

Children Playing with Fire

The Facts

- It is normal for children, even as young as two years old, to be curious about fire. Guiding children to fire-safe behaviour is the responsibility of parents and caregivers.
- Fireplay happens when a curious and unsupervised child plays with matches, a lighter, an open flame or a hot stove. This curiosity can lead to a fire that may result in death, injury, or property damage.
- Fires started by children in the home usually happen in bedrooms. Other rooms where children play with fire are the living room, the closet and the kitchen.

What you can do

Step 1: Prevent children from starting fires

- Keep matches and lighters out of sight and reach. Even toddlers are known to have started fires with lighters.
- Never leave a hot stove, space heater or lit candles unattended.
- Reward a child who finds and reports to any adult of any matches or lighters they find.
- Never leave children unsupervised at home—not even to run a quick errand.

Step 2: Teach children about fire

- Teach children that fire is a tool, not a toy. Talk about the use of fire as a tool we use to cook food, heat our homes, make repairs and light birthday candles.
- Educate your children about the dangers of fire and make sure they know that all fires, even small ones, can spread very quickly.
- Provide opportunities for school-aged children to understand the safe use of fire (such as lighting birthday candles) under your supervision.
- Teach your child how to say NO when friends suggest playing with fire.

Step 3: Set a good example

- Emphasize the fire and burn safety rules you follow when using fire.
- With your children, regularly inspect your home for fire hazards.
- Install and maintain smoke alarms.
- Plan and practice home fire escape drills.

What to do if your child sets fires

As a parent or caregiver of young children, take any fireplay seriously.

- If your child sets a fire, use an immediate consequence, such as taking away a privilege or using time-out.
- Depending on your child's age, talk (don't lecture or scold) about the dangers of fire.
- Get immediate help if a child sets a second fire. Your call to the fire department will be kept confidential.
- Getting help will prevent this behaviour from becoming worse.

How to get help

- Call your local fire department or your child's school counsellor.

For more information, please contact the Alberta Emergency Management Agency at (780) 422-9000 (dial 310-000 for toll-free access outside of Edmonton) or visit www.aema.alberta.ca
Last updated/reviewed June 15, 2009