional. Characteristics of the incident often include:

    a. Lack of adult supervision.

    b. Easy access to ignition materials.

    c. Unsophisticated planning of event.

    d. Ignition in hidden/remote location.

    e. Indoor or outdoor fires.

    f. Recent onset of firesetting behavior.

    g. No identifiable target or fire pattern.

    h. No past history of firesetting.

    i. Lack of fire safety knowledge in the family.

j. Failure to use safety knowledge in the family.

10. Three out of every five children set bedrooms on fire, involving the ignition of bedding, mattresses, upholstered furniture or clothing.

11. The curiosity-motivated firesetter comes from a variety of household profiles. He or she often has low impulse control and lacks an understanding of the destructive power of fire.

12. Cognitive challenges such as learning disabilities and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are factors that can influence poor decision-making and spontaneous behaviors such as spur of the moment fire experimentation.

13. Once curious firesetters realize the impact of their behavior, they often seek help and/or try to extinguish their fire. In some cases, firesetters may hide or exit the area of origin without seeking help.

14. A very important point: Curiosity-motivated firesetting can lead to more serious incidents if ignored. If a child or adolescent continues to participate in more than one unsupervised fire incident, the probability of starting a significant fire increases dramatically.

15. It is critical for parents, caregivers, the emergency services, schools and the health community to understand that all incidents should be reported and addressed immediately.

16. Careful screening of all firesetting incidents by a trained practitioner is critical in order to evaluate the potential for underlying psychological or social needs.

17. Most firesetters start their first fire while exploring a natural curiosity. If educational intervention does not take place, eight out of 10 children will continue to experiment, and the frequency of behavior may escalate (IFSTA Fire and Life Safety Educator (FLSE) Manual, 2010).

18. Adolescents may also start fires out of curiosity. Their actions are sometimes prompted by a desire to experiment and/or by carelessness. Sometimes it's a simple wish to explore their environment with little understanding of the consequences or danger of starting a fire. As with younger children, cognitive challenges can influence poor decision-making and spontaneous behaviors.

19. Most adolescent firesetters who are truly prompted by curiosity do not intend to be destructive or to inflict damage on life or property. Many will try to extinguish the fire they start, and often it is the firesetters who initiate a call for help.

20. Experimenting adolescents may initially deny or lie about their involvement with fire. However, if confronted by officials using an appropriate demeanor, they often show remorse for the event.

21. Combined with education, holding adolescents accountable for their actions is a proven strategy to prevent/address firesetting behaviors.

B. Crisis/Troubled/Cry-for-help.

1. Be it sadness, anger or a signal to a problematic situation like abuse, firesetting can be a powerful way for youth to communicate a level of need for attention from adults.

2. The need to deliver a message requesting help is often a root factor contributing to crisis/troubled/cries-for-help firesetting.

3. Intentional firesetting may be influenced by cognitive, psychological or social problems. It can also be exacerbated by environmental factors, such as access to ignition materials, lack of adult supervision, and family dysfunction.

4. This type of firesetting is extremely dangerous because it often consists of a series of fire incidents, both planned and/ or spontaneous, that take place over several weeks, months or even years. The severity of fires may vary.

5. In some cases, there is intent to destroy or harm specific property and/or people. Once a fire is started, the firesetter may not make an attempt to extinguish the fire or seek help. The fire acts as a symbol of a problem and signals a cry for help in response to a stressful life experience or abuse.

6. The possible link between physical and/ or sexual abuse, neglect and firesetting has been investigated extensively by several states. Professionals in both Oregon and Massachusetts have empirically documented a strong connection between child abuse and firesetting behavior (Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal and Massachusetts State Police).

7. The crisis/troubled/cry-for-help firesetter often has poor coping and problem-solving skills. He or she is often unable to clearly identify or express his or her feelings in a socially appropriate manner.

8. As with curiosity-motivated firesetters, the attention-seeking youth may lack understanding of the speed, danger and destructive potential of fire.

9. When confronted, attention-seeking firesetters may lie about the cause of their fire, or make up wild stories about the event.

10. Of particular concern, this typology of firesetter may lack remorse for starting a fire and/or ignore the event once it has been initiated because he or she feels that the behavior was justified.

11. This typology of firesetter may continue to set fires until his or her need for attention is identified and appropriately addressed.

12. The attention-seeking firesetter (and family) needs immediate intervention from a team of experienced professionals who can intervene appropriately. Intervention may include a combination of education, clinical (mental health) and social service support. Adjudication (legal proceedings) by justice officials may also be necessary.

C. Thrill-seeking/Risk-taking.

1. In contrast to curiosity, some adolescent firesetters try to duplicate forms of dangerous behaviors seen in various mediums such as in person, through video gaming or on the Internet.

2. Experimentation with fire, explosives and other pressure-creating devices (bottle bombs) can serve as the "ultimate" risk for adolescents engaging in thrill-seeking/risk-taking behaviors.

3. Adolescents often take these risks without thinking through potential consequences such as injury, death, property damages or criminal sanctions.

4. As adolescents search for an adrenaline rush, today's rapidly expanding technology creates a surplus of opportunities for youth to learn what's being done by their peers worldwide.

5. Many parents/caregivers have no idea what their child has been researching, viewing or experimenting with until contact with public officials occurs.

6. Thrill-seeking/Risk-taking adolescents are often very peer-influenced and enjoy attention-getting behaviors.

7. Incidents are usually created with available combustibles/materials and ignition sources that are easily accessible.

8. While most thrill-seeking incidents occur outdoors, this typology of offender is responsible for the greatest number of school fires and fireworks incidents.

9.   As with the other typologies, cognitive challenges such as learning disabilities and ADHD are factors that can influence poor decision-making and spontaneous behaviors such as spur of the moment fire experimentation or device manufacturing/detonation.

10.   This typology of firesetters may oppose authority figures. When confronted about their behavior, they often lie about their involvement in illegal behavior or make up stories about why the event(s) occurred.

11.   However, thrill-seeking/risk-taking adolescents are usually afraid of potential legal consequences. They will often admit to their indiscretion if presented with facts about an incident and approached in a respectful manner.

D.   Delinquent/Criminal/Strategic.

1.   What distinguishes the delinquent, criminal and strategic firesetters from thrill-seeking/risk-taking youth is the planned willful intent to cause destruction.

2.   Purposeful destructive firesetting by adolescents often targets fields, mail boxes, dumpsters and abandoned structures.

3.   Delinquent firesetters often set fires, discharge fireworks, or falsely activate fire alarms because of peer pressure, boredom, or the desire to show off. In many major cities, delinquent youth firesetting is often used as a rite of initiation for joining a gang.

4.   Criminal and strategic firesetters may use fire to conceal a crime that has been committed.

5.   Criminal and strategic firesetters sometimes target objects such as schools or other property as an act of revenge.

6.   Regardless of the magnitude of an event, the motives behind these typologies of firesetting must be immediately addressed.

7.   Delinquent, criminal and strategic firesetters often have a troubling behavioral history. Many experiment with alcohol/drugs, are often truant from school, and exhibit a wide range of anti-social behaviors.

8.   These firesetters typically have low self-esteem, are peer dominated, and often alienate themselves from their family/society. Many view the legal system as a joke and brag about their acts of destruction to peers.

9. Fires set by delinquent, criminal and strategic firesetters are often well-planned and fueled by accelerants, and they have multiple points of origin. Many firesetters in this typology lack remorse for their actions.

10. Left unchecked, these profiles of firesetting have great potential for ascending into future acts of violence and other anti-social behavior.

11. Comprehensive interventions such as age-appropriate school-based educational programs coupled with punitive actions (that include potential legal ramifications) are proven measures that often deter delinquent, criminal and strategic firesetting.

E. Pathological/Severely disturbed/Cognitively impaired/Thought-disordered.

1. Left unaddressed, youth firesetting behaviors can transcend into a pathology of continuing fire incidents.

2. In epidemiology, pathology is referred to as the process of a disease. While youth firesetting is not a disease in itself, the behavior is a response to some level of need — be it curiosity, problem-driven, or criminal intent.

3. Pathological firesetting is very disconcerting because the perpetrator uses fire as a means for receiving gratification without regard to others.

4. A pathological firesetter may start hundreds of fires for a plethora of reasons. The term "pyromania" refers to a pathology whereby a person sets many planned fires for pleasure or to release stress.

5. While the mental health community tends to reserve the term "pyromaniac" for adult offenders, youth firesetting behaviors, when left unchecked, can transcend into a pathology carried by a perpetrator to adulthood.

6. Pathological firesetters may have a high IQ. Their fires are often sophisticated, very cleverly set and cause significant damage.

7. The fires will have a distinct pattern and may serve as a type of ritual for the firesetter.

8. If confronted, this typology of firesetter will deny involvement and lie about the cause of a fire. He or she is proud of the fires and believes he or she is smarter than police officers and fire investigators.

9. These firesetters may photograph, video or create written documentation of their fires. They will sometimes interject themselves into the fire investigation process.

10. Pathological firesetters have a long history of emotional, physical and/or psychological disorders. They often have difficulty establishing relationships with peers and family. Their home life may be unstructured, with caregivers being neglectful, abusive or even incestuous. The caregivers of this type of firesetter may have their own psychological and/or substance abuse issues.

   Researchers provide the following descriptions of firesetters that may fall under the pathological typology:

   a. Disordered coping: Set fires in order to return to a state of emotional equilibrium after experiencing intense anxiety, rage or both (Williams, 2005).

   b. Pathological: Includes youth who are psychotic, paranoid or delusional, or who live in a chronically disturbed or bizarre environment (Stadolnik, 2002).

   c. Severely disturbed: Youth that have a paranoid, psychotic fixation on fire. They are controlled by sensory reinforcement. The sensory aspect of the fire is sufficiently reinforcing for them to set fires frequently (Slavkin, 2000).

   d. Thought-disordered: These firesetters suffer from some type of thought disorder such as schizophrenia and attribute their firesetting to hallucinations or delusions (Williams, 2005).

11. Pathological firesetters represent an extreme danger to themselves, the community and our industry. If a firesetter's behaviors are identified as being pathological in nature, immediate multidisciplinary intervention is required.

F. Not all firesetters have cognitive, behavioral or learning disorders.

   1. Just because a youth firesetter has been diagnosed with a cognitive, behavioral or learning disorder, it does not necessarily mean that he or she is predisposed to set a fire or that the fire he or she set was caused by the disorder.

   2. It is also important to remember that youth firesetting behavior can be influenced by the youth's social, cultural and environmental circumstances.

