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

JACQUELINE JOHNSON, DSW, LCSW-R

JENNIFER ALONGI, MA, LCSW



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
 - Contract Trainer

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

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

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

WHY ADDRESS YOUTH FIRE SETTING

Adolescent (Impulsive/Belief of Immortality/Not having full knowledge)

+ Speed/Power of fire

Death/Serious Injury/Destruction

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

(NYSDHES, 2017. <http://www.dhSES.ny.gov/ofpc/resources/juvfire.cfm>)

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.)

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?*

INTRODUCTION TO JUVENILE FIRE-SETTING

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

WHAT AGE GROUP ENGAGES IN THE MOST FIRE-SETTING BEHAVIORS

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

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.

(Boberg, 2006)

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)

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.*

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.*

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*

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

CURRENT TYPOLOGIES 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

CONTINUUM OF RISK



YOUTH MOTIVATION PROFILE TYPOLOGIES (FRAT-Y)

ROBERT STADOLNIK, 2010

- Simple Curiosity
- Complex Curiosity/Fascination
- Anger/Revenge
- Thrill Seeking/Stimulus Seeking
- Control/Power/Mastery
- Cry for Help/Attention Seeking
- Loss/Sadness
- Self Harm/Self-Injury
- Cognitively Impaired/thought disordered
- Peer Group affiliation/Socialization
- Group Delinquent Act/Aggression/Criminal
- Disordered Coping/Severely Disturbed/Complex mental illness
- Internal Sensory/Sensory Soothing/Compulsive

RISK-NEED-RESPONSIVITY MODEL

ANDREWS, BONTA, HOGE, 1990

Reducing Recidivism

The RNR Framework

- ✓ Target individual risk
- ✓ Target needs that are amendable to change
- ✓ Offer quality programs
- ✓ Engage youth in change process

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?

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

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

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

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

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

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?

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

INFORMATION TO BE GATHERED DURING INTERVIEWS

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

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

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

YOUTH LEVEL OF SERVICE 2.0

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

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

FRAT-Y

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

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

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

INTERVENTIONS: LEVELS OF PREVENTION

- Primary



- Secondary



- Tertiary



PRIMARY PREVENTION

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



SECONDARY PREVENTION

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



TERTIARY PREVENTION

- Reduce negative impact of event
- Rehabilitation to functional condition



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.

EDUCATE YOUTH AND PARENT

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



FIRST STEP – INTERVENTION



Evaluate the existing fire safety knowledge of all participants.

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



FIRE SAFETY EDUCATION

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



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*

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.

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

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.

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).

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.

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.

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

CONTACT INFORMATION

- Jacqueline Johnson, DSW, LCSW-R
 - drjacquelinejohnson@outlook.com

- Jennifer Alongi, MA, LCSW
 - jenniferb721@msn.com