

or family assistance may be an essential part of helping a child and family. To locate resources in your area, refer to the online “Mental and Behavioral Health Resources” handout.

Coordinated Community Efforts

Use this toolkit to provide youth firesetting prevention education and intervention. The most effective, comprehensive approach is to engage community collaboration and build multidisciplinary partnerships. Refer to the online “Coordinated Community Effort” handout.

Knowledge Assessment

To assess baseline and new knowledge learned, use the Youth Collage and pre-/post-tests available online.

Evaluation

We need your help! To improve this important educational tool, please provide your input at: www.surveymonkey.com/s/Seans-Story

Media Kit

For press release templates to promote awareness on youth fire misuse, to quickly respond to local incidents, and to educate communities about available assistance go to: www.traumaburn.org/Seans-Story

Resources and Professional Training

Visit the website for additional resources on youth fire misuse, signs of fireplay, definitions, intervention programs, mental health assistance, professional training, and future updates in toolkit materials.

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The University of Michigan Trauma Burn Center is an internationally recognized leader in patient care, research, community and professional education, rehabilitation, and injury prevention.

University of Michigan Trauma Burn Center presents

Sean’s Story:

My life torn apart by firesetting

Educator’s Guide



*One Match.
One Choice.
One Lifetime.*

Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention Toolkit



17 minutes/DVD/Color

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What is “Sean’s Story?”

“Sean’s Story” is a nationally acclaimed documentary that has been incorporated into the National Fire Academy/FEMA Youth Firesetting Prevention and Intervention curriculum. Sean, a convicted juvenile arsonist, shares his story so viewers can witness firsthand the life-long negative impact that firesetting can have on youth/parents’ reputation, community acceptance, family relationships, education, career, financial status, legal liability, incarceration, and injury to self and others. Experts from law enforcement, juvenile justice, and healthcare provide insight into fire misuse behavior and consequences that youth and their parents typically do not consider. Firesetting and arson can be reduced in communities by utilizing this national toolkit to increase awareness and provide preventative education. Additionally, youth who misuse fire can be helped with early intervention by using this comprehensive guide to facilitate appropriate and



constructive discussion regarding high-risk behaviors. “Sean’s Story” is a poignant film that explicitly demonstrates the long-term consequences that can occur if fire misuse behavior is minimized, ignored, unrecognized, or untreated.

What Are the Goals of This Toolkit?

1. Increase national awareness of the youth firesetting problem and the need for action.
2. Prevent any type of fire misuse in youth.*
3. Understand the numerous and long-lasting financial, social, legal, future/career, and medical consequences of firesetting.
4. Facilitate appropriate, constructive discussion with youth and their caregivers regarding high-risk behaviors.
5. Encourage change in youth at high risk for misusing fire utilizing best practices, i.e. a supportive and positive approach, *without* the use of scare tactics.
6. Promote professional education and training on youth firesetting.



Who Will Find This Video Toolkit Helpful?

Organizations and professionals committed to youth education and safety, including: schools, fire departments, public educators, law enforcement, mental health, juvenile justice, injury prevention programs, youth assistance, hospitals, medical clinics, community organizations, and social service agencies.

- **What can you do differently so you make good choices regarding fire from now on?** Consider using role-playing so youth can practice their responses to different scenarios and examples of peer pressure.
- **What is your favorite thing to do for fun?** Sports, gaming, music, hanging out with friends, etc. Imagine having those things taken away, not being allowed to do them, and losing your freedom because you were put in jail or juvenile detention (“juvie”). **Sean was locked up when he was 15 years old for 3 years. What does that mean re: not seeing friends or family? Not getting to choose what he can do during the day?** No choice in clothes; No video games, iPod, cell phone, text messaging, Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- **Youth who misuse fire can often have other underlying family, social, or environmental issues or mental health conditions. What were some things in Sean’s life that were potentially affecting him?** Struggling in school; depression; teasing, bullying; troubles at school and home that he didn’t want to talk about, etc.
- **What were lessons that Sean learned?** Per Sean: Being a kid or juvenile isn’t a “free pass;” you can be charged with a crime. The bad choices I made as a kid still impact me as an adult. I was arrested and labeled as an arsonist. I have to try twice as hard to get an education, job, or apartment. I could have injured myself, or others, including police and firefighters responding to the fire. I could have been prosecuted for injuring or killing someone even if I didn’t mean for it to happen. My reputation was ruined. I should have ignored the kids in school and realized what they thought really wasn’t important, I don’t even see any of those kids anymore. I hurt my family and our relationship changed. We all had to pay a high price for my bad choice and mistake. I wish every day that I could take it back, and you can’t.
- **What do you think would work to keep youth from misusing fire?** Allow time for responses, then discuss specific plans for how appropriate ideas can be put into action.