   3. Sometimes children grow up in a family environment with few rules or consequences for inappropriate behavior.

4.   Many firesetters reside in a household where one or multiple family members smoke and access to ignition materials is readily available.

5.   In some cultures, children are taught at a very young age how to light fires for heating, cooking or religious purposes.

6.   Many parents/caregivers have never been taught fire safety practices; therefore, they do not pass fire safety information to their children. It may be difficult to explain to the parent/caregiver why certain behaviors regarding fire may be dangerous because the parent/caregiver has never learned about or experienced the dangers associated with firesetting behavior.

7.   Family influences can impact whether or not a child will set a fire. While youth firesetting can occur in any household, research indicates that the behavior occurs more frequently in homes where a lack of supervision and parenting skills are evident.

8.   Family dysfunction and/or lack of adult support can be factors that influence firesetting behaviors. Parents or legal guardians may be physically present in a home but emotionally absent. The family may be experiencing a recent trauma or crisis.

9.   In more extreme cases, drug and/or alcohol abuse may be evident among family members, including the firesetter. Physical and/or sexual abuse, neglect and other anti-social adult behaviors may be occurring. Prior contact between the family and police is common. In summary, the home environment of many firesetters is chaotic. This is especially true in problematic, complex cases.

10.   It is important for the youth firesetter interventionist to remember that there are many circumstances that can influence youth firesetting behavior and that these children do not always fit into a neatly defined typology.

VI.   FOUR COMMON FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE FIRESETTING BEHAVIOR

While social, cultural and environmental circumstances may influence firesetting behaviors, empirical evidence identifies four common factors that directly contribute to youth firesetting behavior. These factors impact all typologies of firesetters and include:

A.   Easy access to ignition materials.

Easy access to ignition materials often proves deadly during child fire-play incidents. In many homes where fire-play has occurred, the child easily discovered the ignition source or already knew where it was located and how to obtain it.

B.   Lack of adequate supervision.

The lack of adequate supervision is a factor that can influence each typology of firesetters. Panicked once they discover their child has engaged in firesetting or the manufacture of explosive/pressure-creating devices, parents often discover the experimentation has been occurring over a prolonged period of time.

C.   A failure to practice fire safety.

A failure to practice fire safety is a factor that often affects youth and their parents/caregivers in the following ways:

1.   Young children often lack understanding of the dangers associated with firesetting and safety rules about fire.

2.   Older children and adolescents may not have received school-based primary prevention about the dangers of fire-play/firesetting, penalties for inappropriate behavior, and direction of what to do if a fire happens.

3.   Parents/caregivers may not be aware of the significance of youth firesetting, appropriate safety education, penalties, or what action to take in the event that a fire occurs. They also may not be aware of local youth firesetting prevention/intervention programs.

D.   Easy access to information on the Internet regarding firesetting, designing explosives and how to do tricks with fire is a problem that demands proactive attention.

1.   The Internet, cellphones, web-based and interactive television shows, games, etc. have made explicit media available to youth on many dangerous (and often illegal) activities.

2.   Youth are able to experiment with fire or incendiary materials and instantaneously post results for the world to see and replicate.

3.   As an example: In 2002, a major lighter manufacturing company provided instantaneous access to a section on its website dedicated to showing more than 550 lighter tricks. It also provided an area for individuals who developed and designed their own lighter tricks to download their newly designed lighter trick.

4. Other issues associated with the easy access to information through social media, the Internet, cellphones, etc. is the idea of "one-upmanship" through risk-taking contests, dares and the idea of being the individual who has the most "hits" on YouTube and other social media sites.

5. As newer forms of communication are designed, the ease and instantaneous nature of communication becomes more compelling. How this will affect youth firesetting behavior in the future remains to be seen.

E. Solutions to firesetting behaviors.

1. Aggressive primary prevention that includes school and community-based education is the first line of defense in preventing all typologies of youth firesetting.

2. Early identification, screening and intervention directed at the firesetter and his or her family is a critical form of secondary prevention that demands cooperative support from parents/caregivers and the fire service, juvenile justice, social service, and clinical and school communities.

VII. SUMMARY

UNIT 3:
IDENTIFICATION, INTAKE, SCREENING, DISPOSITION AND FOLLOW-UP

TERMINAL OBJECTIVE

The students will be able to:

3.1   *Evaluate intervention options to mitigate youth firesetting behavior.*

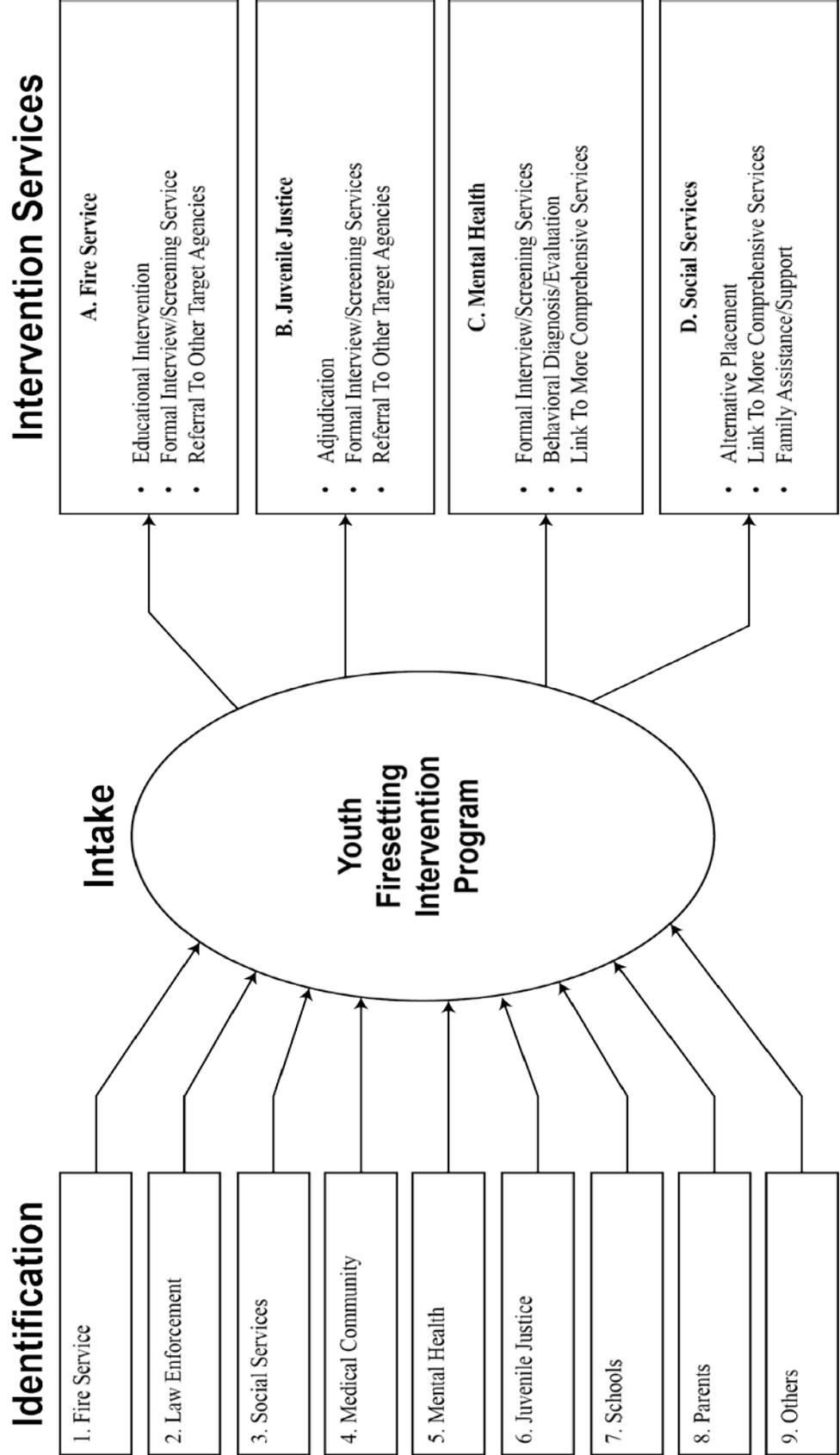### *ENABLING OBJECTIVES*

The students will be able to:

3.1   *Determine sources to identify youth firesetters.*

3.2   *Discuss necessary and effective intake procedures.*

3.3   *Describe the potential impact of cognitive, behavioral and learning disabilities.*

3.4   *Summarize the youth firesetting screening process.*

3.5   *Discuss the components of a screening tool.*

3.6   *Analyze the components of an effective screening environment.*

3.7   *Illustrate how to conduct a screening.*

3.8   *Define levels of firesetting risks.*

3.9   *Discuss potential intervention options for firesetters and families.*

3.10   *Given a screening form and case studies, evaluate firesetting risk levels and recommend appropriate intervention options.*

3.11   *Describe how to perform follow-up activities to assess impact of program services.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. When a child or youth is suspected of firesetting behavior, and/or a fire results from the actions of a child or youth, identification and intake procedures should be initiated.

B. Once juveniles and their families are identified, decisions are made regarding a course of action.

C. All youth firesetting intervention programs should be supported by an interdisciplinary team.

D. The interdisciplinary team is a broad-based multiagency partnership that works collaboratively to address youth firesetting cases and recommend/deliver appropriate intervention strategies.

E. There are five components of this process:

    1. Identification.

    2. Intake.

    3. Screening.

    4. Intervention strategy(s).

    5. Follow-up.

F. Once a youth firesetter has been identified:

    1. Intake procedures should begin.

    2. Shortly thereafter, a screening process is conducted.

    3. This process is followed by disposition of which intervention strategy to initiate.

    4. Once interventions have been conducted, follow-up to program services should occur.

Flow Chart for
Youth Firesetting Intervention Services

Identification

1. Fire Service

2. Law Enforcement

3. Social Services

4. Medical Community

5. Mental Health

6. Juvenile Justice

7. Schools

8. Parents

9. Others

Intake

Youth Firesetting Intervention Program

Intervention Services

A. Fire Service

- Educational Intervention
- Formal Interview/Screening Service
- Referral To Other Target Agencies

B. Juvenile Justice

- Adjudication
- Formal Interview/Screening Services
- Referral To Other Target Agencies

C. Mental Health

- Formal Interview/Screening Services
- Behavioral Diagnosis/Evaluation
- Link To More Comprehensive Services

D. Social Services

- Alternative Placement
- Link To More Comprehensive Services
- Family Assistance/Support

II.   IDENTIFICATION OF YOUTH FIRESETTERS

A.   Youth firesetters can be identified in a number of ways.

B.   The earlier the identification is initiated, the better the chances of a successful intervention.

C.   There are multiple ways children involved in fire incidents come to the attention of a youth firesetting program:

      1.   Parents/Caregivers.

           a.   Adults may discover telltale signs such as burned items found in the youth's bedroom or in or around the home. These items may include toys, carpeting and furniture.

           b.   Parents/Caregivers may call the local fire department for advice.

