

After the Fire is Out: The Firefighter's Role in Preventing Child-Set Fires

A family, shaken but unhurt, stands at the curb watching you walk toward them from their home. Some smoke still drifts out of a bedroom window. Their son decided to play with some matches, and the fire quickly got beyond his control. But the fire is out. They are safe.

What do you do now? If you just put out the fire and walk away, it could be like leaving the scene with an ember still burning.

There are plenty of ways you can help prevent a future tragedy. Talk with the family about how they can stay safe from fire in the future. Ask whether they have an exit route from their home, and explain the importance of E.D.I.T.H. (Exit Drills In the Home). Talk about the importance of keeping matches and lighters *really* out of reach of children, not just in an unlocked drawer. If they don't have a working smoke detector, make arrangements now to ensure they get one.

Don't rely on just handing them a pamphlet. Take a minute to talk to them and you are more likely to make a real difference.

Parents are more likely to really listen if you tell them the facts without seeming to "lecture" them. Remember, it's all in *how* you say it. Rather than say: "You should supervise your child better," you might explain: "Most people don't know that many fires set by children are set in their own bedrooms. So even though we think our kids are safe at home, we still need to keep an eye on them." If you're a parent yourself, tell them how you can relate to the problems of supervising children.

You can do so much more than just put out fires. You have an incredible opportunity to take advantage of "teachable moments." A family is looking up to you. Fulfill their expectations of you as a "hero" -- by sharing your knowledge of how they can keep their children safe.

For the complete article "After the Fire is Out," by Robert Cole, Robert Crandall and Carolyn Kourofsky in the October 2003 issue of *Firehouse Magazine*, contact us at info@fireproofchildren.com