



PRESCHOOLERS & FIRE SAFETY

Children under 5 years of age are, tragically, twice as likely as are older children to suffer fatal injuries in fires.

Regrettably these fires are more likely to have been lit by young children and/or electrical appliances and faults.

Where young children copy the actions of adults around them and play with fire, (smoking materials, heating equipment), they are aware that their actions need to be carried out well away from the adults in their immediate environment.

As a result they hide in cupboards, under beds, in sheds, etc. Fires can quickly become established in such areas and can remain undetected for some time. In confined spaces the smoke given off by fires, not to mention toxic gases, can overwhelm a small child very quickly.

It is vital, therefore, to provide information to young children in order to prevent them from 'playing' with fire, and to give them survival techniques to avoid serious injury.

A preschool fire safety program, to be successful, must involve parents as well as children. Your students will encourage parents and caregivers to be more aware of fire hazards around the home and to be better prepared for a fire.

Tools not toys

Young children need to know that matches and lighters are tools not toys. Their natural inclination to copy adult behaviour can lead to them experimenting with matches and lighters.

The message should be clear: matches and lighters have specific uses, misusing them is dangerous. Don't play with fire!

Parents and caregivers need to be reminded to store matches and lighters in a high cupboard, preferably locked, and that visitors who smoke should keep their matches and lighters with them at all times.

- Teach children to tell a grown-up if they find matches and lighters.
- Design posters that teach the 'tools not toys' concept.
- Develop this concept to include other child safety programmes.

For more information on bushfire safety and home fire safety, visit the Rural Fire Service website at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au or call the RFS Education Line on 1 800 654 443 (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm).



- Get the children to collect pictures of those things that are 'safe' or permissible to play with and things that are not.
- Put these in a box and draw them out one at a time. Get the children to nominate each one as a tool or a toy.

Preschool fire escape plan

- Each room in a complex should have a minimum of two exits.
- Children should know where each exit is and be instructed on the use of these exits.
- An assembly point in a safe area should be designated.
- Practice evacuation drills and assemblies at the safe area should be conducted regularly. Advice on safe areas and drills can be sought from your nearest NSW Rural Fire Service Control Centre and the NSW Fire Brigades.
- Deaths and serious injuries occur when children decide to take refuge or hide from fire. Children have been found in cupboards, under beds and behind large pieces of furniture. When talking to young children it must be emphasised that they must not hide but they can escape.

It is vital that children are well aware of the proper fire-escape drill, both at home and at school. Frequent fire-escape drills are needed to reinforce the plan.

Two exits from every room are required in case one is blocked by smoke or flame. It is therefore also necessary for young children to know the correct procedure to exit a burning building safely.

Get out and stay out!

Never re-enter a burning building. This means everyone. It is extremely important that the teacher(s) know that everyone has been accounted for, including children and staff.

Teach students to use their alternative exit if the primary exit is blocked by smoke or flame.

It might be necessary to escape through smoke. If this is the case, children should crawl on their hands and knees, close to the floor where the air is cleaner.

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Get down low and GO! GO! GO!

- Practice crawling low under smoke as part of your fire-escape drill.
- Use a sheet, (black or dark coloured if possible), stretched out about 60cm above the floor to represent the smoke level at some point along the escape route.
- Explain to children why it is necessary to remain low.
- Vary the height of the sheet at each drill.
- Emphasise the need for haste as opposed to rush. The escape should be orderly to avoid unnecessary injury and confusion.
- Once the children understand the drill you should practice unannounced escapes. Fires can be extremely noisy, confusing and frightful experiences. The need to have a practiced, well planned fire escape can not be over emphasised. Other activities can be organised to reinforce the need to crawl.

Stop, drop and roll

Parents and caregivers should be advised to purchase clothing that is labelled fire safe.

Even so, accidents can and do occur and children need to know what to do in the event that their clothing catches fire.

Young children can learn this simple manoeuvre. It is easy and fun to practice in the classroom and at home.

STOP: Stop where you are. Don't run!

DROP: Drop to the ground.

ROLL: Cover your face with your hands to protect it from flames, and roll over and over to smother the flames.

Children should be encouraged to practice this manoeuvre individually. Later they can carry out this manoeuvre in pairs so that, if necessary they can assist others.

Planning ahead

- Get the children to act out what they would do in specific fire situations.

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- Suggest specific fire situations:
 - Pretend you wake up and there is smoke in your bedroom
 - You're in the kitchen helping at the stove when your sleeve catches fire
- Encourage students to take this fire safety message home to parents and caregivers.
- Key follow up questions should be asked:
 - Who helped prepare the family's fire escape plan?
 - Describe two ways to exit your bedroom.
 - Where is your family's safe meeting place?
- Ask these and similar questions in relation to the preschool's fire escape plan.

These simple, fun exercises, if conducted on a regular basis, will minimise the risk of fire related injuries and death amongst young children.

Bushfire safety

These exercises can be practiced in the school ground or when out on excursions in appropriate areas.

- If you are in the bush and a fire starts it is important not to panic. Do not run. Stop and think.
- Do not run uphill. Choose an open space. Find a ditch or other low spots or get close to a rock, bank or fallen tree. Playground equipment can be used to practice these drills, though the children should understand what these pieces are representing.
- Lie face down as low as possible. Cover your skin. It should be emphasised that a fire front passes in a matter of minutes. It is therefore necessary to lie still for 2 or 3 minutes. This could be difficult for some children but beginning with shorter periods of time, 3 minutes can eventually be reached with practice.
- Children should not be encouraged to enter bushland alone. They must be accompanied at all times by an older person.

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