      2.   Schools.

           a.   A school experiencing a series of trash can fires or other small fires identifies one or more youth involved in the incidents and contacts the fire service for assistance.

           b.   Other resources to use within the school include the school resource officer (SRO) and/or guidance counselor.

      3.   Law enforcement, juvenile justice, courts and attorneys.

           a.   A youth may be referred to the program by an agency in conjunction with (or in lieu of) formal adjudication proceedings.

           b.   Arson Hot Lines, Crime Stoppers, and other mediums may be used as well.

      4.   Mental health agencies.

           Clinical agencies and/or private practitioners may refer a client and his or her family after learning that firesetting behaviors have occurred.

      5.   Social and child protective services.

           Agencies that advocate for (or require) the well-being of youth may initiate (or require) a referral to the program.

      6.   Fire service.

Fire service personnel during fire suppression and investigation procedures may identify youth firesetters.

a.   Immediately after suppression, most fire departments conduct an origin-and-cause investigation.

b.   The purpose of an origin-and-cause investigation is to determine the origin (i.e., where the fire started), cause (i.e., how the fire started), and more specifically, what event brought the heat, fuel and oxygen together to cause the incident.

c.   This information is gathered by:

-        Talking with firefighters at the fire scene.

-        Reviewing physical evidence at the fire.

-        Interviewing witnesses.

d.   Agencies frequently gather information using a witness-driven protocol. This protocol drives a successful investigation by gathering information such as:

-        Who was the last person in the area?

-        What did firefighters or police officers see when they arrived on the scene, etc.?

e.   A complete and thorough origin-and-cause investigation will reveal if a child or juvenile is involved in a fire.

f.   Fire investigators often provide referrals to a Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention (YFPI) program.

g.   A youth firesetter's fire-related activities may be made known through the investigator's report and/or the youth's own admission.

D.   Factors to consider during the identification process.

Once a firesetter has been identified, the pathway to intervention depends on a number of factors:

1.   If there is a violation of local, state or federal law, mandates may require immediate referral to the local justice system.

2.   The age of the child or youth involved must be considered.

     a.   Age of accountability is the minimum age at which state courts have ruled that a child is intellectually capable of understanding right from wrong and the consequences associated with inappropriate behavior (International Fire Service Training Association (IFSTA), 2010).

     b.   Depending upon the state, the age of accountability may vary, but for most places this age is between seven and nine, though it can be as old as 12. It is the responsibility of program personnel to ensure that they are familiar with their state's age of accountability.

3.   The nature and severity of the fire needs to be considered. Those firesetting acts that result in a large dollar loss and/or a loss of life may, by need or requirement, be referred to the juvenile justice system before any firesetting intervention takes place.

4.   The firesetting history of the juvenile should be explored. Many YFPI programs have strict guidelines on disposition of first-time versus repeat firesetters.

5.   It is essential that all personnel who have potential to interact with a youth firesetter and his or her family have basic understanding of the standard operating procedures (SOPs) or standard operating guidelines (SOGs) of the YFPI program.

     This is very important, especially when a parent or caregiver walks into a fire or police station asking for help with addressing a youth firesetting incident/situation.

6.   Having a predetermined strategy will help ensure that rapid and reliable assistance is provided to all families in need of program services.

III.   INTAKE PROCESS

A.   Once a child or youth has been identified, whether through a parent/caregiver, community agency or fire department contact, there must be a mechanism in place to formally initiate the involvement and participation in the youth firesetting intervention program.

B.   Intake is defined as the process of collecting initial information about the youth firesetter, his or her family, and the incident(s) that brought the youth to the program (National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), 2010).

C. A firesetting intervention program must have a consistent and reliable intake process. This includes protocol on the following:

    1. What to do when a parent/caregiver asks for help.

    2. How to process a request for service from a partner agency.

    3. How to contact and obtain information from a family after a fire incident has occurred.

D. Intake forms should be used for each referral or complaint of youth firesetting behavior. The form should be standardized for the jurisdiction and designed to gather basic information about the youth, his or her family, and the fire event/ situation that led to the program referral.

E. All staff members who may perform intake duties must be provided with the training and tools to perform this important aspect of the program.

F. Depending on available resources and program protocol, the intake process may be handled by firefighters on a scene, a fire investigator, a receptionist/ administrative assistant or a member of the youth firesetting intervention program team.

G. A successful youth firesetting intervention program must have an intake process that includes the following five basic procedures:

    1. Points of entry.

        The mediums of how the youth enters the program.

        a. Fire service can include suppression staff, investigators, public educators or on-duty station/administrative personnel.

        b. Partner agencies can include juvenile justice, social services, mental health, schools or other groups.

        c. All personnel from every agency must understand what to do if presented with a firesetting situation and how to initiate (or deliver) the intake component.

        d. Some programs train partner agencies to conduct the intake process. Others direct all referrals to the lead agency. This process may vary based upon the lead agency for the interdisciplinary team.

    2. Reasonable response time.

Once a firesetter has been identified, there is a significant but short window of opportunity to provide services for these at-risk youth.

a.   The best window of opportunity to provide successful intervention is immediately after the fire.

b.   The program should establish what contact window of time is appropriate.

c.   Ideally, within 48 hours of initial contact, the youth firesetting program should make contact with the youth and his or her family. This may be either in person or by telephone.

-    However, in the event of a significant fire that has displaced family, parents/caregivers may not be in the frame of mind to discuss their involvement in the program.

-    Firefighters, investigators or program staff should ensure that a family's basic needs are being met. That includes shelter, food and clothing.

-    Showing empathy toward a family that has suffered a loss often extends the window of opportunity to provide information about the program.

d.   Caution, there must be a balance between compassion, care for the family, and persistence that action about the youth firesetting situation needs to occur in a timely manner.

e.   Once a fire crisis has subsided, parents/caregivers may be reluctant to follow-through with fire intervention and education for their child.

According to data compiled from 1995-2005 by the Massachusetts Coalition for Youth Firesetting Intervention Program, only 1 out of 5 youth, who were voluntarily referred to a juvenile fire program, actually attended Day 1 of the program.

f.   Depending upon the jurisdiction and the design of the program, it is up to the youth firesetting intervention program personnel to make contact with the family and encourage their participation.

3.   Contact person/people.

Intake personnel and their availability must be identified.

      a.   Who in the program will be responsible for taking requests for service and/or contacting families?

      b.   Will there be more than one person available to initiate the contact?

      c.   There is a range of options; some programs have one contact person assigned per day, while others have one contact person available on a half-time basis or on call.

4.   Intake forms.

      Intake forms may be written or electronic and must be established for each case. A fire incident form should be attached to the intake form if it is available (if the referral is through an actual fire response).

5.   Prioritization of cases.

      Methods must be in place for responding to urgent cases that require a more rapid intervention.

IV. UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF COGNITIVE, BEHAVIORAL AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

A.   Knowledge provides us with abilities to help others.

1.   Many firesetting intervention specialists often view a case that involves a youth who is challenged by one or more cognitive, behavioral and/or learning disabilities or disorders as being too complex and above their level of ability to provide successful intervention.

2.   While firefighters, investigators, police officers and public educators are not mental health clinicians, they are respected professionals who (with education) can provide effective intervention services that involve their respective domain of expertise.

3.   Every intervention specialist should understand how cognitive, behavioral and/or learning disabilities can require them to modify service delivery strategies so a positive outcome is achieved.

4.   The culminating readings of Unit 2 presented an overview of several of the most common disorders that firesetting intervention specialists may encounter.

5. Understanding the nuances of a particular mental health disorder or learning disability (LD) will make the design and implementation of interventions more effective.

6. Program personnel need to understand how the disorder or disability may impact the youth/family and be able to speak knowledgeably about the implications of the diagnosis as it relates to firesetting behavior.

7. In addition, mental health practitioners may make referrals to the program. Having a basic understanding of the various common special needs enhances both communication ability and credibility of the firesetting intervention specialist.

B. Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

 1. ADHD is one of the most common cognitive disorders that develops in children.

 2. Children with ADHD often struggle to pay attention and/or control their behavior.

 3. The principal characteristics of ADHD are inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.

  a. Children who are inattentive have a hard time keeping their minds on any one thing. They may get bored with a task after only a few minutes.

  b. Hyperactive children always seem to be "on the go" or constantly in motion. They may dash around touching or playing with whatever is in sight or talk incessantly.

  c. Impulsive children seem unable to curb their immediate reactions or think before they act. They will often blurt out inappropriate comments, display their emotions without restraint, and act without regard for the later consequences of their conduct.

C. Autism and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs).

 1. Autism is the most common condition in a group of developmental disorders known as ASDs.

 2. Autism is characterized by impaired social interaction, problems with verbal and nonverbal communication, and unusual, repetitive, or severely limited activities and interests.

3.   Other ASDs include Asperger's syndrome, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (usually referred to as PDD-NOS).

4.   Autism is a complex disorder. A comprehensive evaluation requires a multidisciplinary team including a psychologist, neurologist, psychiatrist, speech therapist, and other professionals who diagnose children with ASDs.

5.   Doctors rely on a core group of behaviors to alert them to the possibility of a diagnosis of autism. These behaviors include:

        a.   Impaired ability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others.

        b.   Absence or impairment of imaginative and social play and stereotyped, repetitive or unusual use of language.

        c.   Preoccupation with certain objects or subjects.

D.   LDs.

1.   A mental health disorder and LD are **not** the same.

2.   An LD is a disorder that diminishes a person's capacity to interpret what he or she sees and hears, and/or to link information from different parts of the brain.

3.   If a person is unable to process information being presented, learning (or behavior change) will not occur.

4.   In school age children, reading or spelling disabilities, writing, and arithmetic challenges may appear. A type of reading disorder, dyslexia, is quite widespread. Reading disabilities affect up to 8 percent of elementary school children.

5.   An LD (now referred to as "a learning difference") is a learning problem in a school environment often regarding perception, comprehension and interpretation. (These vary with teaching styles and learning modalities.)

