

# Myths and Facts

## about children who light fires

- Myth** » It is normal for children to play with fire.
- Fact** » While it is common for children to be curious about fire, playing with fire is not normal and can be deadly.
- Myth** » It is a phase that children will grow out of.
- Fact** » It is very rarely a phase and you must deal with it immediately or it will continue.
- Myth** » Children who play with fire are pyromaniacs.
- Fact** » Playing with fire is a behavioural problem which can be stopped. It may occasionally be a symptom of more widespread problems.



### Need help or want to talk?

Phone: **0800 FIRE INFO**  
(0800 3473 4636)  
during business hours

Visit: **[www.fire.org.nz](http://www.fire.org.nz)**

E-mail: **[FAIP@fire.org.nz](mailto:FAIP@fire.org.nz)**

**New Zealand Government**



Fire Awareness Intervention Programme

# Does your child light fires?

We can help  
Working together to stop  
child fire lighting



# What is the Fire Awareness Intervention Programme (FAIP)?



FAIP is designed to stop children from 5 to 17 years lighting fires. It raises their awareness of the dangers and consequences of fire lighting.

The programme is free, confidential and voluntary (except for referrals from the Police or Court).

The programme is delivered by trained firefighters and is usually done in a home setting.

Our trained firefighters use education and behaviour modification resources to challenge and correct the child's negative fire lighting behaviour.

The content and delivery of the programme varies according to the age and maturity of the child.

Typically the programme would involve two meetings with the child and takes a total of about two hours.

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## What can you do?



Start by telling your young children that fire is a tool not a toy.

You must explain that fire is used to cook food and heat the home. It is not magic, it is not a toy. Fire is dangerous and only for adults to use carefully (like driving a car or using a power tool).

Keep all matches and lighters out of reach of very young children. A child resistant lighter is not child proof, not even for a two year old.

Teach children that matches and lighters are tools not toys.

Instruct children to hand over matches and lighters to adults when they find them. Children need to be rewarded or praised for doing this.

Allow older children (8 to 10 years) to use fire, but only under direct supervision.



## Why do children start fires?



### Curiosity

- » Children may start experimenting with fire from about 3 to 6 years of age
- » This can be linked to an attraction to the colour, light and energy released by a flame

### Attention seeking

- » Children from about 6 to 12 years of age
- » This could be to do with a change in the family situation, for example a new baby, parental separation or learning difficulties

### Peer pressure

- » This can be due to difficulties with relating to their peers and low self-esteem
- » Peer pressure can affect children from about 10 to 14 years of age

### Anger or revenge

- » This can be a motive for children from 8 to 14 years of age
- » Family and social difficulties may be a cause

### Malicious mischief

- » 9 to 16 years of age
- » Family and social difficulties are a likely cause

Younger children tend to light fires in and around the home and only rarely set out to cause damage by their fire lighting.

By contrast, older children are more likely to light fires away from home and may be motivated by malicious intent.