

Fire Safety for Preschoolers

Young Children at Risk

Children five (5) and under are more than twice as likely to die in fires as are older children and adults.

Working together, teachers and parents must teach young children the basic lessons of fire safety. It can save their lives.

Matches and Lighters: Adults Only

Each year, hundreds of children die in fires started by preschoolers using matches or lighters. Teach young children that matches and lighters are tools, for grown-ups only. Make the message clear: children should not touch matches or lighters. If they find them, they should tell a grown-up to put them away.

Parents can protect their children by using only child-resistant lighters and by keeping all fire tools up high, out of sight and out of reach (in a locked cabinet, if possible).

You Can't Hide From Fire

Some young children die in fires because they try to hide from smoke and flames under a bed or in a closet. When talking with children about what to do in a fire, emphasize that they cannot hide from fire, but they can escape.

Smoke Alarms

Teach children to recognize the sound of a smoke alarm and train them to react immediately when they hear it. Teach children the phrase "Get out and stay out". Never go back into a burning building.

Escape Plans

At school, hold frequent fire drills and encourage children and their parents to have a similar fire escape plan -- and practice it -- at home.

- Children (and adults) should know two ways out of every room and be familiar with every possible exit from the home -- including windows.
- Families should decide on an outside meeting place where everyone in the household can gather after they have escaped.

School Activities

Make sure children understand the following procedures: stress that "Stop, Drop & Roll" is for when your clothes catch on fire and "Crawl Low Under Smoke" is for when there is smoke in the area

Stop, Drop, and Roll -- Cool and Call

Even young children can learn what to do if their clothing catches fire. "Stop, drop, and roll" is easy and fun to practice in the classroom.

If your clothing catches on fire:

- Stop where you are -- don't run.
- Drop to the ground.
- Roll -- cover your face with your hands and roll over and over or back and forth to smother the flames. Then cool the burned area with water and call for help.

Crawl Low Under Smoke

Teach preschoolers to use another exit if they meet smoke or flames while escaping from a fire. Because smoke rises to the ceiling, if they have to escape through smoke, they should crawl toward the exit on their hands and knees with their heads in cleaner air about 1 to 2 feet (30 to 60 centimeters) above the floor.

During the fire drill, have adults stretch out a bed sheet or blanket 2 feet (30 centimeters) above the floor to represent "pretend" smoke. Have the children find an alternative escape route or crawl under the sheet to an exit.

Thinking Ahead

Have the children act out the right thing to do in specific fire situations. Possible scenarios: "Pretend you wake up and there is smoke in your bedroom," (crawl low under smoke) or "Pretend you are helping in the kitchen and your sleeve catches fire" (Stop, Drop and Roll)

Send the Message Home

Teachers should ask young children to talk with their families about home fire escape plans. Send information home on child-resistant lighters and the importance of fire escape plans and smoke alarms.

Young Fire Starters

Some children play with fire because they are naturally curious; others start fires in anger or as a cry for help.

Any fire setting -- no matter the reason -- is dangerous and must be dealt with immediately.

- Always demonstrate safe use of fire. Never use matches or lighters to amuse children. They may imitate you. Keep matches and lighters up high, preferably in a locked cabinet and use only child resistant lighters.
- If you discover that a child has been playing with fire, respond calmly -- don't punish. Talk to him or her about the danger and find safe, supervised ways for the child to learn to use fire safely -- blowing out candles, dumping charcoal into a barbecue grill.
- If you suspect a child is setting fires, get help immediately. Your fire department, school, or local social-service agency can help you find expert counseling.