6.   U.S. schools are basically two dimensional learning environments, where most children with "disabilities" are three dimensional learners.

7.   If an LD is unrecognized and not addressed by providing education in a way the child can learn, the child can become discouraged and fail in school, and the lack of success and understanding can cause acting out and anti-social behavior.

8.   Many children who have learning differences are not diagnosed unless the condition is severe. The children may be thought to be "not very smart," "a behavior problem," anxious, depressed, etc.

9.   These children and parents/caregivers try to cope with something they, themselves, cannot understand.

10.   Children who attend public/private schools and are challenged by a cognitive, behavioral or LD or disorder will often have their own prescribed Individual Education Plan (IEP).

11.   An IEP is a plan developed by a team of educational professionals to help the challenged student perform at a higher level. It often includes strategies of how to best address the student's disability or disorder.

12.   Inquiring about the presence of such a plan can help the youth firesetting intervention specialist identify key partners within the local school environment who may be able to assist with intervention recommendations and perhaps offer supportive services.

E.   Bipolar disorder.

1.   In its classic form, bipolar disorder is characterized by mood cycling between periods of intense highs and lows.

2.   In children, bipolar disorder often seems to be a rather chronic mood disregulation with a mixture of elation, depression and irritability.

3.   Youth with bipolar disorder experience unusually intense emotional states that occur in distinct periods called "mood episodes."

4.   People with bipolar disorder also may be explosive and irritable during a mood episode.

5.   These mood episodes are different from the normal ups and downs that everyone goes through from time to time. They can result in damaged relationships, poor school performance, and even suicide.

F.   Anxiety and depression.

1.   Doctors have begun to take seriously the risk of depression in children. Research has shown that childhood depression often persists, recurs and continues into adulthood, especially if it goes untreated.

2.   Anxiety disorders commonly occur along with other mental or physical illnesses, including alcohol or substance abuse, which may mask anxiety symptoms or make them worse. In some cases, these other illnesses need to be treated before a person will respond to treatment for the anxiety disorder.

3.   When a person has a depressive and/or anxiety disorder, it interferes with daily life, normal functioning, and it causes pain for both the person with the disorder and those who care about him or her.

4.   There are a variety of anxiety disorders, including but not limited to:

        a.   Panic Disorder.

        b.   Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

        c.   Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

        d.   Social Anxiety Disorder.

5.   The same is true with depression. Types include:

        a.   Major Depressive Disorder.

        b.   Dysthymic Disorder.

        c.   Psychotic Depression.

        d.   Seasonal Affective Disorder.

G.   Implications for intervention specialists.

1.   Intervention specialists need to have knowledge about the various disorders that may affect a youth firesetter for the following reasons:

        a.   Provide insight on how to best communicate with the firesetter and his or her family.

        b.   Consider how the disorder may impact the risk of recidivism (future firesetting).

2.   Program personnel must be able to relate the characteristics of the child and his or her disorder into the screening and intervention process.

3.   Program personnel do not have to be experts on cognitive, behavioral and LDs.

However, having a basic understanding of these disabilities empowers the intervention specialist with knowledge to better communicate with those who request and are delivering program services.

4.   If a potential participant in the firesetting intervention program has a disability or disorder, program personnel should consult the mental health representative for information concerning the implications for the screening and subsequent intervention process.

This is why having representation from the mental health community on the youth firesetting program multidisciplinary team is essential.

5.   Of particular importance to the intervention specialist is the fact that many of these disorders are hereditary. This means that not only will program personnel be dealing with a child that has a particular disorder, but he or she will be working with a family where parents/caregivers or siblings have the same or similar disorder.

V.   WHAT IS THE SCREENING PROCESS?

A.   Once basic intake information about the youth firesetter, his or her family, and the fire incident(s) has been obtained, the next step is to perform a structured screening process.

1.   A structured screening process that uses a valid screening instrument is a statistically reliable way to identify, record and evaluate factors contributing to a child/youth's firesetting behaviors.

2.   The ultimate goal of the screening process is to determine why firesetting is occurring, what satisfaction the juvenile receives from starting fires, and the risk level for future firesetting events.

3.   The screening process entails interviewing both the firesetter and his or her parents/caregiver(s).

4.   The process allows for objective exploration of the factors that may have influenced the firesetting behaviors.

5.   It also provides information about attitudes, behaviors, demographics and experiences of the youth/family that may present obstacles to the introduction of appropriate interventions.

6.   Use of this process helps the interdisciplinary team understand why firesetting has occurred and what types of intervention to offer.

7.   The screening process should occur in a timely manner according to the program protocol directive. Youth firesetting program personnel contact the parents/caregiver(s) to arrange for a screening interview of the firesetter and his or her family.

8.   The screening process **should not** be used as a determining factor for legal action.

B.   The screening tool is a form that directs its user to ask a series of questions and record specific information about the youth firesetter, his or her family, and the incident(s) that occurred.

1.   Using an assessment tool, an intervention specialist's level of experience, and his or her education will help lead to a decision on possible intervention options.

2.   Responses to the questions are assigned a numerical value and scored as indicated by the form.

3.   Once scored, most screening tools assign the level of potential risk for repeat firesetting into one of three categories: some, definite and extreme.

VI.   THE SCREENING FORM

A.   There are a variety of forms (screening tools) available that can provide the structure needed for an effective screening.

B.   The decision of which form to use rests entirely with the youth firesetting intervention program and will depend on the program's service goals, available resources, and desired outcomes.

C.   In order to provide a structured screening process, it is important that program personnel use approved screening forms — one for the child and one for the family.

D.   An approved screening form is one that has been adopted and approved by the interdisciplinary team (youth firesetting task force) and the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ).

E.   It is important that screening forms are considered to be reliable. While "less may look better," that is not always the case.

F.   Information included on the screening forms should include:

1.   Information about the firesetting incident and history of previously set fires.

2.   Information about the youth to include medical/mental health history, interests, developmental level, etc.

3.   Social information, including behavior of the youth at home, school, with friends, etc.

4.   Information about the family to include activities, disciplinary practices, ability to relate with the youth, interest in the youth's welfare, concern for the youth, and supervision of the youth.

5.   Facts about the home environment to include youth access to ignition materials, presence of life safety equipment, and knowledge/practice of fire safety.

6.   Recent changes in the youth's immediate situation, such as a recent trauma, divorce in the family, death of family members or friend, crisis at school, etc.

7.   The screening process may also identify the perceived rewards for the firesetting incident(s), such as peer attention, approval, money or gratification.

VII.   ARRANGING THE SCREENING

A.   Once the intake information has been received (and reviewed) by youth firesetting program personnel, they should arrange for the screening meeting.

B.   This meeting should be arranged to occur at a time and place that is convenient for the family and/or caregivers of the youth. Program personnel must recognize that this may have to be during evening or weekend hours depending upon the schedule of the family and the youth.

C.   The youth and his or her parents/caregivers should be informed about the amount of time that the screening will encompass. Many may think that it will be a short visit when in fact it may take one to two hours depending on the structure of the screening process.

D.   It is important that the screening involve the parents or caregivers of the firesetter, as well as the firesetter. Often parents/caregivers may be apprehensive about the screening process and involvement in the intervention program altogether. Because a firesetting situation is a family issue, parents/caregivers must be involved in the entire process.

E.   The intervention specialist can help relieve this apprehension by exhibiting an empathetic demeanor and assuring that a secure and professional process will be followed.

F.   Location of the screening.

1.   The decision of where to conduct the screening should be in accordance with preapproved directives of the youth firesetting program.

2.   Some agency's operating guidelines require interviews to be conducted at the office of the program personnel or at the fire station.

3.   Some programs allow for the screening to take place in the home of the firesetter.

        If the agency allows for home visits, program personnel may find this to be very beneficial by observing the youth and/or his or her family in their own environment. It will also help the individuals being interviewed feel more comfortable and potentially provide more information.

4.   If a home visit is chosen, program personnel must consider their own personal safety. Program personnel should go in pairs. It may also be beneficial to have a male and female team.

5.   If possible, program personnel should consult their local law enforcement agencies about the safety of the specific neighborhood and call history to the firesetter's home and who may reside there. This action should be taken before agreeing to perform a home visit.

6.   Some programs allow fire department personnel to conduct the screenings. Others may call for a fire department representative and a representative from the interdisciplinary team (mental health practitioner, law enforcement representative, etc.).

G.   If possible, place a reminder call to the family the day before the interview.

H.   If the family fails to show up for the interview (or is not home) at the scheduled time, this should be documented and follow-up actions should be taken to find out why.

I.   If the screening is conducted in the home, and the program personnel feel that it is appropriate, a home fire safety inspection may be conducted with the permission of the parents/caregivers. This is to assure a safe environment. Examples of items to review during a home fire safety inspection include:

1.   Installation and proper operation of smoke alarms in each room of the home (except the bathroom and kitchen).

2.   Clear exit pathways.

3. Identification, reduction and elimination of obvious fire hazards including properly securing matches and lighters.

VIII. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS IN THE SCREENING SETTING

A. Previous information in this unit discussed arranging the location for the screening.

B. Some program protocols may allow home visits, while others might require the screening to take place in an office setting or at a fire station.

C. Regardless of the setting, the screening environment must include a balance between comfort and support for the firesetter and his or her family.

D. The goal of the process is to maximize the exchange of information between the interviewer and the youth/family.

E. In addition, there must be a balance between safety and the mandates established by the AHJ and/or program procedures.

F. The following section provides suggestions for facilitating an environment conducive to information sharing.

1. Formal setting (such as a fire station or office).

a. Prepare the setting. Be sure that the room ensures privacy.

b. Make sure there are enough chairs for everyone involved.

c. Try to arrange a comfortable setting.

d. Remove distractions. Turn off all electronic equipment, scanners, radios, pagers, etc.

e. Be aware of physical barriers in the room. A semicircular pattern creates an open seating arrangement and facilitates communication.

f. Since the parents/caregivers screening and the firesetter interviews should take place separately, it is beneficial to have an area where the child or youth can wait on the parents/caregivers. In the case of a small child, there will be the need for someone to stay with the child.

2. Informal setting (such as a family's home).

a.   Ask parents/caregivers if all electronic devices, such as televisions, computer, games, etc., can be turned off for the duration of the screening.

b.   Ask if there is an area where you can talk uninterrupted, such as a dining room, kitchen or office.

c.   If the family has other children, the screeners may wish to ask parents/caregivers in advance of the meeting to plan for some sort of childcare arrangement.

d.   While the screener has less control over the environment in the home, it is extremely beneficial to observe the family in their environment.

