

FIRE SAFE ZONE

An Interactive Board Game for Children

by

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“We need a tool to engage children, a tool to help children talk about their fire setting behavior, and a tool to involve parents.”

We hear this sentiment often from fire personnel and other community interventionists who are eager to address the needs of children who misuse fire. In 2006, a team of licensed mental health professionals began developing a board game designed to address some of the specific needs of children who have misused fire. The result is *FIRE SAFE ZONE*, an interactive board game that addresses the issues of fire safety, encourages children to talk about feelings, and gives children the chance to practice decision making skills. The game teaches children to make connections between behavior and consequences.

FIRE SAFE ZONE is intended to be an easy to use and fun to play therapeutic game. In the course of the game children are exposed to numerous hypothetical situations in which they must generate or choose a solution to common problems or experiences they may be exposed to in their daily lives. Many items focus on fire safety and making safe choices about fire. Other items are designed to help children express feelings, learn problem-solving skills and explore the perspectives of others. The game can be played with children individually, with their families, and in small groups.

Play is a natural way for children to express themselves. The use of board games has been an effective tool for children to learn and practice skill related to a variety of emotional/behavioral issues such as anger management, bullying and social skills. Charles E. Schaefer and Steven E. Reid in *Game Play: Therapeutic Use of Childhood Games* (2001) discuss the advantages of using game play in the clinical and school-based therapeutic interventions with children and teens. They suggest that most children with self-control problems have experienced failure in academic and social arenas. They cite that games “offer an opportunity for impulsive children to acquire concrete regulatory skills utilizing an enjoyable and intrinsically motivating format.”

Jill Bellinson, in *Children’s Use of Board Games in Psychotherapy* (2002), discusses how board games contribute to the real world of child work. *FIRE SAFE ZONE* was field tested by the Bend Fire Department for eighteen months. They have described the game as “an invaluable tool, a way to engage the child’s interest, a fun method of teaching, and a way to engage the family.”

The game is now featured on the *FireSmartKids* website at www.firesmartkids.com. The game board and sample game cards can be viewed on the website www.safetyzonellc.com.