

Sleepover fire safety for kids

Is your child safe staying overnight at a friend's home? NFPA offers a free [Sleepover Checklist](#) to help parents answer that age-old question, "Mom, can I sleep over at Dana's house?"

Think upset tummies and lack of sleep are the biggest risks when your child is spending the night at his or her friend's house? "Think again," says Judy Comoletti, NFPA's assistant vice president for public education. "Before you permit your child to sleep over with a friend, talk to the child's parents. Depending on what you learn, it can either uncover serious fire dangers or give you peace of mind during your child's sleepover."

Ms. Comoletti says that eight out of 10 fire deaths take place in the home, with the majority of home fire deaths occurring late at night. "If you don't know for certain that the friend's home is equipped with working smoke alarms, and that the sleepover will be supervised by an adult, don't take the risk; reverse the invitation and have the sleepover at your own home," she adds.

NFPA recommends teaching children about the importance of fire escape planning in a positive, non-threatening style. "Ideally, your child is already well versed in home fire escape planning and drills in your own home. Before you permit a sleepover at a friend's, discuss the importance of knowing how to escape from a fire wherever you are, including friends' homes." Ms. Comoletti also urges parents to empower children to ask friends and their parents about fire safety in their home, and to report to you anything that makes them feel unsafe.

"And when it's your turn to have other children stay overnight in your home, make sure they know what your home's fire escape plan is," Ms. Comoletti adds.

NFPA offers this [Sleepover Checklist](#) to help parents and caregivers consider the hazards, and make decisions about slumber parties and sleepovers.

Sleepover checklist

NFPA offers this checklist to help parents and caregivers consider the hazards, and make decisions about slumber parties and sleepovers.

"Before you permit your child to sleep over with a friend, talk to the child's parents," says Judy Comoletti, NFPA's assistant vice president for public education. "Depending on what you learn, it can either uncover serious fire dangers or give you peace of mind during your child's sleepover."

Before you say "yes"

- How well do you know the home?
- Is the home clean? Does it appear to be structurally sound?
- Is the home in a safe area?
- If the home has security bars on doors and windows, do you know for certain that the bars have quick release devices inside, so your child could get out in an emergency?
- Is your child comfortable in the home and with all the occupants?
- Are you comfortable leaving your child in the home overnight?

How well do you know the parent(s)?

- Are they mature, responsible and conscientious?
- Will they supervise the children throughout the stay?
- Will they remain sober and attentive?
- Are they cautious with smoking materials, matches and lighters, and candles?

Ask the parents

- Are there working smoke alarms on every level, throughout their home?

- Do they have a well-rehearsed fire escape plan that includes two ways out and a meeting place outside?
- Where will your child be sleeping? Is there a smoke alarm in or near the room? Are there two escape routes from the room?
- Will the parents walk through their escape plan with your child?
- Do the parents prohibit bedroom candle use by children?

Tell the parents...

- about your home escape plan and the fire protection equipment you have in your home.
- that you will walk their child through your plan when invited to stay overnight in your home.

Does your child...

- recognize and awaken to the sound of the smoke alarm? **Important:** If not, tell the sleepover parents that your child does not waken to the smoke alarm and that someone will have to wake them in an emergency.
- know what to do when the smoke alarm sounds?
- know that he or she cannot hide from fire and that the top priority is to get out and stay out until firefighters say it is safe to go back inside?
- know the fire department emergency number?
- feel empowered to ask about the friends' escape plan?
- feel empowered to tell you if there is a dangerous practice or situation at the friends' home?



Install smoke alarms correctly and test them regularly

Because fire can grow and spread so quickly, having working smoke alarms in your home can mean the difference between life and death. But these life-saving devices are only effective when they're working properly. Smoke alarms with batteries that are dead, disconnected, or missing can't alert you to the dangers of smoke and fire. Follow these tips to ensure that your smoke alarms are installed correctly and tested regularly.

Once the alarm sounds, you may have as few as two minutes to escape. By learning how to effectively use the smoke alarm's early warning to get out safely, you'll reduce your risk of dying in a home fire.

The right way to install smoke alarms

- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement, making sure that there is an alarm outside every separate sleeping area. New homes are required to have a smoke alarm in every sleeping room and all smoke alarms must be interconnected.
- Hard-wired smoke alarms operate on your household electrical current. They can be interconnected so that every alarm sounds regardless of the fire's location. This is an advantage in early warning, because it gives occupants extra time to escape if they are in one part of the home and a fire breaks out in another part. Alarms that are hard-wired should have battery backups in case of a power outage, and should be installed by a qualified electrician.
- If you sleep with bedroom doors closed, have a qualified electrician install interconnected smoke alarms in each room so that when one alarm sounds, they all sound.
- If you, or someone in your home is deaf or hard of hearing, consider installing an alarm that combines flashing lights, vibration and/or sound.
- Mount smoke alarms high on walls or ceilings (remember, smoke rises). Ceiling mounted alarms should be installed at least four inches away from the nearest wall; wall-mounted alarms should be installed four to 12 inches away from the ceiling.
- If you have ceilings that are pitched, install the alarm near the ceiling's highest point.
- Don't install smoke alarms near windows, doors,

- or ducts where drafts might interfere with their operation.
- Never paint smoke alarms. Paint, stickers, or other decorations could keep the alarms from working.

A life-saving test: check your smoke alarms regularly

- Test your smoke alarms once a month, following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Replace the batteries in your smoke alarm once a year, or as soon as the alarm "chirps" warning that the battery is low. Hint: schedule battery replacements for the same day you change your clocks from daylight savings time to standard time in the fall.
- Never "borrow" a battery from a smoke alarm. Smoke alarms can't warn you of fire if their batteries are missing or have been disconnected.
- Don't disable smoke alarms even temporarily. If your smoke alarm is sounding "nuisance alarms," try relocating it farther from kitchens or bathrooms, where cooking fumes and steam can cause the alarm to sound.
- Regularly vacuuming or dusting your smoke alarms, following the manufacturer's instructions, can keep them working properly.
- Smoke alarms don't last forever. Replace yours once every 10 years. If you can't remember how old the alarm is, then it's probably time for a new one.
- Consider installing smoke alarms with "long-life" (10-year) batteries.
- Plan regular fire drills to ensure that everyone knows exactly what to do when the smoke alarm sounds. Hold a drill at night to make sure that sleeping family members awaken at the sound of the alarm. Some studies have shown that some children may not awaken to the sound of the smoke alarm. Know what your child will do before a fire occurs.
- If you are building a new home or remodeling your existing home, consider installing an automatic home fire sprinkler system. Sprinklers and smoke alarms together cut your risk of dying in a home fire 82 percent relative to having neither – a savings of thousands of lives a year.
- For more information, read NFPA's smoke alarm fact sheet.