IX.   CONDUCTING THE SCREENING PROCESS

A.   Prepare for the process.

1.   Each individual develops his or her own personal style in the screening process.

2.   Techniques that are effective in screening some families may not be effective with others.

3.   The screening process is nonaccusatory. It is designed to gather information. It is not an interrogation to ascertain guilt or innocence.

4.   Prior to conducting the screening process, the intervention specialist must be fully familiar with the information obtained as part of the intake process. This includes the available information about the firesetter and his or her family and the details of the firesetting incident(s). If there are fire/police reports on the incident (and they are made available), review these as well.

5.   The intervention specialist must be very familiar with the screening tool to be used and be practiced in its application.

6.   He or she must create a safe environment that encourages the family and firesetter to participate and openly share information.

7.   The intervention specialist must ensure and convey to the family that:

a.   He or she is there acting on behalf of the family.

        b.   There is a true desire to uncover the root cause of the firesetting behavior.

        c.   The purpose is to see that the family receives the intervention needed to curb the firesetting behavior.

B.   Describe the process to parents/caregivers.

    1.   While this may have already been a part of the initial contact with the family, the intervention specialist should provide an explanation of the intervention program to the family.

    2.   At minimum, the following information should be included:

        a.   Explanation of why the YFPI program exists.

        b.   Summary of the YFPI program history.

        c.   Explanation of how the screening process works.

        d.   Identification of the levels of intervention that are offered through the program.

        e.   Identification of how the intervention strategies are determined and by whom.

        f.   Summary of where intervention services are provided and by whom.

        g.   Identification of the level of participation required from the youth.

        h.   Clarification of what levels of support are expected from parents/caregivers.

        i.   Explain the multidisciplinary approach of the program and the involvement of other community agencies in the intervention process.

C.   Perform the screening.

The following is a recommended sequence of events for conducting the screening process:

    1.   Conduct the screening with the parents/caregivers.

a.   This strategy permits the intervention specialist to obtain additional background information on both the firesetter and the firesetting situation.

b.   Assure parents/caregivers that all information documented during the intervention process is confidential and protected from viewing by unauthorized parties.

c.   Confirm signatures on all pertinent documents such as release forms, liability waivers, and confidentiality assurances.

d.   Follow the sequence of questions listed on the screening form.

e.   After completing the screening form, the intervention specialist should bring closure to the interview by asking parents/caregivers if they have questions or would like to offer any further information.

2.   Conduct the screening with the firesetter.

a.   If possible, the firesetter should be interviewed alone and not in the company of parents/caregivers.

   -       This strategy permits validation of the fire-related events outlined by parents/caregivers.

   -       It also creates an opportunity for the youth to disclose information that he or she may not be willing to share in the company of parents/caregivers.

b.   When interviewing juveniles age eight and under, the intervention specialist may consider use of ancillary tools such as drawings, games, pictures or puppets to help the child recall/explain pertinent events related to the firesetting situation.

   Note: In cases involving young children, it may not be practical to interview the child without his or her parents/caregivers.

c.   While interviewing the firesetter, the intervention specialist may have parents/caregivers complete a questionnaire about the program or view a video on firesetting intervention.

d.   If possible, preteens and adolescents should be interviewed before parents/caregivers. This strategy builds rapport by validating their level of maturity and providing them the opportunity to offer a truthful account of the situation prior to parents/caregivers being interviewed.

e.   When interviewing the parents/caregivers, it might be helpful to have a project for the firesetter to do.

- For younger children, this may entail reading a book, coloring a picture, watching a video, etc.

- In the case of older firesetters, consider asking them to write down their version of what happened or fill out an accompanying questionnaire.

f.   If, at any time during the screening process, the intervention specialist has reason to believe that the child is a victim of child abuse or neglect, or intends to harm him or herself or others, the screening process should be stopped and the proper authorities notified.

D.   **IRONIC** — A method of screening.

1.   The following information was adopted from public domain information from Sergeant Paul Zipper, Ph.D., of the Massachusetts State Police. In 2004, Dr. Zipper was part of the team that developed and delivered a curriculum titled "The Investigation of Youth Set Fires" for the International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI).

2.   He has also co-authored an article with David K. Wilcox, Ed.D. titled "Juvenile Arson: The Importance of Early Intervention" for the FBI in their Law Enforcement Bulletin, which was published in April of 2005. Dr. Zipper and Dr. Wilcox stressed the importance of a structured interview process when working with youth firesetters.

3.   The IRONIC method has been developed as an easy to remember method that identifies the procedures involved in conducting a screening and determining the facts of the event.

4.   IRONIC stands for: Introduction, Rapport, Opening Statement, Narrative, Inquiry and Conclusion.

a.   **Introduction** — The person or people conducting the screening introduce themselves before the process begins. They can easily do this by showing credentials (photo identification, a fire or police department badge, or a business card).

b.   **Rapport** — This requires the interviewer to find some common ground that the youth enjoys discussing. Examples include sports, pets, travel, family or hobbies. This critical phase begins immediately on contact with the interviewee and continues throughout the interview.

c.   **Opening Statement** — This step informs the youth the reason for the screening. For example, "I am here today because of the fire next door to your house."

d.   **Narrative** — This step allows the youth the opportunity to provide a full account of what happened. Allowing the youth to describe the incident provides a wealth of information to the intervention specialist. He or she should closely analyze the youth's verbatim words. If possible, the narrative should be recorded and transcribed. This narrative of the event should not be contaminated with leading questions. Follow-up questions may be asked to determine the following:

-   Who.

-   What.

-   When.

-   Where.

-   Why.

-   How.

e.   **Inquiry** — This step serves to document the answers to specific questions asked of the interviewee. Using an approved screening form, the intervention specialist should ask the questions listed on the form and document the answers.

    f. **Conclusion** — This is the wrap-up of the screening. The intervention specialist should thank the youth and parents/caregiver(s) for their time and ask if they will be available for a second screening, if necessary. They also should provide the family with information on how to maintain contact with the program.

 E. Steps to building rapport with people.

How to Build Rapport with a Youth and their Family

Be on time.	1. A structured interview requires that a specific amount of time be set aside by all parties involved. 2. Be respectful of the people you will be interviewing. Start and end the interview at the prearranged time.
Dress appropriately.	1. Each fire intervention program must develop its own policy regarding the attire of interviewers. 2. While some fire departments mandate the wearing of uniforms with a badge at all times, others may allow the interviewer to wear business casual attire. 3. Wearing a fire department uniform suggests that the interviewer is official and is recognized as a person of authority. However, in some cultures, those wearing a uniform or badge may represent that something negative is going to happen (i.e., a person is going to be arrested). 4. Some young children may be afraid of an adult in a uniform, and therefore it is important to get down to their level and wear clothing that is not intimidating. 5. Whatever attire is worn, it should be appropriate, respectful and representative of a professional.
Be prepared. Do your homework.	Be familiar with the details of the incident(s) **prior** to arriving at the screening. This demonstrates professionalism and shows empathy toward the family.
Avoid prejudices. Keep opinions to yourself.	
If knocking on a door, do so respectfully. You are representing a youth firesetting prevention and intervention team, **not** conducting a raid.	
Let the family seat you … it's their house.	
Break the ice with small talk. Start the conversation with questions not pertaining to the incident. This will help make the situation more comfortable for everyone involved.	
Be aware of your surroundings. In the home, look for lighters, matches, smoke alarms, clutter, etc.	
Be comfortable with the process. Gain experience by working with other seasoned people who conduct frequent interviews.	
Don't be surprised by anything!	

X.   DETERMINING LEVEL OF RISK

A.   The purpose of the screening process is to determine the potential level of risk for repeat firesetting incidents.

B.   By determining the level of risk, an appropriate intervention strategy can be developed.

C.   There are three recognized levels of risk that ascend in the following order: some, definite, and extreme.

D.   The levels have been identified and used in many professional firesetter publications, including the Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Handbook (U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), 2002) and the National Juvenile Firesetter/Arson Control and Prevention Program (USFA, 1994).

E.   The risk levels represent the likelihood that youth will become involved in future fire experimentation and/or intentional firesetting.

F.   Some risk.

1.   Most common and lowest of risk levels.

2.   Youth has engaged in at least one unsupervised fire motivated by curiosity. Fires resulting from these incidents are often unintentional and are generally not a significant fire event. Young children will often attempt to put these fires out or go for help. Some may hide or run away.

3.   Curiosity and experimentation with lighters and matches is the most common motive of children involved in unsupervised firesetting.

4.   If these firesetters are identified and evaluated at an early age, and if they receive proper supervision and educational intervention, recidivism is unlikely.

5.   However, some young children may exhibit more serious psychological problems or be exposed to stressful circumstances that increase their likelihood of inappropriately using fire repeatedly. These children may therefore require additional clinical assessment and intervention.

G.   Definite risk.

1.   Some youth go beyond experimentation and set fires for other motives.

2.   Consider the influence of today's electronic age wherein youth are exposed to vast amounts of the negative aspects of fire.

3.   Those aspects as seen on TV, in commercials, in the movies, and on the Internet can portray detrimental meanings that include power, control, revenge and rage, as well as inappropriate problem-solving.

4.   Inappropriate fire use or acts of burning can provide a youth with feelings of satisfaction as well as a sense of power and control over their lives and others.

5.   The misuse of fire may also be a form of communication where verbal skills are lacking. Firesetting could be an avenue to gain attention, express anger, and possibly even as a weapon for revenge.

6.   When firesetters progress to repeated and intentional firesetting activity, underlying psychological or social problems and issues may be factors influencing it.

7.   These types of fires are deliberate and may include the gathering of fuels and the possible selection of a target to be affected by the fire. The fires may be set for different reasons including:

    a.   Anger.

    b.   Revenge.

    c.   Attention getting.

    d.   Malicious mischief.

    e.   Concealment of a crime.

    f.   Problem-solving.

    g.   The intent to harm people or destroy property.

    h.   To make something or someone go away when they have no other solution.

8.   Youth engaged in this type of firesetting rarely attempt to put the fire out and will often retreat from the fire but may remain close enough to watch its effect.

9.   This type of emotionally motivated firesetting is referred to as a crisis, troubled, cry-for-help typology.

10.   Fire safety and primary prevention education may help the emotionally motivated firesetter.

11. However, he or she should also be referred to the appropriate mental health service for thorough screening and intervention.

