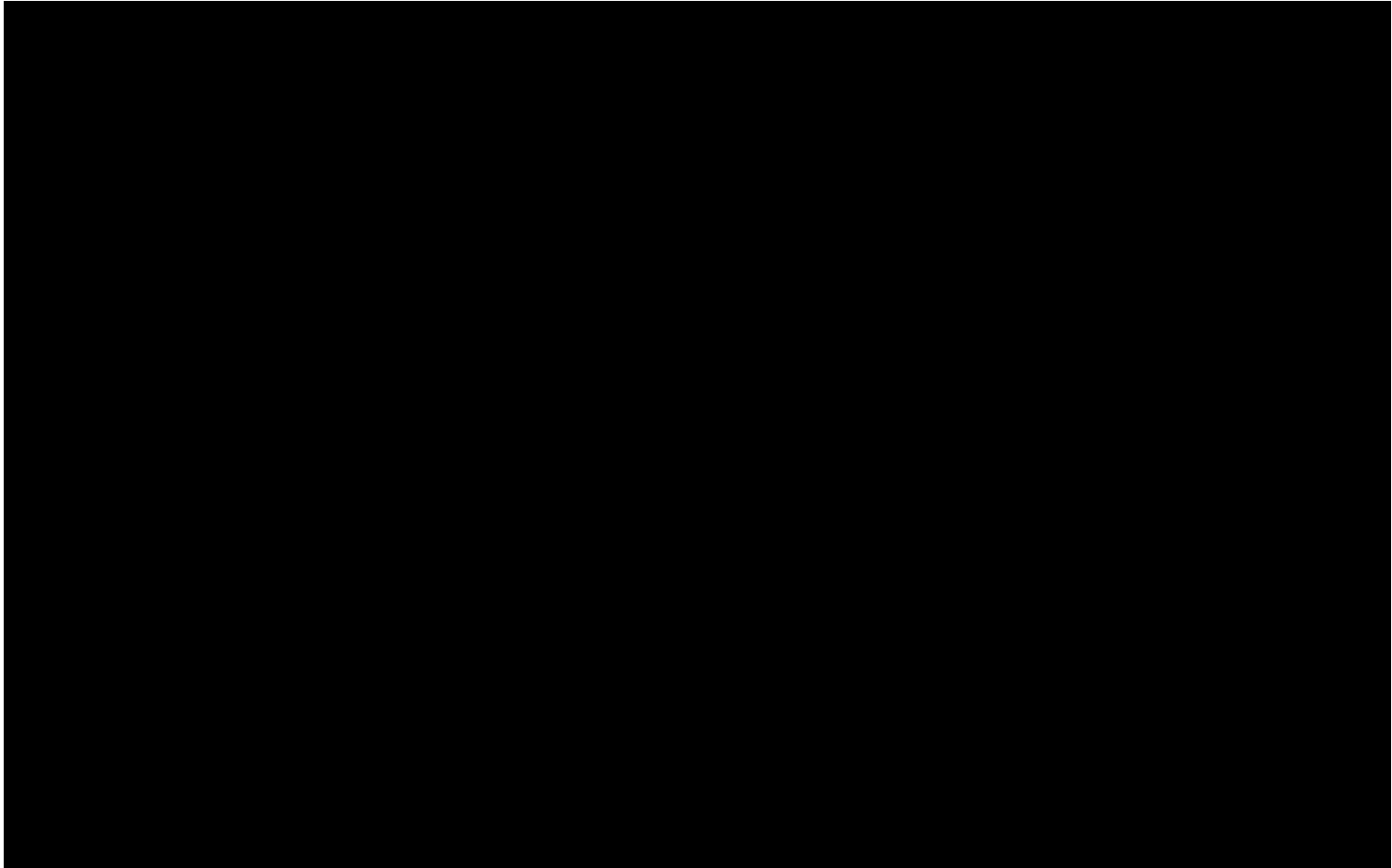




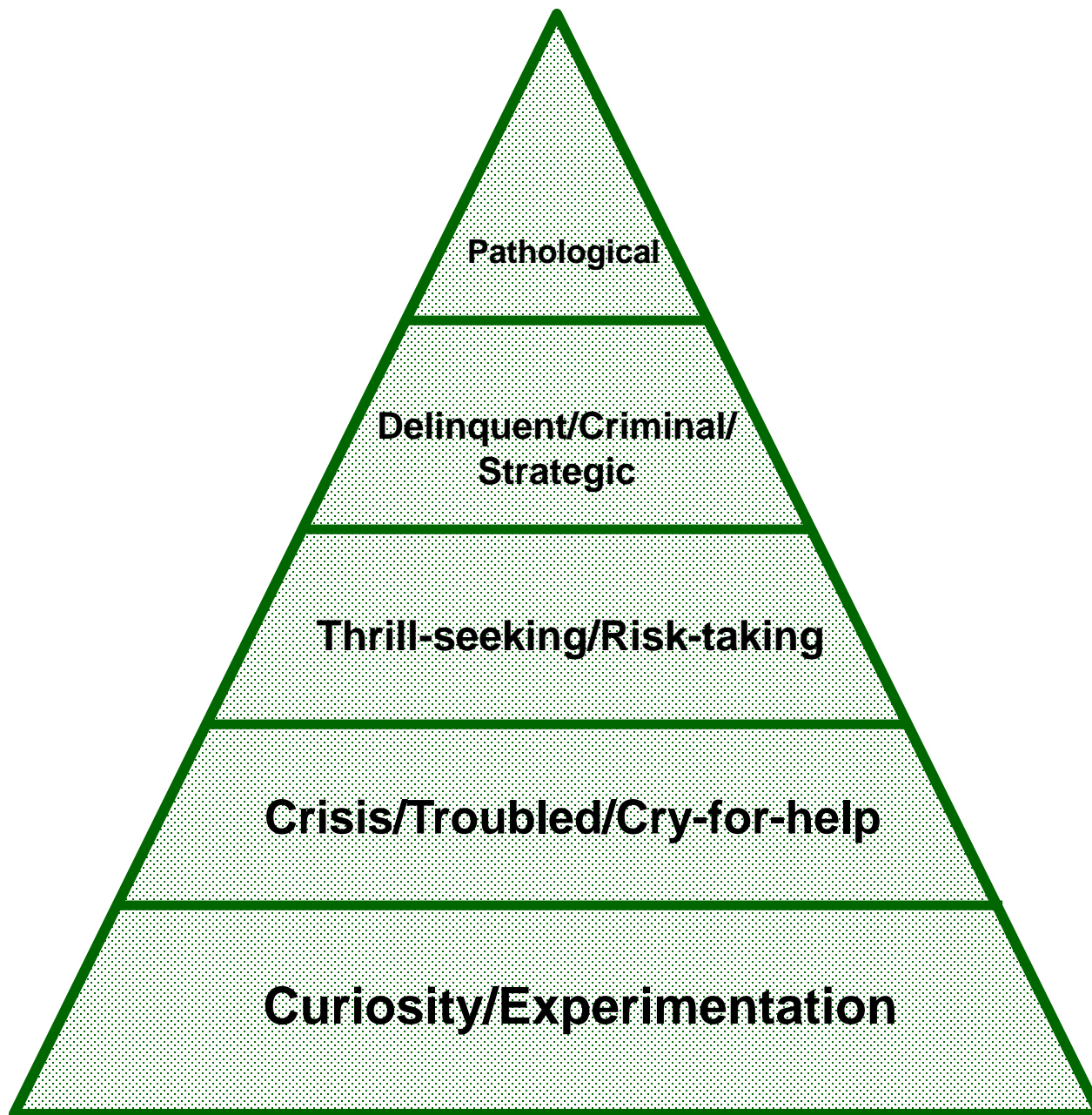
PART 2: WHO SETS FIRES AND WHY?

“SEAN’S STORY”



TYPOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING

- Curiosity/Experimentation.
- Crisis/Troubled/Cry-for-help.
- Thrill-seeking/Risk-taking.
- Delinquent/Criminal/Strategic.
- Pathological/Severely disturbed/Cognitively impaired/Thought-disordered.



TYPOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

- Curiosity/Experimentation.
 - Boys/Girls — wide age span (2 to 17).
 - Lack of understanding of fire's power.
 - Low impulse control.
 - Need to know about/explore environment.
 - Active learners.
 - Fail to think through consequences.

Curiosity-motivated firesetting
is generally unintentional.
What characteristics might an
incident often include?



TYPOTOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

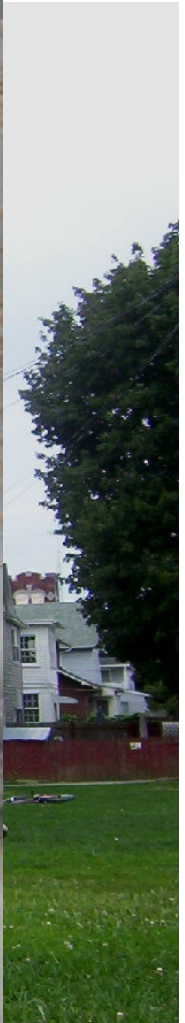
- Crisis/Troubled/Cry-for-help:
 - Firesetting is calling attention to a problem.
 - Youth may have poor coping/problem-solving skills.
 - Youth may have had a recent crisis or trauma.
 - Family dysfunction may be common.
 - Youth has access to ignition materials without supervision.
 - There may be a continuing series of firesetting.

TYPOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

- Fires are sometimes directed at specific targets/objects.
- Fire may be symbolic of what's causing problems.
- Physical, psychological, sexual abuse are possible.
- Youth may use fire to express anger, sadness, frustration, powerless feelings related to stress or major changes in their life.

TYPOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

- May lie or make up a wild story about the fire's cause.
- May ignore fire and lack remorse.
- Will continue to set fires until needs are identified and met.
- The crisis to the youth is based on their experiences, **not** those of the practitioner or parents.
- This typology of firesetting demands a rapid and integrated response from a team of professionals.



TYPOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

- Thrill-seeking/Risk-taking:
 - Experimenting for adrenaline rush with fire and “other” devices.
 - Adolescents fail to think through possible consequences.
 - Peer influenced; enjoy attention.
 - Easy access to fire tools and other materials.

TYPOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

- Adolescent may be afraid of consequences.
- May tell the truth if confronted in a respectful manner and presented with facts.
- Often embarrassed when caught.
- May try to extinguish the fire or summon help because their motive was not for the incident to get out of control.



TYPOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

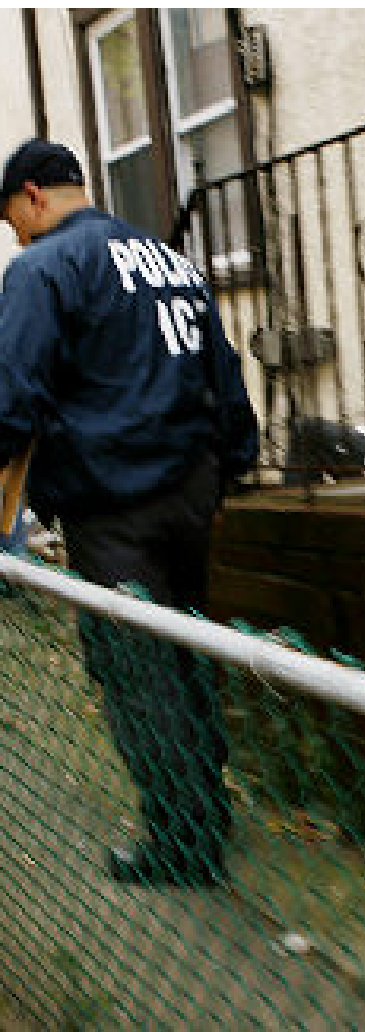
- Delinquent/Criminal/Strategic:
 - Distinguished by **motive of willful intent** to cause destruction.
 - Targets are typically schools (after hours), abandoned buildings, open fields, dumpsters and abandoned structures.

TYPOTOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

- Criminal and strategic firesetters may use fire as crime concealment or for revenge.
- Youth may have troubling behavioral history.
- Probable other criminal issues.

TYPOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

- Incidents are often well-planned.
- Accelerants used with multiple points of origin.
- Fail to experience guilt for the fire they set.
- If left unchecked, these profiles have great potential for ascending to violent anti-social behavior.



TYPOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

- Pathological/Severely disturbed/Cognitively impaired/Thought-disordered:
 - Left unaddressed, youth firesetting behaviors can transcend into a pathology of continuing fire starts.
 - Pathological firesetting is very disconcerting because the perpetrator uses fire as a means for receiving gratification without regard to others.
 - These firesetters can ultimately set hundreds of fires.

TYPOTOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

- May possibly have a high IQ but long history of disorders.
- Fires have distinct pattern and may be ritualistic.
- Firesetter denies or lies about involvement.
- Believe they are smarter than fire department or police department.
- May document fires.

TYPOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

- May interject themselves into investigation.
- Firesetter has a long history of dysfunction.
- They have difficulty establishing relationships.
- Home abuse is possible.
- Family may have their own issues.



TYPOTOLOGIES OF FIRESETTING (cont'd)

- Just because a youth has a cognitive, behavioral or learning disorder, it does not necessarily mean that he or she is predisposed to set a fire or that the fire he or she set was caused by the disorder.

FIRE-RELATED CORRELATIONS:

- Households with few rules or consequences for inappropriate behavior.
- Smokers present in home.
- Lack of fire safety knowledge (youth/family).
- Lack of parental skill/supervision.

OTHER CORELATIONS:

- Chaotic home environment/Lack of adult support.
- Substance abuse issues.
- Verbal, physical, sexual abuse.
- Multiple factors often involved in complex cases.

FOUR COMMON FACTORS OF ALL TYPOLOGIES:

- A failure of understand fire.
- Easy access to ignition materials.
- Lack of adequate supervision.
- Easy access to information on the Internet regarding firesetting, designing explosives and how to do tricks with fire.

FOUR COMMON FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE FIRESETTING BEHAVIOR (cont'd)



FOUR COMMON FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE FIRESETTING BEHAVIOR (cont'd)

- **Solutions to firesetting behaviors:**
 - Aggressive primary prevention.
 - Early identification, screening and intervention directed at the firesetter and his or her family.
 - Cooperative support from parents/caregivers, the fire service, juvenile justice, social service, clinical and school communities.



SUMMARY

- Curiosity about fire is natural, firesetting is not.
- It is important to understand myths/facts related to firesetting.
- There has been an abundance of research conducted by the mental health community on youth firesetting.



SUMMARY (cont'd)

- Two key concepts of this unit:
 - Don't get hung-up trying to identify a precise typology of firesetter.
 - Know when the situation is more than curiosity and needs referral to a partner agency.

“FOUR YEARS AFTER”