For additional discussion questions and to contribute your ideas go to:
www.traumaburn.org/Seans-Story

Fire Misuse and Locating Counseling Assistance

Youth who misuse fire can have underlying difficulties with social and interpersonal skills, communication, family issues, impulse control, behavioral issues, impaired cognitive functioning, learning disabilities, or mental health conditions such as: Attention Deficit or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Abuse/Neglect, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Depression, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and Conduct Disorder. Mental health evaluation, treatment,

criminal charges, loss of insurance coverage, freezing assets or bank accounts, detention/confinement/jail/prison and paying for the cost of it, etc. Future & Career: school suspension or expulsion, not allowed to graduate, banned from certain jobs or professional licenses, difficulty obtaining jobs or applying to schools, permanent criminal record, etc.

- **What is restitution? What things can be included in restitution compensation?** Making up for wrong that was done; having to pay or compensate for loss, damages, or injuries caused including costs of: medical treatment, lost income, replacement of damaged possessions or property, fire department and EMS response, post-incident investigations, business/school interruptions, etc.
- **Can parents be held liable for acts of their children?** Yes, including the severe financial repercussions of garnishing wages or freezing accounts to pay restitution costs.
- **What was the cost of damages from the fire Sean set? Who is responsible for paying it? How long would it take you to pay that back?** Over \$700,000. Sean and his parents.
- **Who was harmed or affected by Sean’s choice to misuse fire? How were they affected? Who was (or could have been) harmed by your fire misuse behavior?** Numerous people including: Sean, parents, siblings, friends, firefighters, police officers, EMS and first responders, people that could have unknowingly been inside the building, bystanders, students, teachers, community, neighbors, business owners, etc. Fire destroys lives, pets, homes, property, toys, clothes, computers, electronic devices, businesses, and important personal property like photos, albums, and family heirlooms that can never be replaced.
- **What if someone is injured and/or dies as a result of a fire you started?** You may be charged with additional crimes such as murder or homicide. You may also be held responsible for anyone injured while fire, police, and EMS are responding “lights and sirens” to an emergency call scene.
- **Give examples of fire misuse you have seen in video games, movies, TV shows, social media, online videos, or other websites. Allow time to answer. In real life, how could these lead to someone being hurt or property and belongings being damaged?** Discuss how media and games sensationalize fire and influence misconceptions of fire being safe with minimal or no consequences.
- **In what ways do friends, other people, websites, or online videos “pressure” or influence you to participate in risky behaviors with fire? Allow time to answer. Who controls the decisions you make?** Reinforce that youth have individual accountability for their actions. This includes being responsible for inaction and indirect participation like: choosing to be present during fire misuse vs. walking away; observing fire misuse and not discouraging or reporting it.

Preparing for Discussion

Throughout the toolkit, “youth fire misuse”^{**} will be used to describe any behavior involving the improper or unapproved use of fire. While “Sean’s Story” depicts a school arson incident, the video can be used to facilitate discussion regarding the numerous consequences that occur when youth misuse fire.

This video may be appropriate for youth 8-10 years and older, depending upon: a state’s age of culpability, each individual situation, and a child’s developmental level (ability to understand the content). Before using this toolkit, instructors are encouraged to obtain training in youth education and firesetting intervention and/or partner with someone trained in these fields.

It is best practice to use open-ended questions (avoid ones with yes/no answers) to stimulate interactive discussion between educators, youth, and parents/caregivers. The example questions listed below are not in a fixed order. Select ones appropriate for your audience and program length. Listen closely to audience responses to assess participant understanding. Clarify misconceptions or thinking errors youth or parents may express. Use your professional experience to add case examples and expand discussion questions. It is helpful to become familiar with basic arson/fire-related terminology and local/state definitions before leading group sessions. Major themes and key points to reinforce throughout discussion include:

1. Youth have individual responsibility and accountability for their behavior. Foster development of skills in good decision-making, effective problem-solving, impulse control, and social interactions.
2. Discuss the short- and long-term legal, social, and financial consequences of fire misuse in simple age-appropriate language. Use a supportive, positive approach as the use of “scare tactics” is ineffective, does not teach a child about the correct uses of fire, and may be potentially harmful.
3. Recognize the positive and negative influences of media, social media, and peer-pressure. Help youth make specific plans to recognize and overcome sources of negative influences on their decision-making.
4. Identify motives, social/environmental/parental/familial factors, and/or mental health conditions potentially contributing to a youth’s fire misuse behavior. To provide comprehensive intervention, locate local community resources for youth/families to receive needed assistance and services.