12. With timely and broad-based support, there is a reasonably good chance that future recidivism can be prevented.

H. Extreme risk.

1. Firesetters in this category may reflect the same aspects as listed in the definite risk level.

2. Their behaviors usually involve more severe forms of firesetting influenced by psychological, social and environmental factors.

3. These youth generally reflect a small subgroup of firesetters, but they are often considered at-risk for engaging in future firesetting incidents.

4. Delinquent juveniles can exhibit certain patterns of aggressive, deviant and criminal behaviors that occur with greater frequency as the juvenile matures.

5. The longer the delinquent behavior continues, the harder it is to reverse; therefore, early identification and intervention from an interdisciplinary team of professionals is critical.

6. Fire safety education may positively impact but not always reverse this type of anti-social behavior.

7. Firesetters of extreme risk are often beyond the scope of immediate educational intervention services from a youth firesetting intervention program.

8. Youth included in the extreme-risk category demand a broad-based approach to solving their firesetting pathology. This includes a combination of justice system, educational, clinical and social service intervention.

9. Extreme-risk firesetters may pose a significant danger to themselves or others. The youth firesetting interdisciplinary team should be consulted immediately if a risk level of extreme is noted.

XI. DETERMINING INTERVENTIONS

A. Once the screening has been conducted and the level of risk determined, the proper intervention(s) can be recommended for the firesetter and his or her family.

B.   The involvement of the interdisciplinary team becomes crucial in final
        determination of the risk level and appropriate interventions.

C.   There are several categories for interventions:

        1.   Educational intervention.

        2.   Mental health and/or social service referral.

        3.   Youth justice system referral.

D.   Educational intervention.

        1.   Nearly all firesetters and families can benefit from fire safety and
                prevention education.

        2.   Educational intervention is particularly successful with the firesetters in
                the some-risk category.

        3.   If a simple (some risk) firesetting case is obvious, the intervention
                specialist may wish to score the assessment instruments on-site and
                schedule (or perform) fire safety education intervention immediately
                following the interview.

        4.   If educational intervention is the sole medium being recommended, the
                intervention specialist may choose to discuss options with the entire
                family as a group.

        5.   Educational interventions must include all members of the household.

        6.   However, if other intervention services are being recommended, the
                education component may need to wait for a more appropriate time.

        7.   YFPI program personnel should never assume that parents/caregivers (and
                youth) know the basics of fire safety and fire survival.

        8.   YFPI program personnel need to assess what the parents/caregivers and
                the youth know about fire prior to conducting educational intervention
                services.

        9.   Unit 4 is dedicated to education as a preventive intervention.

E.   Mental health and/or social service referral.

        1.   When firesetting goes beyond curiosity or experimentation (or if there is
                repeat firesetting), it might be necessary to refer the family for mental
                health support.

2. The interdisciplinary team (youth firesetting task force) may need to be consulted before this referral is made to ensure that it is handled according to program protocol.

3. In complex situations, it may be wise to schedule a second meeting to discuss intervention options with parents/caregivers **after** scoring the assessment instrument privately and consulting with the interdisciplinary team.

4. A firesetter and his or her family may (or may not) be receiving service from a support agency.

5. YFPI program personnel need to be aware of the support services available in their community and any fees or costs associated with these services.

6. Social service agencies can often provide families with training in parenting/caregiving skills, anger management, or dealing with a particular loss or change in lifestyle. Clinical staff may be able to help with referrals for these services.

7. Child Protective Services (Youth and Family Services) or whatever the unit is called that handles child abuse/neglect situations should be a partner that collaborates with youth firesetting cases.

8. Parents and careproviders will often respond rapidly to the offer of intervention services when an enforcement-related division of the social system becomes involved.

9. While supportive services are always suggested for definite and extreme-risk firesetting situations, they can also be helpful for families of some-risk firesetters as well.

F. Youth justice system referral.

1. Invoking legal sanctions can help ensure that firesetters and their families participate in the YFPI program.

2. How this is accomplished will depend upon the laws and ordinances of the jurisdiction.

3. The decision to recommend legal sanctions may not be in the control of the YFPI program. The decision to take this action may depend upon:

    a. Violations of local or state laws.

    b. Deaths, injuries or property loss associated with the firesetting.

        c.   Local operating procedures of the fire department.

        d.   Age of accountability.

        e.   Firesetting history of the youth.

4.   Initiating a legal action for firesetting is a very serious matter. This decision is best made by an interdisciplinary team who can, in cooperation with the justice system, develop a protocol for action.

5.   Once legal action is initiated, the defendant's civil rights must be recognized and honored. This means that the families must be informed of the decision, and juvenile Miranda rights must be read.

6.   Again, it is important for each YFPI program to consult with the local district attorney regarding the protection of a juvenile's legal rights.

7.   There are significant benefits of having a youth petitioned to the juvenile court for offenses relating to firesetting.

        a.   The action helps ensure that parents/caregivers will participate and follow through with recommended program services.

        b.   Parents/Caregivers of children with serious firesetting behavior problems are sometimes reluctant to pursue services when offered through a normal voluntary course of programming.

XII.   MANDATED REPORTING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

A.   Reporting child abuse.

1.   All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories have statutes specifying procedures that a mandated reporter must follow when making a report of child abuse or neglect.

2.   Mandated reporters are individuals who are required by law to report cases of suspected child abuse or neglect. Members of a YFPI program would be classified as mandated reporters.

3.   Most states require mandated reporters to make a report immediately upon gaining knowledge or suspicion of abusive or neglectful situations.

Signs of Child Abuse

Physical Abuse:	Unexplained burns, cuts, bruises, welts Bite marks Anti-social behavior Problems in school Fear of adults
Emotional Abuse:	Apathy Hostility or stress Lack of concentration Eating disorders
Sexual Abuse:	Inappropriate interest or knowledge of sexual acts Nightmares and bed-wetting Drastic changes in appetite Overcompliance or excessive aggression Fear of a particular person or family member
Neglect:	Unsuitable clothing for weather Dirty or unbathed Extreme hunger Parent/Caregiver lack of supervision
Source of Information (Childhelp USA, Scottsdale, Arizona) www.childhelpusa.org	

B. Confidentiality of information.

    1. Program personnel need to assure parents/caregivers that information obtained through the screening process will be kept confidential.

    2. Referrals may be made, such as to mental health and/or counseling agencies, and information should be released appropriate to those professions only if the referral is made and/or it is relevant to their care and treatment of the child and/or family.

    3. If information is obtained from the youth that indicates he or she is being harmed, or intends to harm him or herself and/or the family, this information must be released to the proper authorities.

    4. Parents/Caregivers and/or guardians should be informed that they will be required to sign a release of liability before the youth can be interviewed by program personnel. This is for the protection of the program personnel and the agencies involved in the firesetter program.

C. Release of liability.

    1. Liability refers to the potential for firesetter intervention programs to be at risk for legal action because of the behavior of the firesetter and his or her family.

2.   It is important that programs protect themselves from being held liable for the actions of firesetters.

3.   Liability waivers that release the intervention program from being responsible for the actions of juveniles should be developed and implemented. Parents/Caregivers of children or youth participating in the program must sign this form prior to the screening process.

4.   This release of liability should be written with advice from the AHJ's legal counsel and the local district attorney.

D.   Release of information.

1.   When working with children and/or youth and their families, confidentiality of information is an important aspect to protect.

2.   When a juvenile is referred to an intervention program, it is essential to obtain a signed "Release of Information" form from the parents/caregivers.

3.   The "Release of Information" form provides the program officials the right to release information received to those persons and/or agencies necessary for intervention.

4.   Without an official release of information, no information may exchange hands, thereby preventing any intervention from taking place and thus wasting the time and energy of the program.

5.   Jurisdictions have specific procedures for the proper release of information. The legal counsel for the AHJ and the local district attorney should be consulted.

6.   Examples of Release of Information forms can be found in the appendix of this unit.

XIII.   FOLLOW-UP

A.   It is important that follow-up contact be made with each family that participates in a youth firesetting intervention program.

B.   Unfortunately, follow-up is a program component that is often overlooked.

C.   Parents/Caregivers may not always report a repeat incidence of firesetting for the following reasons:

1.   Embarrassment.

2. Fear of legal sanction.

3. Uncertainty of actions to take.

D. For all youth firesetting cases, a primary follow-up is recommended four to six weeks after completion of the program. A secondary follow-up can take place between six to 12 months after close-out of the file.

E. Follow-up can be conducted in a number of different ways to include:

1. Telephone calls, which are the most cost-effective and least time-consuming.

2. Written contacts, including postcards, letters, surveys and electronic communication.

3. Home visits require the most resources but allow for a direct reassessment of the firesetting situation problem.

F. Challenges with follow-up include the transient nature of today's society. More frequent contact may be necessary just to ensure the location of the family.

G. While follow-up takes time and effort, it helps reinforce program information and demonstrates that the youth firesetting team is truly interested in the well-being of the youth and his or her family.

H. Follow-up is an essential component of program evaluation that must be performed to prove the youth firesetting program is working.

XIV. SUMMARY

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UNIT 4:
YOUTH FIRESETTING EDUCTIONAL INTERVENTION

TERMINAL OBJECTIVE

The students will be able to:

4.1   Apply stages of development to an educational intervention for a Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention (YFPI) program.

ENABLING OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to:

4.1   Differentiate the levels of prevention

4.2   Illustrate how education can be used as an effective intervention strategy.

4.3   Categorize the stages of cognitive development and how they apply to the delivery of an educational intervention.

4.4   Describe how to deliver age-appropriate educational interventions.

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I.   INTRODUCTION

A.   As was discussed in earlier units, the purpose of the screening process is to determine a firesetter's level of risk for repeat firesetting behavior and consider appropriate interventions.

   1.   Regardless of the typology of firesetting being addressed, education is an appropriate prevention intervention to employ.

   2.   While education may not be the first level of intervention, such as when mental health assistance or law enforcement involvement may be indicated or required early on, it definitely serves a vital purpose in the process of preventing recidivism.

   3.   It is up to each jurisdiction to determine the circumstances and setting for the delivery of the educational intervention.

   4.   Most Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention (YFPI) programs rely on the fire service to provide educational intervention to firesetters and their families.

B.   Intervention is defined as the act of intervening, interfering or interceding with the intent of modifying the outcome.

   In medicine, an intervention is usually undertaken to help treat or cure a condition. For example, early intervention may help children with autism to speak.

