

# Tools or Toys?

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Well, which ones are toys and which ones are cigarette lighters? Take a guess! Lighters manufactured to look like toys are alarming when you realize that curious children might find these and attempt to play with them. Although the lighters are “child resistant”, we all know how resourceful children can be when they want to figure out how something works. The truth is that ALL of the above items are part of a group of hundreds of “novelty lighters” available for sale in stores and on the internet.

## Children and Fireplay

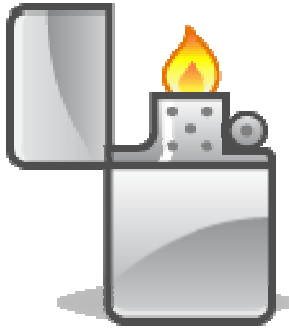
According to the most recent data from the U.S. Fire Administration’s National Fire Data Center, children’s fireplay resulted in over 42,000 fires, causing an estimated 165 civilian deaths, 1900 civilian injuries and \$272 million in direct property damage.

Roughly three out of every four children experiment with fire. Those fires are most often started by matches and lighters, although lighters contribute more often than matches.

## Child Fire Victims

The median age of children who started fires by experimentation was 5 years old. The number of fire injuries and deaths is also highest for children under age 5. They typically depend on others for safety and for escaping from a fire. They lack the proper maturity to understand how to protect themselves or the need to quickly escape a burning structure.

Physiologically, a young child’s skin is quite thin compared to adults and older children. As a result, they can suffer deep burns more rapidly.



## Fire and burn prevention

There are three important steps parents can take to prevent children from playing with matches and lighters.

- Education
- Supervision
- Storage



### Education

Teach children the difference between “tools” that only grown-ups use, and “toys” that are safe for children to play with. Help them to recognize matches and lighters as tools that adults use to light candles, fireplaces, campfires, etc. Do not allow children under 5 years to handle any matches or lighters. If they find matches or lighters, teach them to TELL a grown-up where they found them, and let the adult retrieve them. Teach them that matches or lighters could hurt them if they play with them.

### Supervision

Young children are curious and like to imitate adults. If they have witnessed an adult lighting candles on a birthday cake; lighting a grill; lighting a fire in a woodstove, they may just decide they want to “surprise you” and do it themselves. Avoid lighting matches or lighters when children are present. If a friend or relative is visiting and has matches or lighters in a purse or pocket, it is possible the child will find them. While you visit, it’s a perfect time for them to “play”. Hang coats or purses in a closet and close the door. Supervise carefully!

### Storage

It is important to keep matches and lighters stored up high and safely out of the reach of children. A locked metal box or a can with a tight-fitting lid is preferable, even if you are a smoker. Children are naturally curious and can find lighters or matches that are left in pockets or drawers of end tables or nightstands. If you don’t have any matches or lighters in YOUR home, remember that friends or relatives may have them in theirs. **Never purchase novelty lighters that can be mistaken for toys.**



### Parent/Child Activity

Have your child point to each picture and tell you if it is a tool or a toy. Explain that tools are for grown-ups to use. Children should never use grown-up tools without asking first. Point to the lighter and the match at the top of the page. Remind children that they are tools, not toys. For a math activity, let your child count the tools and the toys.