

INCREASING COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM JUVENILE FIRE-SETTING:  
USING THE RISK-NEED-RESPONSIVITY MODEL TO CREATE TREATMENT AND  
PROGRAMMING FOR JUVENILE FIRE-SETTERS

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INTRODUCTION

- Who we are
  - Forensic Social Worker
  - Forensic Psychologist
- Where we practice
  - New York State Juvenile Justice
- Our experience and training
  - National Fire Academy, FEMA
    - Consultant
    - Content Trainer

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WHY THE NEED FOR THIS PRESENTATION

- Research indicates an increase in the need to address juvenile fire-setting as an intervention for community safety
- NFA regularly offers trainings related to juvenile fire-setting to fire service professionals
- Juvenile fire-setting assessment and treatment is a specialty area within forensic social work that deserves more exposure and attention

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RELEVANCE OF JUVENILE FIRE-SETTING TO FORENSIC SOCIAL WORK

- ▣ Increase awareness and knowledge in juvenile fire-setting assessment and treatment
- ▣ Facilitate collaboration between forensic social workers and local fire service jurisdictions
- ▣ Promote safety in families and communities
- ▣ Provide risk reduction

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ▣ Learn the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model (Andrews, D.A., Bonta, J., & Hoge, R.D., 1990)
- ▣ Learn juvenile fire-setting risk assessment process
- ▣ Learn juvenile fire-setting treatment programming

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WHY ADDRESS YOUTH FIRE SETTING

- Adolescent (Impulsive/Belief of Immortality/Not having full knowledge)
- + Speed/Power of fire
- Death/Serious Injury/Destruction

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JUVENILE FIRE-SETTING PREVALENCE RATES IN THE U.S.

- \* Years between 2007 and 2011
- \* 67,000 fires set by youth across the U.S., resulting in
  - \* 230 deaths
  - \* 1,800 injuries
  - \* \$235 million in damages

(NYS DHES, 2017. <http://www.dhies.ny.gov/afpc/resources/juvfire.cfm>)

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UNITED STATES ARSON ARRESTS



According to the FBI, nearly half of all arson arrests in the United States are of juveniles under the age of 18.

Nearly one-third of those arrested were under the age of 15 and 5 percent were under the age of 10.

(FBI, 2006.)

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JUVENILE FIRE-SETTING PREVALENCE IN NEW YORK STATE JUVENILE JUSTICE

- \* Approximately 28% of NYS JJ youth have fire-setting histories – with or without adjudication
- \* Fire-setting history without intervention has blocked step-down placement, return to community, vocational/occupational opportunities
- \* *What are the prevalence rates in your state?*

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**INTRODUCTION TO JUVENILE FIRE-SETTING**

- Who are setting fires?
- Youth in Juvenile Justice who engage in fire-setting behavior
- Typologies/Motivation Profiles

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**WHAT AGE GROUP ENGAGES IN THE MOST FIRE-SETTING BEHAVIORS**

- a. 0 - 5
- b. 6 - 10
- c. 11 - 14
- d. 15 - 17

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**MALES, AGES 11 - 14**

- Statistically speaking, youth between the ages of 11 and 14 are at the greatest risk for setting fires.
- Boys are at greatest risk of setting fires.

(Bishop, 2004)

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**YOUTH IN JUVENILE JUSTICE SETTING WITH FIRESETTING HISTORIES**

- Fire misuse at earlier developmental phase
- Gang Initiation
- Firesetting for profit
- Animal cruelty
- Revenge/retaliation
- Crime concealment
- Substance Use related
- Thrill-seeking/Reckless behavior (YouTube)

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**MYTHS ABOUT JUVENILE FIRE-SETTING**

- **A child can control a small fire**
  - Most fires start small but can become uncontrollable quickly
- **It is normal for children to play with fire**
  - For children, interest in fire is normal; setting fires is not
- **Fire-setting is a phase that children will outgrow**
  - Fire-setting is not a phase. If a child is not taught fire safety, the fire-setting can get out of control. We cannot afford to wait to change it.
- **Many children are obsessed with fire**
  - Very few children are obsessed with fire. There is always a reason for fire-setting. We need to discover the reason and address it.