C.   A youth firesetting educational intervention is a strategy used to provide educational information to youth firesetters and their families. The content of an intervention should include education on:

   1.   Fire science.

   2.   Fire safety.

   3.   Decision-making skills.

   4.   Consequences of inappropriate decisions.

   5.   Cause and effect relationship of fire.

   6.   Legal ramifications for firesetting.

D.   The goal of the youth firesetter intervention is to empower youth (and their families) to make better decisions regarding fire and prevent future firesetting through dissemination of accurate educational information.

II.   TYPES AND LEVELS OF PREVENTION

A.   Levels of prevention.

There are three levels of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary.

1.   **Primary prevention** is all of the activities designed to prevent an event from happening.

a.   Primary prevention is designed to teach individuals what to do so that an event that could cause property damage, injury or death does not happen at all.

b.   Examples of primary prevention are community-based education, school prevention programs, injury-prevention programs, etc.

2.   **Secondary prevention** seeks to change or modify events and/or behaviors that reduce the severity of the event.

a.   Examples would include the activation of a smoke alarm, the use of a home escape plan, the use of a fire extinguisher to extinguish a fire, or the use of child restraint seats in vehicles.

b.   Secondary prevention also targets groups that have demonstrated behaviors that place them at risk from harm. Youth firesetting certainly ranks in this category.

3.   **Tertiary prevention** seeks to reduce a negative impact of an event over the long term.

Its goal is to prevent complications and/or work with case management/ rehabilitation regarding an event. The following are some examples:

a.   Long-term community-based services after a disaster.

b.   Prompt medical care at a burn facility for those individuals that have been burned.

c.   Youth firesetters detained at a long-term treatment center.

4.   Relating levels of prevention to youth firesetting:

a.   Many times, youth firesetting intervention is a culmination of all three levels.

b.   When school-based and/or community-based prevention programs are conducted on a regular basis, this serves as a primary prevention measure to prevent a firesetting incident before it occurs.

c.   When a firesetter has been identified because of a firesetting incident, secondary interventions such as attending a YFPI program are applied.

d.   If a pathology of firesetting develops, admittance to a tertiary treatment center may be required.

B.   Types of prevention interventions: the five E's.

1.   The five E's of prevention are: Education, Engineering, Enforcement, Economic incentives and Emergency response.

2.   It takes all five working in tandem to effectively prevent deaths, injuries and property loss as a result of fire.

3.   It also takes all five to effectively work with a youth firesetter and his or her family.

4.   Education.

     a.   The goal of education is to provide awareness, change behavior and eliminate risky behavior.

     b.   Every youth firesetting intervention program must have an educational component.

5.   Engineering.

     a.   Engineering efforts include modification of an environment to enhance safety.

     b.   Examples: fire-resistive building designs, sprinklers, etc.

     c.   Firesetting intervention programs must ensure that the homes of firesetters are equipped with working smoke alarms and child-resistant lighters are used as needed.

6.   Enforcement.

     a.   Enforce or obtain compliance with fire laws and codes.

        b.   For firesetting situations, this means involvement of the legal system or action from a social services child protective division.

7.   Economic incentives.

        a.   Enhancing safety measures through monetary incentives.

        b.   One example would be providing economic incentives to builders who install sprinkler systems.

        c.   Another type of economic incentive may be in the form of a negative incentive, such as the payment of fines, fees and/or restitution.

8.   Emergency response.

        a.   This refers to an adequately staffed, equipped and trained cadre of responders to mitigate emergency incidents when they occur.

        b.   Emergency response is pertinent to the youth firesetting situations. Available resources respond to an incident and refer the youth and his or her family for intervention.

III.   EDUCATION AS AN INTERVENTION STRATEGY

A.   The goal of fire safety education (a youth firesetting educational intervention) is to empower the child, adolescent or teen to make the right decisions regarding abstinence from firesetting and other types of fire-related experimentation.

    1.   Educating the child and parents/caregivers is essential for the success of a youth firesetting intervention program.

    2.   Youth firesetting intervention specialists must not assume that all children, adolescents and parents/caregivers know the basics about fire safety and fire science.

        a.   Children may or may not have had a fire safety or fire science class in school.

        b.   The parents or caregivers may or may not have had a fire safety or fire science class at some point in their lives.

        c.   Children, adolescents and adults may be uneducated or misinformed about proper fire safety practices.

       3.   All three populations can be educated to make good decisions through structured, age-appropriate processes. Similarly, all groups need to feel empowered to make the right decisions.

       4.   Children have to rely on the experience and education of adults to understand the danger of fire.

       5.   If parents or caregivers do not have this knowledge or experience, the likelihood of passing on information regarding fire safety and fire science is compromised.

B.   When a youth firesetter and his or her family have been referred to a youth firesetting program, the first step is to evaluate the fire safety knowledge of all participants.

       1.   The goal is to give the parents/caregivers and child an equal (age-appropriate) understanding of applicable information.

       2.   An age-appropriate fire safety pretest can provide the intervention specialist with knowledge of what the child and parents/caregivers already know about fire safety and fire science.

       3.   Conducting a pretest is the most reliable way to obtain a baseline understanding of a participant's existing knowledge level.

C.   Parents/Caregivers are important students.

       1.   Parents/Caregivers may not consider fire to be a dangerous tool.

       2.   Parents/Caregivers may minimize the danger associated with firesetting because they lack insight into what their children can (or often cannot) understand.

       3.   It should be suggested that parents/caregivers set the same kind of rules for fire that they have for guns, sharp knives, chain saws, etc.

       4.   Parents/Caregivers also may suffer the same experience deficits and neurological compromises as their children.

       5.   Parents/Caregivers may have some of the same difficulties recognizing true hazards and making appropriate choices.

D.   Fire safety messages need to be:

       1.   Correct, current and consistent regardless of the target population.

2. Many of our messages offer an increase in awareness. But increased awareness doesn't necessarily educate a person or change their behavior.

"Be Safe with Fire" on a pencil reminds us that fire safety is important; however, the message is not specific.

3. Messages should provide information about the behavior you want the person to perform, not about what you don't want them to do. Messages should be positive.

Example: "Don't play with matches and lighters" doesn't tell a child what to do if he or she encounters matches and lighters. It only mystifies these tools and makes the child wonder why he or she shouldn't handle them.

4. Offer direction as to the desired behavior expected.

Example: "Go tell a grown-up if you find matches and lighters."

5. Scare tactics don't work, especially for the children we work with in the firesetting venue.

Youth have been so desensitized by TV and video games that it just doesn't work!

E. Children are conditioned to seek information about the world around them.

1. If fire is available, children may often try to explore its nature.

2. All children need a fact-based, age-appropriate understanding of fire, to include:

a. Fire's purpose.

b. Appropriate uses of fire.

c. Rules and potential dangers.

3. Prior to delivering an educational strategy, it is important to remember that an individual's stage of development has a lot to do with what he or she is able to understand.

IV. COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT: AGES PRESCHOOL THROUGH ADOLESCENCE

A. Stages of development tell us "what is possible" at any given age or stage of development.

B.   This information should be applied to the delivery of educational interventions. Knowledge of cognitive development will help determine the appropriateness of materials and methods to be used and the content to be presented.

C.   Preschool children.

1.   Younger children (ages 4 to 6) can only focus on one feature of an object at a time.

a.   A single match is small.

b.   A house fire is large.

c.   How one becomes the other is a mystery.

d.   Even if we show them how it happens, they really don't understand.

2.   Preschool children have only a limited understanding of cause and effect.

a.   Those children who do have some notion of cause/effect are easily confused by too much or distracting information, i.e., if you do "this," then "that" will happen.

b.   Until a child can understand cause and effect, he or she can't recognize unsafe conditions or figure out how to correct or avoid them.

3.   Many parents/caregivers are unaware of or overestimate their child's level of understanding.

a.   Parents/Caregivers may confuse their children's language ability with the child's actual understanding of cause and effect.

b.   Many 3- and 4-year-olds have remarkable language skills.

c.   Since parents/caregivers overestimate their children's ability to understand, they focus on teaching safety principles long before the children can benefit from them, rather than simply eliminating the hazards and closely supervising the children.

d.   Young children do not understand the concept or the finality of death.

e.   Many parents/caregivers believe that just because a child can mimic their words about the concept of death, it means the child understands the reality.

D.   Elementary school children.

1.   Most elementary school children have a better (but limited) appreciation of the power of small flames.

2.   Elementary school children understand the transformations that fire can make, and they understand cause and effect.

a.   Although they have these abilities, sometimes they don't use them.

b.   Children at this age rely heavily on their own experience and can't anticipate events that they haven't experienced.

c.   If they haven't seen the progression of a fire out of control, they can't visualize it.

d.   Elementary school children are very good at following directions. If they are shown how to do something, most often they can do it and do it correctly time and again.

e.   What they are not good at is anticipating what might go wrong and how to respond if something does.

E.   Adolescents — a complex target population.

1.   Brain development in adolescents is becoming more understandable!

2.   Impulsiveness, questionable decision-making skills, attention problems, and the frustrating lack of initiative seem to be tied to brain development.

3.   Research is showing that the brain continues to develop (to include executive functions) well beyond age 25!

4.   During adolescence, the parts of the brain that helps adolescents exercise judgment are still under construction.

a.   This situation often leads to a world of fast cars, early driving, drug and alcohol accessibility, etc., and it puts a teen at high risk of preventable injury.

b.   According to Dahl (2004), adolescence in almost every measurable domain "is a developmental period of strength and resilience."

      c.   Adolescent death and disability is often related to difficulties in controlling behavior and emotion.

5.   Taking healthy risks can help adolescents develop more complex thinking and increase confidence.

      Examples of healthy risks are supervised sports, training, and use of tools and guided safety practices for those activities.

6.   Science helps us understand why teens are susceptible to impulsive risk-taking behavior.

      a.   It also gives us a clue that, although education about fire is critical for teens, it has to be complemented with other critical components.

      b.   Since teens have increased difficulty making mature decisions and understanding the consequences of their actions, education must be accompanied by:

         -    Rules.

         -    Structure.

         -    Supervision.

         -    Patience.

         -    Love.

      c.   When working with a youth firesetter and his or her family, our job isn't complete if we don't teach about risk as well as fire.

      d.   The intervention specialist must be ready to teach families how to structure opportunities for independence.

F.   Parents/Caregivers' ideas of risk-taking are influenced by their own experiences.

1.   For example, parents/caregivers who experimented with fire as youth may believe there's no danger because they never got hurt or caught.

