

# **OPERATIONAL GUIDELINE**

**(Template)**

## **Youth Firesetting Intervention Program**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

This Operational Guideline outlines consistent procedures when addressing the behavior of firesetting among youth (ages 1 through 17). The responsibility to carry out this order rests with any member of the organization who may encounter a youth with firesetting behaviors.

### **II. DEFINITIONS**

Youth (Juvenile) Firesetting: Youth (age 1 through 17) who have been engaged in the unsanctioned and/or unsupervised use of fire. The firesetting behavior does not have to result in damage, injury, or death nor does a crime have to be committed. The behavior does not necessarily denote mental illness.

Youth Firesetting Intervention Program: The program is made up of five components, which provide a continuum of service for youth who come to the attention of the agency for firesetting behaviors.

Mission Statement for the Program: “The mission of the Youth Firesetting Intervention Program is to identify the firesetting behavior of children who have been referred to the Program for the unsanctioned and/or unsupervised use of fire, determine the motivation for the firesetting behavior, and provide appropriate education and/or referral for such children/families.”

County Firesetting Intervention Networks: A local, county-based network of professionals who address youth firesetting behavior intervention within the community. The professional disciplines represented might include: Fire Service; Law Enforcement; Mental Health; Juvenile Justice; Child Welfare; State Human Services; Medical; Insurance; and others.

### **III. PROGRAM FUNCTION**

The program is made up of six basic components. These are Identification, Intake, Education, Interview/Screening, Intervention Services, and Evaluation/Follow-up.

**IDENTIFICATION**: Juveniles are identified and referred to the program by a variety of sources. The majority might come from Fire Department personnel. Fire Department Officers who have responded to a fire or Fire Department Investigators who have investigated a fire are often the first to identify a child as being responsible. When this determination is made, a referral to the Program must be initiated.

All fire companies are provided a form that is carried on fire apparatus or can be found electronically. Standing orders require officers to fill out this form and forward it to the Youth Firesetting Intervention Program Manager when a juvenile is found to be the cause of a fire.

Once completed, the form is forwarded to the Program manager, either on paper or electronically. This initiates a case file and sends a form letter to the family along with a brochure describing the Program. A copy of the letter, the intake worksheet, and the fire report are then retained in a file until the child/family has completed the Program.

The same form can also be used when families stop into a fire station or department facility and self-refer to the Program. In these cases, it is also forwarded to the Program manager either on paper or by e-mail, or the information can be left on the Program Manager's voice mail. It is important to note that the Program is not equipped to take immediate action in response to these referrals. A goal has been set to contact each family within 48 hours of receipt or initiation of a referral.

**INTAKE:** The first step in establishing the file is to question the adult caregiver (the person who is the legal and custodial caregiver of the child) to gather the details of the incident and the demographic information. This is generally done over the phone and can take from ten to thirty minutes.

After the phone discussion with the family, a ninety-minute interview is usually scheduled or the family is referred to a trained firefighter in a fire company. This will be confirmed by the mailing of a packet of information to the family. This packet includes a confirmation of the appointment time and date, a map showing the address and location of the appointment site, a brochure describing the Youth Firesetting Intervention Program, a smoke alarm brochure, and some handouts describing fire survival skills and child behavioral tips.

A narrative is also filled out for each child. Along with the other information that will be collected, this form offers a descriptive account of the contacts and scheduling with the family. The value is often shown when a family refuses to participate and is referred back to the Program again at a later date. The prior refusal is now documented and a paper trail is established.

**INTERVIEW/SCREENING:** In conjunction with education, a formal interview/screening process is also conducted. It forms the foundation for the intervention. This process is intended to help the interventionist determine the motivation behind the firesetting behavior and determine the ultimate needs of the child/family.

Three types of interview/screening forms are used:

- Parent Interview Form
- Youth Interview Form
- Parent Checklist

The goal of the intervention is to determine the child's needs in response to the inappropriate fire use. For children whose behavior seems to stem from thinking errors or lack of information about fire outcomes, education is the most appropriate intervention. When the behavior seems to result from stress, crisis, or dysfunction in the child's life, the required intervention services needed may extend to other service providers.

