



FIRElighting Consequence Awareness Program

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Programs background?

During the mid-1980's the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) and the MFB shared concerns for the safety of young people. Too many young people were being badly burned in fires and too many were responsible for actually lighting these fires.

In the early 1990's the Juvenile fire Awareness and Intervention Program (JFAIP) was developed becoming a joint program of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and Country fire Authority (CFA). The foundation of the program is the delivery of a confidential service, by specially trained operational firefighters to 6 -17YO's who engage in fire risk behaviour (FRB).

Change to Victoria's Fire Services on 1st July 2020 saw the implementation of a more modern fire service resulting in the establishment of Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) bringing together MFB and CFA career firefighters to serve Metropolitan Melbourne and major Regional Centres and restoring the CFA to a volunteer firefighter organisation. Over the years terms and definitions used by stakeholders changed. It became very evident the word "juvenile" was worthy of discussion as the term was out-dated and does not reflect the current accepted terminology ascribed by others oriented towards assisting young people.

To ensure the program was consistent with current idiom and government program naming practices, at the same time of MFB transitioning to FRV, the program undertook new name change. To avoid the term 'juvenile' and to reflect current accepted terminology the proposed and accepted new name was endorsed and implemented being "Firelighting Consequence Awareness Program (Fire-CAP)".

What are the aims of the program?

Aims of program is to prevent loss of life, injury and property damage caused by inappropriate FRB by a child/young person, where the firefighter will:

- Assist the primary carer in dealing with the young person's FRB.
- Educate the young person about consequence of fire.
- Educate the young person and family network importance of fire safety.
- Assist young people to take responsibility for their actions.
- Assist young people to take responsibility for fire safety.
- Encourage self-esteem

Why do young people light fires?

Young people, matches and lighters are a deadly mix. So why do young people partake in FRB? There are several reasons:

- **fascinated** by or **curious** about the colour, light and energy released by flames.

- Some young people **seek attention** through firelighting. This may be in response to a change in their family situation or pressures resulting from learning or social difficulties.
- **Peer pressure** is a common cause of firelighting and generally associated with low self-esteem.
- **Anger and revenge** associated with family or friendship problems can trigger fire lighting.
- Fires resulting from **malicious or mischievous behaviour** can be caused by a young person who is experiencing family or social difficulties.
- **Boredom**

Younger children tend to light fires in and around their homes. They rarely intend to cause damage with fire, while the adolescent is more likely to show off, experiment and be more motivated by peers.

What is the eligibility criteria?

No young person is denied access to the program. The program is about helping the young person and modifying their fire risk behaviour, not judging them for any past behaviour.

A young person may be denied access to the program due to the following:

- upon direction of the Programs Consulting Clinical Psychologist or the young person's Allied Health Professional,
- young person being non-educatable i.e. inability to learn and retain a new behaviour,
- young person having a mental health/welfare issue that would increase or heighten their FRB,
- FRB resulted from antisocial behaviour –young person knowingly and directly used their FRB to damage, injure or harm (criminal action)
- result of geographic delivery limitations -remote living

Referrals to the program can be made directly by the primary carer of the young person or through a third party i.e. Fire Service, Allied Health Professionals, Police, Courts or Schools;

NOTE: *in accordance with Fire-CAP's policy all third party referrals will only be accepted if the third party has the primary carer's permission in passing on their details.*

Where is the program conducted?

The Program is generally delivered at the young person's place of residence where the firefighter will work closely with the young person and their family to reduce and control the young person's FRB in and around the home and encourage stronger FSB.

Conducting the program in the place of residence increases the success of the program in that the:

- young person being in a familiar environment may be more engaged as they feel more comfortable and less intimidated by the firefighter's attendance;
- firefighter can observe and intervene in unsafe and risky practices which may assist in reducing the young person's FRB opportunity. They can undertake a fire safety audit with the young person (and primary carer) ensuring the home has appropriate protection, prevention and the family are able to respond to any emergency.

Though the program is promoted as delivered in the place of residence there are times, for the importance of a more effective program delivery and positive outcomes an alternate venue be sourced and used.

What is the cost of the program?

The program is a FREE. Participation is totally voluntary, except where a young person has been referred to the program via the Court or Police as a condition of their sentence for a fire offence.

How's the program conducted?

The young person is visited at their place of residence over a number of sessions. Each session takes about 45 -60 minutes (depending on the young person's attention span) and usually spaced a maximum of 14 days apart.