2.   Also consider that the youth may be raised by someone other than his or her natural parents.

3.   Many youth are being raised by grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings or someone outside the family.

4.   This means that the caregiver may not understand adolescents or adolescent brain development.

5.   The intervention program must educate them regarding the importance of boundaries, rules, supervision and love.

V.   DELIVERING EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

A.   The majority of the cases identified by a youth firesetting intervention program will be classified as "some-risk."

     1.   Curiosity or experimentation is the prime motive for firesetting as defined in the "some-risk" category.

     2.   The recommended intervention strategy for these cases is education.

B.   "Definite and extreme-risk" firesetting situations also require educational intervention. However, sometimes the education will follow a referral for other types of intervention such as clinical support or youth justice system actions.

C.   Regardless of the assessed level of risk, education should be used as an intervention component. Its delivery will depend upon the specific situation and level of risk assessed.

D.   Educational interventions for the youth firesetter and his or her family should be based upon the following concepts:

     1.   Punishment alone does not teach a child about the dangers of fire.

     2.   All children, youth, adolescents and adults benefit from the receipt of fire safety education.

     3.   Remember to consider the four common factors that influence firesetting behavior:

         a.   Easy access to ignition materials.

         b.   Lack of adequate supervision.

         c.   Lack of practice of fire safety in the home.

         d.   Easy access to information on firesetting and explosives construction on the Internet.

     4.   Messages, methods and materials should be broad-based (without bias, educationally sound, etc.) and age-appropriate.

5. Education may be delivered in various ways (groups by age, one-on-one, etc.) depending upon the resources available in the jurisdiction providing the intervention.

6. Parents/Caregivers need to follow up with home intervention practice.

E. To deliver an education component, a youth firesetting intervention program must consider four important factors:

1. Educational goals.

2. Target group to be served.

3. Format of the learning environment.

4. Teaching materials employed.

F. Educational goals.

1. The goal of a youth firesetting educational intervention is to empower students of all ages to make the right choices so that recidivism is prevented.

2. Remember, setting fires oftentimes indicates that youth are seeking attention. By providing appropriate education about fire science, safety and the consequences of firesetting behavior, youth firesetters will be able to make better choices regarding their own behavior, especially with fire.

G. Target group to be served.

1. A youth firesetting intervention program must deliver the appropriate means of education intervention for each specified target group. This delivery is usually based upon age and/or developmental ability of the youth.

2. Considerations:

a. The developmental level or ability of the youth to understand and learn fire-safety education.

b. The age of the youth.

c. The ability of the parents/caregivers/guardians to understand the educational intervention.

d. The language spoken and understood by the youth firesetter and the parents/guardians/caregivers.

e.   The culture of the youth firesetter and parents/caregivers/ guardians.

H.   Format of the learning environment.

1.   There are a number of different formats for teaching the educational component of a youth firesetting intervention program.

2.   The delivery of a youth firesetting educational intervention component depends on the type and amount of resources available to your program.

3.   There are a wide range of options for educational intervention:

a.   A one-on-one intervention with the youth firesetter and his or her parents/caregivers.

b.   A one-on-one intervention with the youth firesetter separate from a one-on-one session with the parents/caregivers/guardians.

c.   Group sessions with multiple youth firesetters of similar ages and/or cognitive abilities and their parents/caregivers/guardians.

d.   Separate group sessions with multiple youth firesetters of similar ages and/or cognitive abilities and a separate group for parents/caregivers/guardians.

e.   If at all possible, it is recommended to separate the parents/ caregivers from the firesetters.

f.   Reasons for having separate educational sessions include:

- Parents/Caregivers may dominate the conversation.

- Parents/Caregivers may condemn other students when interacting with them in a group setting.

- Parents/Caregivers may overpower the class and intimidate the students.

- Youth should feel at ease to learn without the influence of the parents/caregivers.

g.   How the intervention specialist structures a class is based upon available resources.

   h. There is no set type of program that has been deemed better than others. The effectiveness of a program often depends on the interest, education and experience of the intervention specialist and how the YFPI program is structured/delivered.

   i. When choosing a group format, give consideration to class size limits. Class size is ultimately the decision of the educator and YFPI program protocol.

   j. One format does not work: "back of the fire truck" education.

 4. Class length.

  The length of time for a youth firesetting intervention also varies depending upon available resources:

   a. The intervention could be a course with multiple sessions of one- to three-hour programs, or it could be a one-time class lasting for two to six hours.

   b. Youth firesetting intervention specialists have used both formats with great success depending upon the resources they have available.

   c. Determining factors will be the resources available to the intervention specialist, as well as the availability of the parents or caregivers.

 5. Class schedule.

   a. There are several different ways that educational interventions are scheduled:

    - Monthly basis on a set day and time.

    - As needed when the intervention specialist receives a youth firesetting referral.

    - Some programs have multiple sessions scheduled on a specific day and time weekly, biweekly or monthly.

    - Some classes are scheduled on the availability of the youth firesetter and his or her family.

    - Individualized services for younger children and their families are often offered due to the age of the child.

b. The sooner that a youth firesetter and his or her family receive services, the greater the likelihood of successful intervention.

c. If an extended period of time exists between the firesetting incident and intervention (and there is no repeat firesetting), then parents, caregivers or guardians may feel that the child has learned his or her lesson and doesn't need to attend the program.

d. The more convenient it is for the youth firesetter and family to obtain services, the more likely they are to attend the program.

e. There are several ways of notifying and reminding parents/ caregivers of the youth firesetting intervention class:

- Telephone call the night before the class.

- A letter sent the week before the class to remind the parents/caregivers of the date, time and location.

- An email reminding the parents/caregivers of the scheduled class.

- Whatever medium is used, it is very important to remind the family of the scheduled class.

6. Classroom environment.

The classroom environment of a youth firesetting intervention must be conducive to learning. The following are suggested strategies for creating such conditions:

a. A classroom that is free of distractions such as people coming in and out to use equipment, phones, computers, etc.

b. The classroom should not be connected to an active fire station. If children walk through a fire station with on-duty firefighters and fire trucks, they may feel that they are being rewarded for their firesetting by going to a fire station.

c. The classroom should be a comfortable environment that will allow both the firesetter and his or her family to relax and learn.

d. A classroom that has multimedia is helpful for videos, PowerPoint presentations, etc.

I. Teaching materials employed.

1. There is nothing magical about educational interventions for firesetters. Primary fire prevention and fire safety education are appropriate topics for youth firesetter educational interventions.

2. When providing educational interventions for the firesetter, the method of presentation may vary, and there may need to be more emphasis on the consequences of firesetting and the importance of making good choices. There may also be the need to focus on the "tool of choice" for a particular firesetter (fireworks, lighters, candles).

3. Taking the time needed to appropriately screen the youth will help facilitate understanding of the youth, what he or she did, and why he or she did it.

4. Having this baseline knowledge will allow the educator to provide a more effective educational intervention.

5. The youth firesetting intervention curriculum must be appropriate for the age, cognitive abilities and type of firesetting incident(s).

6. The intervention may include special topics related to the firesetter(s) attending the education intervention.

7. The adult education component should mirror the education that the youth receives and encourage parents/caregivers to practice it with their child.

8. The intervention curriculum and related teaching materials should be divided into various age groups. This means that, while the topics may be the same, the methodologies for the education intervention will be different for the young child and the older youth.

9. When performing the educational intervention, it is important that firesetters of different ages receive a different method of instruction and related activities. Therefore, a 6-year-old firesetter should not be in the same class as a 14-year-old firesetter.

10. Educational interventions should include the following topics:

   a. Fire safety.

   b. Fire science.

   c. Consequences of firesetting.

   d. Need for personal responsibility.

    e.   Need for good decision-making.

11.   Educational intervention should use current age and developmentally appropriate instructional methodologies.

12.   Many programs include video and/or other interactive media.

13.   Every intervention curriculum should include extension activities/ homework or a family activity to reinforce program lessons.

14.   It is appropriate to include an "oath" or contract, depending on age, at the end of the educational session regarding the youth's use of fire in order to reinforce the interventions.

15.   Some curricula for older youth may require the firesetter to write an apology letter to the fire chief or to the individuals who were the victim(s) of the fire.

16.   Tips for working with young children.

    a.   Younger children often do not feel comfortable when separated from their parents/caregivers. It may be necessary to conduct the intervention with parents/caregivers present.

    b.   Since younger children may be fearful of loud noises or scary situations, avoid use of props that make loud noises. Avoid graphic presentations that may scare children.

    c.   Consider using puppets, toys, or other props that children are familiar with to tell a story about fire safety and explain good and bad fire.

    d.   Present simple fire safety messages and rules.

    e.   Ask the child to explain the fire and why it was bad.

    f.   Use age-appropriate media.

    g.   Keep presentations within the attention span of the young child, and make them interactive and varied.

    h.   With younger children, the parents/caregivers' education component is especially important.

17.   Tips for working with older children.

a.   Ask the firesetters why they are participating in the program. Discuss fire and its use.

b.   Use simple case studies or current real-life fire-related events. Introduce props such as burned objects, pictures or firefighting tools. Note: Pictures of fire victims are never appropriate.

c.   In an age-appropriate manner, discuss local laws and penalties. Ask them how they would feel if their home was destroyed (or how they felt if it was).

d.   Consider use of a case study that overviews a juvenile firesetting situation.

e.   Assign extension activities like writing letters to parents, firefighters and victims.

f.   Extension activities should be assigned in conjunction with parents/caregivers.

g.   A form of restitution may be included, such as home chores, neighborhood services or doing safety checks in homes of family and trusted friends.

18.   Tips for working with preteens and adolescents.

a.   Conduct an introduction activity to build rapport with the children.

b.   Use reality-based media, such as news clips, news articles and digital media.

c.   Use peer testimonials, case studies and problem-solving activities.

d.   Reality-based experiences, such as a tour of a burned home, media presentations, and/or mock court exercises may work well.

e.   Adolescents need to have a clear understanding of local fire laws and penalties.

f.   Writing assignments such as a summary of what has been learned as a result of the firesetting experience may work well with this age group.

g.   Restitution may be appropriate, whether monetary or community service. This may depend upon sanctions that have been enacted if the firesetter has had involvement with the legal system.

19.   General tips for presenting education programs.

    a.   Be aware of the group's age and cognitive development level.

    b.   Understand and honor attention span limits.

    c.   Limit the use of lecture-based instruction.

    d.   Intersperse the lecture with interactive and reality-based experiences.

VI.   SUMMARY