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**MYTHS ABOUT FIRE-SETTING**

- **If you take a child to a hospital burn unit to see burn victims, he or she will stop playing with fire**
  - Going to the burn unit instills fear and does not teach the child fire safety.
  - Walking children around the burn unit is a disrespect to the burn victims who are trying to recover. They are not on display.
- **Putting a child in the back of a police car or having a firefighter talk to them in a stern manner will make the child stop setting fires**
  - Police officers will only put children in their patrol cars if they have legal authority to do so and when it is appropriate.
  - Research shows that scare tactics are not effective in getting to the root of the problem behavior, which typically causes youth to continue to set fires.

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### MYTHS ABOUT JUVENILE FIRE-SETTING

- Over 50% of youth fire-setters have a mental health disorder or an intellectual disability
  - Current research reveals that under 25% of juvenile fire-setters have a mental health disorder and/or a learning disability or intellectual disability.
  - This is not to say that youth fire-setters (and perhaps family members) are not challenged by some type of undiagnosed disorder

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### TYOLOGIES FOR YOUTH WITH FIRE-SETTING HISTORIES

- Based on increased concerns about youth with fire setting behaviors, Typologies were developed
- Goal is to help mental health and fire service professionals understand youth with fire setting histories
- Most youth do not fit neatly into one typology

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### CURRENT TYOLOGIES USED BY NATIONAL FIRE ACADEMY

- Curiosity/Experimentation
- Crisis/Troubled/Cry-for-Help
- Thrill-seeking/Risk-taking
- Delinquent/Criminal/Strategic
- Pathological/Severely Disturbed/Cognitively-Impaired/Thought-Disordered

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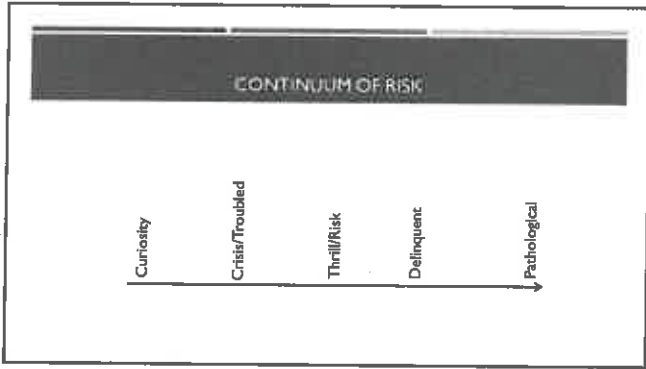
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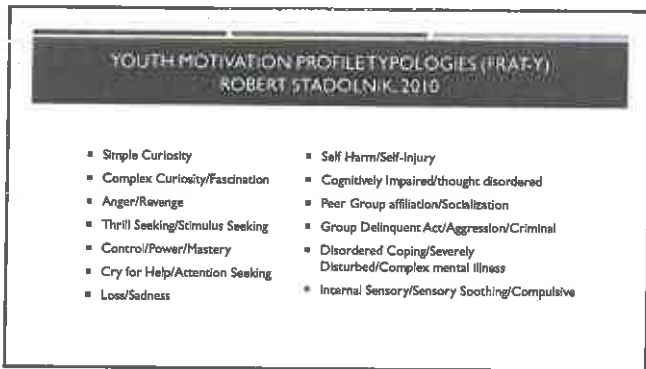
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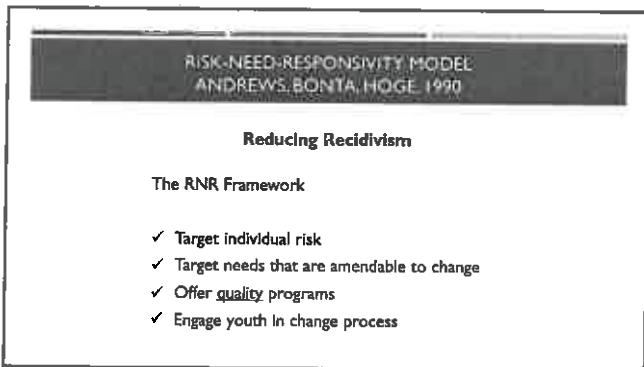
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RISK-NEED-RESPONSIVITY MODEL  
ANDREWS, BONTA, HOGE, 1990

- Risk – What are the risk factors associated with this youth? This is how we guide level and type of interventions.
- Need – How do we address the risk factors? What protective factors are in place or can be built on?
- Responsivity – How are we going to help youth meet their needs to address the risk factors and increase their protective factors?

