

"Stop, Drop and Roll" For Your Young Child?

Written by Kathy Foye

Is it unreasonable to think we can teach young children about fire safety? Do they even understand what fire is and what the dangers are? What about "stop, drop and roll?"

Since the #1 cause of fire-related deaths to children under five (in the U.S.) is **children** playing with fire, there is a concern and a need to teach fire safety to all children, starting at age three. Children as young as two years old have started fires! Between the years 2001 and 2003 in the U.S., the age of children who started the **most number** of fires causing damage to property is **five years old!**

It is difficult to know what to say to a young child so that she doesn't become afraid. Using play as a way to teach fire safety works well with younger children. Here are some tips when talking with young children (three years and older) about fire safety:

1. Firefighters Are Our Friends!

- **Take your child to a firehouse and introduce him to the firefighters.**

Firefighters love to show children the fire trucks and their fire gear. It is important that children know there is a friendly person under all that gear!



- **Use the word "strange" – NOT scary – when talking about the gear.**
Explain the firefighter's "funny looking" uniform is made to protect him against heat and fire and that the mask is to help him breathe if there is smoke. These ideas are important if a firefighter should ever have to rescue your child.
Hopefully she won't be as afraid to go to that person with the "strange" uniform!
- **Talk about other professionals who wear uniforms in their jobs.**

2. Stop, Drop and Roll!

You can make this a game! Be sure your child can do all of this without help. Then, every once in a while, call out "Stop, drop and roll!" **Everyone** in the house is supposed to stop, drop and roll! Try to play this game from time to time. It is more likely she will be able to stop, drop and roll without thinking about it if she does it enough times to become familiar with it.

- **Explain there may be a time when fire "gets on" their clothes.**
Young children might not understand the concept of their clothes "catching" on fire. They are more likely to realize what it means to have fire to "get on" their clothes.
- **Stop!**
If fire ever "gets on" their clothes, they need to stop right where they are – don't run to tell Mom or Dad. After the fire is gone, then tell Mom or Dad what happened.
- **Drop!**
Show your child how to cover her eyes with her hands then fall to the floor or ground. Tell her she doesn't have to look for a place where there isn't anything on the floor. It is more important that she stop the fire that is on her clothes.

➤ **Roll!**

Demonstrate rolling in a complete circle in one direction, and then do the same in the other direction. Have her count as you roll in each direction five times. Then look to make sure there is no more fire.

3. Crawl Low Under Smoke!

Smoke is the first sign of fire and it quickly gets thick and dark. It is important to stay under the smoke so you can see and breathe while you crawl to safety.



➤ **Crawl to safety with your child.**

Again, this can be done as a game. From time to time place an item that you can pretend is fire in a room in your home. When you come across this “fire” you can both get down onto the floor and crawl to the “safe place” that is in your fire escape plan. Practice this from different rooms in the home and practice often.

4. Safe For Play or Keep Away?

Your child understands that it is OK to play with their toys, so they need to be taught what is NOT a toy. Basically, anything that is hot or produces heat is not a toy.

➤ **Teach your child the difference between “kids’ toys” and “adult toys.”**

This is a picture game. Make a set of photos and/or pictures (drawn or cut from a magazine) of items that can cause fire. Have another set of pictures of childrens’ toys. On a large piece of paper, write “Kids’ Toys” on one side and “Adults’ Toys” on the other side. Mix the pictures together into one pile and have the child tell you which side of the paper the picture should be stuck to.



Visit the *play safe! be safe!* website at www.playsafebesafe.com for more information.

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