

A firefighter in silhouette is shown from the back, looking towards a large, intense fire at night. The fire is bright orange and yellow, with thick smoke rising. The firefighter is wearing a helmet and gear. The scene is dramatic and emphasizes the danger of fire.

**LYNDA'S FIRE
SAFETY EDUCATION
PROGRAM**

**Whatchya
Gonna
Do?**

There's an old saying telling us that experience makes the best teacher. For Lynda Rae Fraser, that has certainly been the case. Lynda was seriously burned in 1983 when she ran into an apartment fire to rescue her five-year-old son. She suffered burns to 80% of her body, with the most extensive burns being on her face, hands, arms and back. Her son Adam had less extensive burns as a result of a quick thinking neighbour who immediately put him in a tub of cool water. In 1984, Lynda began a campaign to teach the general public about fire safety and burn awareness, and to promote acceptance of burn survivors. These days, Lynda works for the Canadian Burn Foundation and visits schools across Alberta to discuss the issue of fire safety. She visits approximately 150 schools a year, speaking to kids of all ages.

When she is working with younger kids, Lynda keeps the presentation pretty basic. She advises them to stay low if there is a fire because the smoke rises, and she also lets them know they need to get out of the house the second the smoke detector or fire alarm goes off. "I really stress the fact that they don't have time to go back for their toys or books," says Lynda. Having an escape route planned out beforehand is very important, as kids will know how to get out in case of an emergency. It's a good idea to have primary and secondary exits - depending on where the fire is in the house. Another point Lynda stresses is the importance of having a designated meeting place outside the house. She tells us that "over the years I've met a number of people who have been burned when they rushed back into a house to save a family member who was already safe outside. If a family has a designated meeting place, these kinds of tragedies can be avoided."



Lynda Rae Fraser captures a class's attention!



LEADING CAUSES OF FIRES

The three leading causes of house fires in Canada are kitchen fires, candle fires and smoking-related fires. The vast majority of these fires can be avoided if people take proper precautions. For starters, don't leave food unattended on the stove. If you are cooking, that is all you should be doing. Do not talk on the phone, watch TV or attempt to multi-task - just pay attention to what's on the stove.

If you have a candle burning, don't leave the room without blowing it out. Any number of things could happen while you are away: a pet might knock the candle over; a sudden wind might blow flammable curtains towards the candle; or the candle holder might crack from the heat. Even if you are just answering the phone or going to the bathroom, make sure any candles are extinguished before leaving the room.



Never allow anyone in your household to smoke in bed. When people fall asleep with a lit cigarette, the results are often fatal.

Always ensure that cigarettes are fully extinguished before throwing them out. It's a good idea to soak down an ashtray before throwing the ashes out.

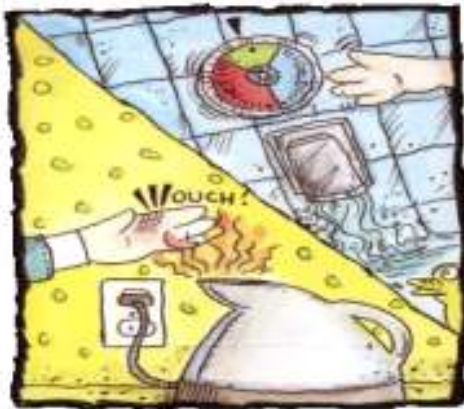
Don't leave matches and lighters out where kids can reach them, or even **see** them! Lynda tells us that "parents will often leave matches on top of the fridge. But youngsters can be pretty creative and pretty determined. If they see them up there, chances are they will find a way to get them down. It makes more sense to keep matches and lighters out of sight in your pockets or in a locked cabinet."

SCALDING

Twice as many children are admitted to hospital for scalding as are admitted for burns. Most incidents of scalding happen to children under the age of five. Their skin is much thinner and can be damaged more easily.

Youngsters this age are naturally curious, and they crawl around a lot, so anything that is in their reach is a potential scald hazard. You can reduce the risk by keeping hot dishes out of reach on the back burners, and by ensuring the handles on pots face towards the back of the stove. Lynda adds that "a lot of parents let their toddlers play with pots and pans on the floor of the kitchen. Youngsters this age can't understand the difference between "safe" pots on the floor and "dangerous" pots on the stove - so it's important to find playthings that won't put your kids in jeopardy!"

Try using back burners instead of the front ones and make sure pot handles are turned IN to keep hot stuff away from grabby little hands!



Another common cause of scalding comes from tap water that is too hot. If children are left unaccompanied in the bathroom, they might turn on the wrong tap and harm themselves. Or perhaps a parent or babysitter forgets to test the temperature of the water before putting the child in it. "A good way to avoid this is by turning the water heater down to the medium level," says Lynda. "The water will still be hot enough to shower and wash your dishes, but it won't be hot enough to scald a child."

TREATING A BURN

The best thing you can do for most burns and scalds is to treat them with cool water. Lynda points out that "my son and I suffered similar burns in our apartment fire, but his injuries ended up being much less severe than mine as he was doused in cool water immediately."

A lot of people immediately put ointment on a burn, but this can actually make the burn more severe. Lynda adds that "when you do this, you trap the heat in and keep it from escaping. It makes much more sense to run cool water over the burn for about fifteen minutes as that will give it time to cool off."

As a general rule, any burn larger than the palm of your hand needs to be seen by a doctor. The bigger the area that is burned, the more chance it can get infected. Once a burn becomes infected, the damage to the skin goes a lot deeper.

