



YOUTH FIRESETTING PREVENTION & INTERVENTION

VISION 20/20 PROJECT · INSTITUTION OF FIRE ENGINEERS, USA BRANCH

COMPANY OFFICER & FIREFIGHTER TRAINING BRIEF

OPERATIONAL FIELD GUIDE · YOUTH FIRESETTING PREVENTION & INTERVENTION

COMPANY OFFICERS ARE OFTEN THE FIRST FIRE SERVICE PROFESSIONAL TO INTERACT DIRECTLY WITH A YOUTH AND FAMILY INVOLVED IN A FIRESETTING INCIDENT

THE ISSUE

As a company officer, you arrive at fires both big and small. During extinguishment, overhaul, and investigation, you are often the first fire service professional to interact with the youth and family involved. What you observe on scene, and what you do with those observations, can be the difference between a child getting the help they need and a behavior that escalates into something far more serious. Youth firesetting is not just a fire problem — this can be a behavioral indicator, and company officers are frequently the first to see it.

49K+

Youth-set fires reported annually in the U.S., resulting in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries (NFPA)

Age 3-18

Full range of ages at which youth firesetting occurs; company officers encounter this behavior across all age groups

97%+

Intervention effectiveness rate when root causes are identified and addressed by trained professionals

WHY IT MATTERS TO COMPANY OFFICERS

Company officers are trusted community figures and the most frequent fire service contact a family will ever have. During overhaul and investigation you observe the scene, the home, the youth, and the family in a way no one else does. Recognizing the signs and taking the right steps — even simply documenting an observation and making a referral — can change the trajectory of a child's life. You do not need to be a specialist. You need to know what to look for and who to call. If you suspect youth involvement in fire ignition, the incident should be referred to a YFPI program. You do not need to prove youth involvement. Find YFPI programs at yfires.com.

WARNING SIGNS TO RECOGNIZE

IGNITION MATERIALS PRESENT

Matches, lighters, or accelerants found near the area of origin, especially in locations accessible to children.

INCONSISTENT EXPLANATION

The youth's account of how the fire started does not align with physical evidence, or changes when questioned.

UNUSUAL AFFECT ON SCENE

Youth appears excited, overly interested in fire operations, or emotionally flat rather than frightened.

PRIOR INCIDENTS AT ADDRESS

Dispatch history or caregiver statements reveal this is not the first fire or fire-related call at this location.

UNSUPERVISED IGNITION ACCESS

Matches, lighters, or novelty lighters stored within easy reach of children anywhere in the home.

BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS

Youth is withdrawn, aggressive, or shows stress beyond what the incident explains — a potential indicator of unmet needs.

WHAT YOU CAN DO & ON-SCENE GUIDE

1 Make the Scene Safe

Ensure scene safety for all occupants. Contact parents or caregivers if children are the only occupants.

2 Document Your Observations

Document observations and voluntary conversations on scene — what you record may be the foundation for a referral.

3 Contact the Right Resources

Contact: Fire Investigator, Public Fire Educator or CRE, or YFPI Specialist immediately if youth firesetting is suspected.

4 Educate the Household

Confirm working smoke alarms in any room where someone sleeps, outside sleeping areas, and on every level of the home including the basement. Advise caregivers to secure ignition materials.

5 Educate Your Company

Incorporate YFPI messaging into station tours and outreach. Assist in CRR activities within your response area.

✓ DO

- ✓ Document observations — what you saw, where, and any voluntary statements made
- ✓ Ensure a caregiver is present before any conversation with a youth
- ✓ Speak calmly and without accusation — your tone sets the tone
- ✓ Use YFPI Go on scene to access referral resources

✗ DON'T

- ✗ Conduct a formal screening — that is the role of a YFPI Specialist
- ✗ Accuse or confront a youth directly, even if the evidence seems clear
- ✗ Dismiss small fires — repeat firesetting is highly likely without intervention
- ✗ Assume motivation — curiosity and crisis behavior require different responses

NATIONAL RESOURCES & SUPPORT

Vision 20/20 Project
strategicfire.org

YFIRES Resource Center
yfires.com

National Fire Academy
usfa.fema.gov/nfa

KEY TAKEAWAY

Firefighters are among the most trusted professionals in any community. You do not need to be a YFPI specialist to make a difference — **observe, document, and connect**. Visit soarcg.com/yfpi-links.html to access YFPI Go and a full library of YFPI resources. Vision 20/20 and the YFPI national network are here to support you.