For children in need of extended services, the Program will assist the family in finding a program or agency best suited to the family's needs. This may range from in-patient hospitalization for the child, to family counseling. Parenting classes may be another recommended intervention service. The program has established a list of intervention strategies to facilitate services to families.

Families will sometimes refuse to participate in the Program. The most common reason is denial, on the part of the family, that their child was involved in the firesetting activity. Some parents also claim that the incident was isolated and the discipline provided by the family will remedy the situation. Regardless of the reason, all children brought to the attention of the Program must be referred through the identified channels. The Program manager may have benefit of information about the family that the family does not disclose initially. **Making a referral does not mean that negative actions or consequences will be directed toward the child and/or family.** The service is designed to aid the family in obtaining solutions to the firesetting behaviors.

**INTERVENTION STRATEGIES:** Intervention Strategies include the services provided after the Interview/Screening process. While education would be considered another intervention strategy, it is typically the service best provided by trained fire service educators. The others, listed below, are typical of those found in the community at-large:

- mental health professional
- child protective services
- school counselor
- in-patient hospitalization
- physician for medical evaluation
- parenting classes (for parents)
- Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) screening
- Juvenile Justice authorities
- Attorneys

Once a referral is made, the Youth Firesetting Intervention Program becomes a resource to the service provider who is working with the child and family over the long term. The Program cooperates with, and encourages this approach.

**EDUCATION:** This is perhaps the most critical part of the Youth Firesetting Intervention Program. When children have had an experience with fire, it is crucial that they gain an understanding of why their behavior was inappropriate. This involves pointing out their mistakes and identifying appropriate corrective action.

Many times, the parent may think they have offered direction to their child. The reality is that most have not. Parents visiting the program have usually attempted to educate their children about proper fire use by applying one or more of the following approaches:

- Instilling fear in the child

- Punitive measures only
- Ignoring the problem, fearing ideas will be put into the child's head
- Explaining unrealistic outcomes of firesetting behavior (e.g. if you play with fire, you will be killed; you will go to jail; etc.)

Rarely do parents, whose children experience problems with fire, give a detailed explanation of how and when fire should be used. This should be no surprise since many adults know little more than their children do about the realities of fire.

The Program provides fire safety education as an integral part of the interview/screening process. The interventionist begins the educational process during the intake interview with the family. Individual families meet with a trained interventionist for approximately ninety minutes.

The Program manager participates in an extensive training program to understand youth firesetting behaviors and systems approaches to solutions. He/she also becomes familiar with community organizations that can assist in the intervention process when educational intervention does not provide sufficient motivation to discourage future behavior.

A pool of trained interventionists may also perform interviews. These team members may work in the Emergency Operations Division of the Fire Department and will invite the families into their fire station during working hours. These individuals undergo 8 hours of specialized training before working with families. **It should be noted that ONLY trained individuals working under the supervision of the Youth Firesetting Intervention Program Manager will provide this service to citizens. Any other employee encountering this behavior will refer these youth in accordance with this guideline.**

The parents are an important part of the educational process. If a parent cannot accompany the child to the interview, the interview will not be performed. Exceptions to mandatory parental attendance will be made in the case of children who are in the custody of the State and whose caseworker feels education will be beneficial to their future placement in a foster home or residential facility.

At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewer may assign some fire safety related responsibility to the child. If necessary, another meeting is scheduled to continue education.

**EVALUATION/FOLLOW-UP:** Follow-up and evaluation is probably the most important aspect of the Juvenile Firesetting Intervention Program. It is the compass that guides the Program. Program evaluation cannot only come from within. The individuals receiving the service must be allowed input as well. The success of the clients, not the opinion of the program management, determines the success of this program.

The Program employs a comprehensive follow-up component that not only questions recidivism, but also critiques its content and delivery. The program also concludes by delivering the mandatory fire reporting information to the appropriate authorities.

IV. **AUTHORITY**

The authority to apply legal sanctions upon children who misuse fire and to intervene in the family circumstance when child abuse is suspected or found is outlined here.

SITE APPROPRIATE STATUES HERE

**NOTE:** All agency employees are mandatory reporters under the above statutes.

V. **RESPONSIBILITY**

Responsibility for the development and implementation for the Youth Firesetting Intervention Program rests with the Program Manager, as assigned by the agency.