STOP, DROP & ROLL

The most basic way to deal with a fire on your body or clothing is to 'stop, drop and roll.' This will help to extinguish the flames. Lynda tells us that "most kids are familiar with the phrase *stop, drop and roll*, but that doesn't mean they are doing the action correctly. I always have youngsters practice when I do a demonstration so I can show them how to do it properly. Many kids will curl up their legs when they roll, and I let them know their legs need to be out straight. Some kids roll **really** fast, and I point out that they need to move more slowly the part of the body that's on fire needs to come in contact with the ground

in order to extinguish the flames. Kids may also keep rolling in a straight direction and they can't see where they are going. I advise them to roll in one direction, then roll back. This minimizes the chance of rolling off a staircase, or accidentally rolling into something that is extremely flammable. And finally, I always tell kids to cover their eyes and face with their hands when they are rolling. This minimizes the chance of permanent damage to their eyes, and also reduces their chances of suffering from smoke inhalation."

STOP-DROP-ROLL

If your clothes catch fire, remember...



STOP!

Don't run - it will make the fire worse!
Protect your face



DROP!

Get down onto the floor!



ROLL!

With your arms above your head, roll over and back - this will put out the flames!



Practise STOP - DROP - ROLL,
so that you won't panic if your clothes ever catch fire.

BEING PREPARED

Part of Lynda's presentations focus on what to do after a fire or emergency - but she also stresses the fact that it makes a lot more sense to take steps which will help you avoid these situations in the first place.

Chemicals - There are a number of household chemicals that can cause serious burns if they come in contact with the skin. Many of these chemicals can be washed off with water but in some instances, water will only make the burn worse. How do you know what to do in case of an emergency? Read the label **before** using any toxic chemical. If it is a potentially dangerous substance (like oven cleaners, toilet bowl cleaners or bleach), there should be instructions on the label telling you what to do if first-aid is required. This way, you will know how to respond if an accident occurs, and you aren't left frantically trying to read the label after you've been burned. When dealing with these sorts of chemicals, it's also a good idea to minimize your exposure by wearing gloves, safety goggles and a mask over your nose and mouth.



Change your batteries
twice a year - at
daylight savings time

Smoke Detectors - When we go to sleep, our sense of smell also goes to sleep, so smoke from a fire isn't going to wake us up. Loud noises will wake us up, though, and that's why it's important to have smoke detectors strategically located throughout your house. Far too many burns and fatalities occur when smoke detectors aren't working properly. Lynda knows this from personal experience as the battery in her apartment's smoke detector had gone dead when she was burned back in 1983. She tells us that "it's a good idea to change the batteries in your smoke detector twice a year. A good way to remember when the batteries need changing is to tie it into daylight savings time; when you move your clocks forward or back, change the batteries in your smoke detector at the same time."

Fire Extinguishers - Fire extinguishers can be very valuable pieces of equipment **if** they are working properly, and **if** they are used properly. Many people are lulled into a false sense of security because they've got a fire extinguisher in their home. They might have it stored '*somewhere*' underneath the sink - but it isn't much use if they can't locate it immediately. They don't want to be digging through cluttered cupboards while a fire is burning. If the fire extinguisher has been sitting in the cupboard for ten years, there's also a good chance it has lost its charge and is no longer effective. Most extinguishers need to be re-charged or replaced after a few years.

Fire extinguishers typically only have a very small charge and are only good for a few seconds once they are activated. A small fire extinguisher designed for residential use might be emptied in as little as two seconds! This may be enough to deal with a small stove fire, but it certainly isn't adequate for anything bigger than that.

Remember!



One important point to consider is **how** to actually use a fire extinguisher. Lynda notes that "there was a fire in the kitchen of an Alberta school some years ago, and the teachers who put out the fire had to spend several seconds reading the instructions since none of them had ever used a fire extinguisher before." If you work in an environment where you might need to use a fire extinguisher, it's a good idea to take a training class offered by the fire department. This can teach you how to use the extinguisher properly, and can also give you a good idea as to whether or not that one fire extinguisher will be big enough to extinguish the fire.

Another important point to consider is **which** type of fire extinguisher to use for different fires. There are three basic classes of fire extinguishers: type A, which can be used for wood/paper fires; type B, which can be used for flammable liquids, oils and grease; and type C, which can be used for electrical fires. If you have an electrical fire, you don't want to use a type "A" extinguisher that uses compressed water because water conducts electricity, and this kind of extinguisher might actually end up electrocuting you! If you buy a fire extinguisher for your home, it's best to have an ABC model that can be used to fight all three classes of fire.

Creating Awareness and Acceptance

An important part of Lynda's presentation involves creating awareness and acceptance of people who have suffered burns. "Having a chance to meet me and speak with me allows young kids to become a lot more comfortable," says Lynda. "They realize they have nothing to fear just because I look different. I let them ask questions about my burns, and I tell them that asking questions in a sensitive manner is a lot more polite than staring and pointing. When we don't talk about things, they can become pretty scary and intimidating. But when we talk about them, and bring them out in the open, they become just another part of life."

Lynda's example also sets a great role-model for teenage girls who might be suffering from image problems and obsessing about the way they look. "I like the way I look," says Lynda. "I'm very comfortable with who I am. If I'm okay with how I look, then other people are going to be okay with it as well. Those of us who've suffered burns still have the same feelings and emotions as anyone else. We are all human beings, and the best piece of advice I can give you is to treat others like you would want to be treated yourself."

Advances in medical technology and research make it possible to save the lives of people with ever more extensive burns.

"You take what's happened to you, and you turn it into a positive thing."

Officer Jason Schechterle suffered fourth-degree burns to his hands and face when his patrol car was hit from behind by a taxi and exploded in flames in 2001.

Darla Hansen lit a match from her mom's purse and dropped it on her pajamas igniting them and burning 85% of her body. She is now a physiotherapist.

