



CHILDREN'S NATURAL CURIOSITY WITH FIRE

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Since the dawn of man, we have depended upon fire to keep us warm and to cook our food. Modern society today does not utilize or rely on fire as our ancestors once did. To cook our food, we simply turn a dial on our stove. To warm our home, we turn up the lever on our thermostat. But there is a problem with these modern conveniences in our life; *we do not use or respect fire* as we once did. The less we use fire, the more we forget how devastating fire can be. This mindset can lead to carelessness and when people are careless with fire, the victims are frequently children. We must teach our children that matches, lighters, and other smoking materials present a very great danger. Some of the youngsters' curiosity about matches can be channeled constructively by teaching the "matches are a tool" concept.

Children should understand the "matches and lighters are tools" concept, however, they should be told that they are expected to use matches only as a tool, not for play, and only under adult supervision. They should understand that improper use can lead to serious burns or death.

Children should also be encouraged to prevent younger friends and siblings from playing with fire.

It is difficult to establish an age at which children should be taught safe match and lighter use, since motor abilities and maturity develop at varying ages. Obviously, matches and lighters should be kept out of the hands of very young children. Parents know their offspring and can provide the best judgment as to when to teach a child proper use of matches and lighters.

At home, parents can teach children how to light a match using the following procedure:

1. Open the package and take out a match.
2. Close the package.
3. Use the striker surface on the package.
4. Strike away from the body.
5. Hold the match horizontally after ignition for several seconds.
6. Blow out the flame and wait for the match to cool before disposing of it.

If your child shows signs of being curious about fire and you feel your child is mature enough to accept this responsibility, let him/her light the fireplace, camp fire, or the candles on the birthday cake. This will help satisfy his/her curiosity towards fire and prevent your child experimenting with fire in the tree fort, forest, or under the porch. Remember, if you allow your child to use matches or a lighter, the following two conditions must be adhered to:

1. Use matches and lighters as tools, not a toy.
2. Use matches and lighters under adult supervision.

We must also teach parents, teachers and caregivers that matches and lighters should be stored high out of a child's reach. Keep them out of sight and secure (possibly in a locked drawer or cabinet). Remember, constant supervision is the single most important measure necessary to prevent a variety of injuries, including flame burns. If you find your child playing with fire, contact your local Fire Department for assistance.