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RISK-NEED-RESPONSIVITY: WHAT IS RISK?

- Risk is the likelihood that an offender will engage in future criminal behavior (recidivate)
- Risk does NOT refer to dangerousness or likelihood of violence
- Static Risk Factors have a demonstrated correlation with criminal behavior
  - Historical – based on criminal history
  - Cannot be decreased by intervention

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RISK-NEED-RESPONSIVITY: ASSESSING NEEDS

- **Static Risk Factors**
  - From a validated risk assessment tool
  - Based on criminal history
- **Demographics**
  - Age and gender
- **Criminogenic Needs**
  - Substance Use
  - Criminal thinking/lifestyle
- **Dynamic Protective and Risk Factors (Stabilizers and Destabilizers)**
  - Clinically-relevant factors

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RISK-NEED-RESPONSIVITY: WHAT IS RESPONSIVITY?

- Treatment to address assessed needs should be cognitive and/or behaviorally based programming that has been shown to effectively reduce recidivism
- Deliver controls and treatment in a manner that is consistent with individuals' learning styles
  - Considers age, gender, culture, intelligence, motivation, etc.
  - Translate Risk & Need into Program Placement/Case Decisions
  - Destabilizers require more social controls

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CORE PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIVITY

- Individual
  - Match programming and controls to risk and need
  - Involve the youth in the assessment of risk-need information
  - Focus on motivation to change
  - Provide feedback reports to youth on treatment progress
- System
  - Focus on correctional culture to increase receptiveness to treatment
  - Measure client outcomes to gauge performance and share with partner agencies
  - Increase communication and build systems of care

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ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Youth who require assessment and possible intervention for fire-setting behaviors

- Current or prior adjudication/conviction for fire setting behaviors (Arson or other crime involving fire)
- Probation/Academic/Other Agency record indicates fire setting history
- Self/family report
- Not always clear what is needed

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ASSESSMENT PROCESS – NOT ALWAYS CLEAR

- ▣ Youth makes statements during intake/later in treatment that they had some fire-setting behaviors but information is vague/not clear
- ▣ There is a history of fire-setting but happened several years ago
- ▣ Youth/family deny any fire-setting incidents
- ▣ Records are inconsistent
- ▣ Other issues?

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ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- ▣ Record review – follow up on missing information
- ▣ Youth interview
- ▣ Parent/Guardian interview
- ▣ Scoring assessment tools
- ▣ Determine interventions
- ▣ Write the report
- ▣ Share with primary clinical team
- ▣ Provide interventions as needed

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INFORMATION TO BE GATHERED DURING INTERVIEWS

- |                                       |                                |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ▣ Fire setting history Family history | ▣ Previous placements          |
| ▣ Criminal History                    | ▣ Substance abuse              |
| ▣ Trauma history                      | ▣ Mental health                |
| ▣ Intellectual functioning            | ▣ Medications                  |
| ▣ Educational history                 | ▣ Medical History              |
| ▣ Hobbies/interests                   | ▣ Goals/thoughts of the future |

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RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS

- Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory 2.0 (YLS/CMI 2.0)
- Firesetting Risk Assessment Tool for Youth (FRAT-Y)
- Colorado Comprehensive Family Fire Risk Assessment (short form)
- Oregon Juvenile with Fire Screening Tool

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YOUTH LEVEL OF SERVICE/CASE MANAGEMENT INVENTORY 2.0

- Essentially a checklist – includes historical information as well as how youth presents
- Highly used in Juvenile Justice across the nation
- Strong empirical data related to recidivism
- Can be used with males and females
- Indicates different risk levels for youth in custody and in the community
- Ages 12 – 18

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YOUTH LEVEL OF SERVICE 2.0

- |   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
| ▪ Prior and current offenses                          | ▪ Peer Relations        |
| ▪ Success/failure with previous community supervision | ▪ Substance Use         |
| ▪ Family/parenting                                    | ▪ Leisure/recreation    |
| ▪ Education/employment                                | ▪ Personality/Behavior  |
|   | ▪ Attitudes/Orientation |

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**FRAT.Y**

- Has "motivational profiles" instead of typologies
- Normed on youth ages 5 – 17
- Includes worksheet to assist with appropriate intervention determinations
- Includes areas related to risk of future firesetting behaviors

