

Playing With Fire?

It will melt your marshmallows and glow brightly on your birthday cake. But did you know that even a very small fire can get out of control and burn down a whole house? Or that many fires are started by kids?

Fire moves very fast. A fire can burn down a building in minutes. And one burning house can set other houses on fire. Fire isn't just dangerous inside. Outdoors, burning piles of leaves or grass can get out of control. Campfires also can lead to bigger fires if they're not put out all the way.

Little kids often play with fire because they're curious and they don't understand how much damage fire can do. If you see a younger kid playing with matches, candles, or any type of fire, get an adult right away!

*Older kids also might be tempted to touch a lit candle or light something on fire, just to see what will happen. **Don't do it!** Kids who play with fire can end up burning themselves, hurting other people, and destroying important things, like homes and woods. If you see a kid playing with fire — even an older one — tell an adult. And if you ever feel like you can't stop yourself from playing with fire, let a grownup know so he or she can help you.*

Fire can be cozy and fun to watch, but only in a controlled situation. Think of a campfire, a fireplace on a winter night, or a professional fireworks display.

Why Fire Fascinates

Fire is a tool and a fascinating one. It's a basic element, like earth, air, and water. Fire is energy. In fact, it's a chemical reaction happening right in front of your eyes. It needs fuel and oxygen to burn, but once it starts burning, it doesn't stop until it runs out of one or both of them. That's what makes it both valuable and dangerous.

If you start by burning a stick in the woods and then you drop that stick, that flame will keep burning as long as there's fuel (more sticks, leaves, dry grass, etc.) and oxygen (there's plenty of that in the air!).

So steer clear of fires and follow these safety tips:

- *Never use a stove, fireplace, or candle without a grownup there to help you. And be careful around hot spots like these because if you get too close, your clothes can catch on fire.*
- *Lamps, heaters, and radiators get hot when they're turned on, so don't touch them. Also never put clothes or blankets on top of one, even as part of a game.*
- *Don't play with light switches, electrical cords, or outlets. Check with an adult to be sure you don't have too many things plugged into the same extension cord or power strip.*

For many thousands of years, fire has cooked food, warmed people, and, unfortunately, destroyed stuff and hurt people. It's always been interesting to look at, too. So the next time you gaze into a roaring fireplace, remember that many generations of people have enjoyed that very same sight. Just enjoy it safely and you won't get burned!

Reviewed by: W. Douglas Tynan, PhD

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