^{**}“Fire misuse” includes: juvenile firesetting, fire lighting, child arson, fire play, experimentation, playing with lighter or matches, and other fire-related incidents (e.g. fireworks, explosives or bottle bombs, pulling a false alarm, lighting aerosols or accelerants, observing others misusing fire, etc.). Use of “juvenile firesetter” is discouraged as it negatively labels a child vs. focusing on changing a youth’s behavior.

- Praise youth for showing respect and responsible behavior towards fire.
Encourage parents/caregivers to set a good example by role modeling safe and careful use of matches, lighters, and other fire sources (i.e. never misuse fire as a source of amusement as youth will imitate the behavior they observe).

Introduction – Before Viewing

Explain to the audience the purpose of having them watch the video. Emphasize that what they are about to see is a true story. What happened to Sean as a result of his choice to misuse fire can and does happen to children and teens every day. Our goal is to prevent this from happening to you. *Optional:* Administer the written pre-test or verbally ask some of the test questions.

Example Discussion Questions – After Viewing

Optional: Have viewers complete the “Youth Collage” either using their own fire incident (if applicable) or Sean’s. Complete the post-test.

- What is arson?** In simple terms, arson is the crime of deliberately setting a fire for an unlawful or improper purpose. *Optional:* Use your state, local, or the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) definition. The FBI defines arson as “any willful or malicious burning or attempting to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, personal property of another...”[#]
- What are examples of fires that meet the definition of arson?** The audience will give a variety of answers. The main point is that many fires which youth are involved in could be considered arson, including: being dared or peer pressured to start a fire; experimenting with bottle bombs, fireworks, or other explosive/pressure devices; igniting aerosol sprays or accelerants; setting fires in fields, parks, dumpsters, abandoned buildings, school property, trash cans, etc.
- How serious of a crime is arson? What is a felony? How serious is a felony?** Arson is classified as a felony. A felony is one of the most serious criminal offenses in the U.S. It has severe legal consequences, which can include 1 or more years in prison or capital level punishment. In addition to arson, other crimes considered felonies include: murder, rape, aggravated assault, battery, burglary, drug possession, and espionage. Besides prison, felons can receive added punishments or collateral consequences such as: loss of voting rights; exclusion from certain jobs and professional licenses; denial of firearm purchase/possession; and ineligibility for public office or military service.



[#]U.S. Department of Justice-FBI. Crime in the United States: Uniform Crime Reports 2000 - 2011.

- Can kids be arrested for misusing fire? What if it was only a “practical joke”?** During the past decade, youth <18 years old have accounted for about 50% of all U.S. arson arrests; about 30% are <15 years old, and about 3% are <10 years old.[#] No other FBI index crime has such a high rate of youth involvement. Youth have also been arrested and charged with domestic terrorism or “possession of a substance with explosive capabilities” for “experimentation” and “practical jokes” associated with firesetting and devices like bottle or smoke bombs.
- What age is considered a juvenile?** Legal definitions vary from state to state; provide your jurisdiction’s definition.
- What does “age of culpability” mean? If your state has an age of culpability, what is it?** “Age of criminal responsibility” or the minimum age a person is presumed to be capable of understanding and can be held legally responsible for their actions. In the U.S., individual states determine the minimum age. Under common law in most states the minimum age is 7-10 years; or it isn’t specified, which means it is determined on a case-by-case basis and can be as young as 3-4. *Optional:* Discuss state mandatory or “juvenile waivers” which require youth to be transferred to adult court for the trying and sentencing of certain offenses.
- How are you and Sean different?** Possible responses: He went too far; I wouldn’t do that; I’m not an arsonist; I wouldn’t torch my school; I only set little fires; I’d put the fire out before it got that big; I’m not a “pyro” like he was; I’d be smarter and not get caught; etc. *Be prepared to discuss and redirect misconceptions or thinking errors that are expressed by the audience.*
- How are you and Sean similar?** Possible responses: He was only a kid/ teenager; When he was younger he and friends set fires; He wasn’t trying to hurt anyone; He didn’t know his actions had long-term consequences or that he could go to jail; He damaged someone else’s property; His poor choice affected many people; He didn’t want to talk to an adult about his problems, etc. *Emphasize the key point:* Similar to Sean, many youth make a poor choice to misuse fire without thinking about the consequences. This can lead to several bad outcomes, including being charged with the crime of arson.
- What problems could you and your family face if you misuse fire? What aspects of your life would change if you were charged with arson or domestic terrorism? Name some consequences of misusing fire: Social, Medical, Financial, Legal, & Future/Career?** Choosing to misuse fire sets off an unstoppable chain of events with lasting consequences. Social: public shame, loss of trust, family strain, guilt, disappointment, bad reputation, forbidden to see friends, etc. Medical: burns, other injuries, death, permanent physical or emotional damage. Legal & Financial: restitution, legal/court/lawyer fees,