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**FRAT.Y**

- Parent/Family functioning
- Behavioral Functioning
- Social/Emotional functioning
- School Functioning
- Firesetting behavior

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**COLORADO COMPREHENSIVE FAMILY FIRE RISK ASSESSMENT (SHORT FORM)**

- Developed in 1995
- Has been supported in courts
- Is used by Fire Service Personnel
- Addresses fire setting behaviors as well as other areas of concern
- Used as a strategy to measure level of risk for future firesetting behavior
- Three levels of risk – Little, Definite, and Extreme
- Most of our youth fall into Definite/Extreme levels

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OREGON JUVENILE WITH FIRE SCREENING TOOL

- Development started in 1989
- Also covers both firesetting and non-fire setting information
- Includes a Fire Safety Contract (useful for when youth is getting ready to go home)
- **Does not** provide risk levels like Colorado and FRAT-Y, but includes recommendations

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INTERVENTIONS: LEVELS OF PREVENTION

- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary




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PRIMARY PREVENTION

- Proactive events
- Improve well-being
- Wide use by fire department
- Weak if used alone




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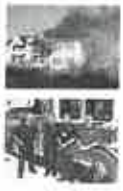
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**SECONDARY PREVENTION**

- Response to trouble
- Targets high-risk groups
- Screening for risk



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**TERTIARY PREVENTION**

- Reduce negative impact of event
- Rehabilitation to functional condition



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**EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS**

The goal of youth firesetting educational interventions are to empower the child, adolescent, or teen with knowledge to make better decisions and abstain from firesetting.

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EDUCATE YOUTH AND PARENT

Educating both the child and parent/ caregiver is essential for the success of a youth firesetting intervention program.



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FIRST STEP – INTERVENTION



Evaluate the existing fire safety knowledge of all participants.

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PARENTS – IMPORTANT STUDENTS

- May not realize dangers of fire
- May lack insight into what children can (or cannot) understand
- May have deficits and challenges similar to their children



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**FIRE SAFETY EDUCATION**

Children need a fact-based age-appropriate understanding of fire to include its purpose, appropriate use/rules, and potential dangers.



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**AGE, DEVELOPMENT, AND HOW PEOPLE LEARN**

- \* Preschool-age
- \* Elementary School-age
- \* Adolescence – Addressing risk-taking
  - \* Remember age and cognitive development
    - \* Understand attention span limits
      - \* Limit lecture
    - \* Use reality-based experiences

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**COMPONENTS OF AN EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION**

- \* What are your educational goals?
- \* Who are the groups being served?
- \* What will learning environment be?
- \* What teaching materials will be used?

Goal of a youth firesetting educational intervention is to empower students of all ages to make better decisions

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**DEVELOPING EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS**

- Joint vs separate sessions with parent and child
- Group, Individual, Family formats
- Classroom environment
- Class schedule
- Age and abilities of the youth(s)
- Abilities of the parents/caregivers
- Potential communication challenges
- Culture of the family environment

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**EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION TOPICS**

- \* Fire safety
- \* Fire science
- \* Consequences of firesetting
- \* Accepting personal responsibility/Restorative Justice
- \* Decision-making processes

Goal of a youth firesetting educational intervention is to empower students of all ages to make better decisions.

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**STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER**

- Punishment alone does not teach youth about the dangers of fire.
- Messages, methods, and materials should be age appropriate, educationally correct, and behaviorally sound.
- Delivery mediums may vary dependent on local needs/resources (groups by age/one-on-one).

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STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER (cont'd)

- Behaviors that ascend beyond curiosity or experimentation need attention from support agencies.
- Educational interventions may have to be delayed for adjudicated youth or those receiving clinical support.
- **REMEMBER**, nearly all firesetters will benefit from receiving fire safety education.

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STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER (cont'd)

- Program extension activities should direct home fire safety interventions to occur.
- The entire family should be involved in the extension activities.
- Successful completion of the youth firesetting program should be contingent on completion of ALL components of the program.

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CURRENT INTERVENTION MATERIALS

- A Spark of Knowledge (Pennsylvania)
- Adolescents with Fire (Oregon)
- Fire Safety Begins with ME (Florida)
- Sean's Story
- YFP Workbook, 5 – 10 (California)
- YFP Workbook, 11 – 14 (California)
- YFP Workbook, 15 – 18 (California)
- Fact Sheets and other Information

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