The program content and approaches vary according to the age and maturity and severity of the fire behaviour of the young person. The first visit is a formal interview followed by the Interventions. During the interventions the firefighter uses a variety of resources which may include role-plays, videos, stories, planned activities and general discussions especially on their own firefighting experiences

The first priority of the firefighter is to establish a good relationship with the young person before any information is presented.

What are the key aspects of Fire-CAP?

A crucial aspect of the program is the development of trust between the firefighter and the young person. This must occur for the program to begin. In partnership, the firefighter, young person and primary carer aim to develop an awareness of fire safety issues in the home and actively work towards a safer home and community environment.

The program consists of three components:

- Trust building -The firefighter aims to develop a positive relationship with the young person through discussions about them and any relevant interest.
- The program (*Syllabus*) -The aim of the syllabus is to increase the young person's understanding of the consequences of fire risk behaviour and increase their fire safe behaviour.

- Positive reinforcement -Throughout the program there is a strong emphasis on providing the young person with positive feedback for non-fire risk behaviour and completed work. This program is totally a positive re-enforcement program and at no stage is graphical information, pictures or videos used.

The young person is free of any recrimination for past deeds in the process

What are the Primary Carer's requirements?

Primary carers are required to be in attendance throughout all firefighter visits. As the firefighter has limited involvement with the young person (on average 2-3 visits), the success of the program is dependent on the support the young person receives from their primary carer(s) by

- encouraging any fire safe behaviour strategies set by the firefighter,
- assisting in maintaining a fire safety environment in and around the home or place of residence,
- providing good supervision and positive role modelling,
- limiting ignition sources (where possible) and flammables and
- continually reminding the young person fire is a tool not a toy.

In conducting the program in the home environment the primary carer should ensure the room is:

- conducive to an intervention/education session;
- equipped with a working TV/DVD player to play DVDs;
- free of distractions, this includes:
- personal electronic devices being turned off or removed; and
- no other children being in the room.

Can the firefighter who attends deal with my child's other behavioural problems?

The firefighter can't do it all. We are only there for the FRB. The firefighter can assist in support and provide advice on other external family services that can assist with other behavioural problems. There are three levels to dealing with FRB:

1. Fire Service only —providing Fire Safety Education (FSE).
2. Integrated approach (Fire Service and Allied Health Professional –providing assistance with emotional, psychological or behavioural concerns)
3. Tandem approach where either Allied Health Professional or FSE are involved in order of priority (where it is anticipated Allied Health Professional be required first)

As it is not uncommon for the young person with fire risk behaviour to have a learning difficulty, social or behaviour problems, the best practice to reducing a young person's fire risk behaviour may require a multi-disciplinary approach i.e. firefighter (dealing with the fire risk behaviour) and the young person's Allied Health Professional (treating the young person's other behavioural issues) working together

In the meantime, what can the primary carer do to prevent/reduce a young person's FRB?

We recommend those supporting the young person(s) can start building the foundations and transitioning the young person from their FRB to being more responsible with fire by;

1. Explaining “*why*” fire is a tool - NOT a toy by building “*knowledge*” about the consequences of fire and raising their fire safety knowledge by discussing:
 - Fire is used for cooking and heating.
 - All fires can spread quickly.
 - Fire is dangerous - **it can kill and destroy.**
2. Promote staying “*safe*”; good supervision & positive role modelling is the most effective method of developing FSB.
 - good supervision will reduce the opportunity to undertake any further FRB.
 - Our young will learn to be fire safe from and watching their peers, family, friends, television and media. Modelling FSB may actively teach and reinforce safe skills.
3. Establish danger “*recognition*”. Teach the young person to report hazards so dangerous situations or hazards can be removed or fixed. These include:
 - Pointing out unattended matches or lighters; dispose of them together and reward them for their honesty.
 - Separating flammable liquids and combustible materials from ignition sources.
4. Build trust with “*responsibility*”. A weekly role will develop self-confidence and self-esteem in the young person.
5. Work “*together*” creating and maintaining fire safety, we encouraged the importance of fire safe environments which includes but not limited to:
 - having working Smoke Alarms.
 - preparing and practicing a home escape plan
 - having a safe meeting place
 - calling 000 and what to say
 - ensure the young person is always supervised around fire and heating appliances to reduce the opportunity of playing with the fire.
 - Matches and lighters should be out of reach and locked away, just as you lock away medicines, cleaning fluids and other dangerous household products.
6. Have clear and consistent home safe fire and unsafe fire rules and follow through with consequences if these rules are broken.

Every day, Fire-CAP helps families to become more fire safe. Take action if you notice matches or lighters missing or amongst the young person's belongings; you discover burnt matches or paper, burn marks on toys, carpet or household items. This indicates the young person already understands how to light fires.