



FIRE F.R.I.E.N.D.S.
INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR
PARENTS AND GUARDIANS



Dear Parent/Guardian,

The Fire FRIENDS program is a collaboration of community based partners joined together in an effort to reduce the number of deaths, burn injuries, and amount of property destruction caused by juvenile firesetting. Our goal is to reduce the number of juvenile fire incidents by providing free fire safety education to children with an interest in fire or explosives, and to those who have been involved in a firesetting event. In situations where the behaviors or concerns appear to be more serious, the Fire FRIENDS program also offers a referral for a free confidential behavioral health evaluation with an experienced behavioral health professional.

We are confident that you, as a parent, share our concern for the safety of your child, your family, and your community. Our goal is to make available to you the necessary resources to end your child's high risk curiosity and/or involvement with firesetting, fireworks, or explosives. We look forward to working with you in this important mission.

To successfully enroll your child into the Fire FRIENDS program there are three primary steps that must be completed:

1. Provide your signed authorization for the exchange of information between the referring agency and the Fire FRIENDS program by completing Form 1, Authorization for Release. This allows the referring agency to share your enrollment information with the Fire FRIENDS program so that a recommended level of intervention can be determined and we can contact you for scheduling services. You are provided with a copy of the authorization letter. Please sign and date both and send one. If you have not received a copy, you can request one from the referring agency or contact the Fire FRIENDS office directly.
2. Provide the referring agency with your contact information by completing Form 2, the Enrollment Form.
3. Provide the referring agency with basic information about your child's history of firesetting interest and/or behavior by completing Form 3, Initial Fire Evaluation Survey and possibly the Optional Form 4, Juvenile Explosive and Fireworks Screening Scale.

In addition, you may be asked to complete Optional Form 5, Pediatric Symptom Checklist, which is a standard screening form for behavioral health concerns with children. Information from the Pediatric Symptom Checklist can be helpful in making sure juveniles receive the services they need. However, providing this information is not required to enroll in the Fire FRIENDS program.

These steps for enrollment are typically accomplished at a fire station or by the fire investigator who contacted you about your child's firesetting behavior. Based on the information provided to the Fire FRIENDS program about the extent and nature of your child's firesetting behavior(s), we will make recommendations from the following intervention options:

- 1-Hour Individual Fire Safety Education Class

These classes are offered through educators at local fire agencies. If this is the recommended intervention, the Fire FRIENDS program will contact you by telephone to assist in setting up an appointment with an educator from the appropriate fire agency.

- 6-Hour Group Fire Safety Education Class

These more extensive fire safety classes are offered every-other month by the Fire FRIENDS program. Topics include general fire safety, legal implications of firesetting behaviors, victim perspectives, coping with peer pressure, and the potential impact of current behavior on future goals. If recommended, a representative of the Fire FRIENDS program will contact you by telephone to assist you in enrolling in a group fire safety class. A list of dates for upcoming classes can also be found on the Fire FRIENDS website (ocfa.org/firefriends).

- Behavioral Health Evaluation

In some cases, a child's use of fire or explosives may be a symptom of other underlying emotional or behavioral problems. In these circumstances, it can be helpful for the juvenile to receive a behavioral health evaluation to determine if any additional behavioral or counseling resources may be needed. These evaluations involve interviews with a behavioral health professional experienced in the assessment of juvenile firesetting behavior, and typically require two-hours to complete (1 hour with the parent and 1 hour with the juvenile). If this is a recommended intervention for your child, a representative of the Fire FRIENDS program will contact you by telephone to assist in scheduling a behavioral health evaluation.

All of the recommended interventions above are available to you and your child free of charge. Also, if it is not recommended but you believe that your child would benefit from the 6-hour group and/or a behavioral health evaluation, please feel free to contact the Fire FRIENDS office to request the more intensive level of intervention.

In some situations, a fire investigator or the juvenile justice system may require a child to participate in a fire-safety diversion program such as Fire FRIENDS. This requirement is a separate contract between you and the fire agency or court. Although we recommend your child's participation in the Fire FRIENDS as a free and professional means to complete this requirement, you may discontinue services at any time once enrolled.

Should you decide not to complete the Fire FRIENDS program notification will be made to the referring agency for further follow-up. If this diversion class was recommended to satisfy a criminal matter, the case will be referred to the Juvenile Court, by petition, for further disposition. It will be your responsibility to meet with the appropriate agency to bring closure to the matter.

It is our goal and sincere hope that your family's participation in the program will be viewed as a helpful and valuable experience. Keep in mind that all services of the Fire FRIENDS program are offered at no cost to your family. If you have any questions or concerns related to the Fire FRIENDS program, please contact the Program Coordinator at (714) 573-6725.

We sincerely look forward to working with you.



FIRE F.R.I.E.N.D.S. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



What is Fire F.R.I.E.N.D.S.?

An intervention program for children and adolescents demonstrating curiosity and/or behaviors related to firesetting or use of explosives. The goal is to reduce the number of deaths, burn injuries, and amount of property destruction caused by juvenile firesetting behaviors in Orange County. Fire FRIENDS was developed, and continues to be maintained, through a collaboration of community based partners, including Orange County Fire Agencies, Probation Department, District Attorney's office, and various local mental health providers. The primary services offered by Fire FRIENDS include a 6-hour fire safety education class and, in situations where the behaviors appear to be more serious, referral for a confidential behavioral health evaluation with an experienced mental health provider. In situations where the child's behaviors present as simple curiosity, the child and his/her family will generally be referred back to an educator at their local fire agency for a one-hour basic fire-safety education class.

How much does it cost?

All services provided by Fire FRIENDS are free of charge. The comprehensive behavioral health evaluation is also provided at no charge to families.

Do I have to participate?

In some situations, a fire investigator or the juvenile justice system may require a child to participate in a fire-safety diversion program such as Fire FRIENDS. This requirement is a separate contract between you and the fire agency or court. Although we recommend your child's participation in the Fire FRIENDS as a free and professional means to complete this requirement, you may discontinue services at any time once enrolled.

Should you decide not to complete the Fire FRIENDS program notification will be made to the referring agency for further follow-up. If this diversion class was recommended to satisfy a criminal matter, the case will be referred to the Juvenile Court, by petition, for further disposition. It will be your responsibility to meet with the appropriate agency to bring closure to the matter.

How does Fire FRIENDS determine the level of intervention recommended for my child?

The recommended level of intervention is usually determined by the child's history of firesetting behaviors. This information includes the number of all known fireplay incidents, the child's intent of the behavior, and seriousness of the outcomes. This information is gathered during the enrollment process using the Initial Fire Evaluation Survey form. In some cases, additional information from other sources may affect the determination as to what level of intervention is appropriate.

Why am I being asked to complete the Pediatric Symptom Checklist (PSC)?

Sometimes firesetting behaviors are a symptom or indicator of other things that may be going on in the child's life. In these situations the behavior may not be as much about the child's fascination with fire as it is a "call for attention" or "cry for help". Since these potential motivations are not addressed in the Initial Fire Evaluation Survey, the Fire FRIENDS program uses the PSC to try to screen for possible behavioral health concerns that might otherwise be missed. The PSC is a standard screening form that is commonly used by healthcare professionals. Completion of this form is optional for enrollment. However, the information obtained from the PSC allows Fire FRIENDS to recommend a level of intervention that appears to be best suited to the needs of your child.

Does Fire FRIENDS offer additional treatment services such as therapy?No. If it is determined that the child/family may benefit from therapeutic services, a Fire FRIENDS partner will work with the family to obtain these services with other mental health providers outside of Fire FRIENDS. Additionally, the behavioral health professionals contracted by Fire FRIENDS are available to consult with therapists who are providing treatment.

Why do I have to fill out all of these different forms?

The forms included in the enrollment packet each serve a different purpose. The Authorization for Release form allows the person or agency completing the enrollment packet to share your information with the Fire FRIENDS program so that the appropriate level of intervention services can be determined for your child. The Initial Fire Evaluation Survey and Pediatric Symptom Checklist forms are used to determine the level of intervention that will be recommended for your child. This determination is made comparing your responses to pre-established criteria used with all participants. The Confidential Enrollment Form provides your family's basic contact information, which allows Fire FRIENDS to contact you and follow up on our recommendations.

What does it mean when I sign this release?

In order to enroll children in the Fire FRIENDS program, each agency is required to sign an agreement that legally requires them to protect the rights of privacy and confidentiality. By signing the Authorization for Release, you are giving permission to the enrolling agency (i.e. fire department, Probation, etc.) to share your enrollment information so that appropriate services and referrals can be made for your child. This information is primarily communicated to Fire FRIENDS by entering it into a secured web-based database. Once the information is entered into the database, generally only the Fire FRIENDS program administrators will have access to your child and family's information. Any requests for information regarding your child's participation in Fire FRIENDS must come through the program administrators and can only be shared with the agency that enrolled your child and those providing services. Fire FRIENDS will not share your information with any person or agency outside of Fire FRIENDS without written permission from the parent, a subpoena, or a court order. However, Fire FRIENDS may be required by law to report specific information when deemed necessary and in the best interest of the juvenile client.

Who might this information be shared with and what specifically can be shared?

Once enrolled in the database, the only information provided by Fire FRIENDS to the referring agency, is the child's level of participation in the program. This is limited to information about the child's recommended level of intervention, whether or not those interventions have been completed, and dates of completion.

Can I withdraw my release? If so, how?

Yes, your authorization for sharing this information can be revoked at any time. To revoke this authorization, you must submit a signed, written request to Fire FRIENDS Program Administrator, at 1 Fire Authority Road, Irvine, CA 92602. Once the request is received, information can no longer be shared without signed permission from the parent, a subpoena, or a court order.

Does my child have a record as a result of participating in Fire FRIENDS?

Fire FRIENDS is an education based intervention program, not a system for tracking criminal and/or delinquent behaviors. Any criminal record that may exist as a result of an incident involving your child is separate from his/her participation in Fire FRIENDS and would be maintained by the legal entity that investigated (fire service Investigations Department) and/or followed up on the incident (e.g. Juvenile Justice, Probation). While Fire FRIENDS does maintain a file on your child's participation in the program, it is to allow for consistency of services should you request them at a later date and to follow up as necessary. Federal and state law governs confidentiality of these records.