

# STOP, DROP, AND GO:

12 Essential Steps to Keep Your  
Family Safe from Fire





# THE NATURE OF FIRE

Imagine, for a moment, this scenario. It's nighttime, and you and your family are asleep. Suddenly, you wake up to the smell of smoke, and within seconds your room is filled with the sound of a blaring alarm. What is the first thing you do? Unless you've experienced a fire yourself, you probably imagine it to be a lot like the movies. Maybe you see yourself rushing down a flaming hallway, grabbing your loved ones and pets and running for the door.

But the true nature of fire is surprisingly complex. In the early stages, most house fires are dark, creating more smoke than flames. The smoke mixes with toxic fumes that can make it very difficult to see or breathe when standing upright. Fire also spreads very quickly; opening a door can cause backdrafts that fan embers to flames in seconds. Rooms can

heat up to hundreds of degrees in a matter of minutes. Staircases can be especially dangerous, as they can funnel air and flames up through your home (no wonder some firefighters call them "chimneys"). The true nature of fire is usually fast, often dark, and always toxic.

If you're feeling a little uneasy reading this, that's a normal response. But there are steps you can take to keep your family safe. Taking precautions now will place you ahead of the curve, dramatically improving your family's ability to avoid, navigate and recover in the event of a fire. To learn how, keep reading.

# PREVENT:

## FIREPROOF YOUR HABITS



## 1. INSTALL SMOKE ALARMS, AND TEST THEM OFTEN.

Since half of all fire-related deaths happen when people are asleep, working smoke alarms dramatically increase your chances of surviving a house fire.<sup>1</sup> To make sure your family is covered, install smoke detectors outside the kitchen, in each bedroom, and at the bottom of all staircases.

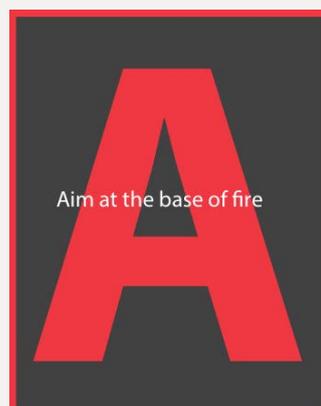
Make sure to test the batteries frequently (press the test button to get a beep), and replace them every six months. Replace the entire alarm every 10 years. Also, make sure all members of your family recognize the sound of the smoke alarm, and what to do if it rings.



## 2. PASS THE FIRE EXTINGUISHERS.

Fire extinguishers can stop a small fire from becoming a threat to your home. You need at least one extinguisher on each floor of your home. But for the best protection, put one wherever there is flame or heat in your home: kitchen, garage, grill,

fireplace, outdoor fire pit. You should also check your extinguishers monthly to be sure they're fully charged. To use an extinguisher, put your nearest exit behind you, and PASS.





### 3. WATCH YOUR LITTLE FIRES.

Every day, an average of 25 home fires are started by candles.<sup>2</sup> To be safe, keep all flammable materials at least 12 inches away from your candle, and don't leave it unattended. If you have to leave the room, train yourself to get in the habit of putting out the

candle first. Never fall asleep while a candle is lit, and don't smoke cigarettes in bed. Many bed linens and mattresses are highly flammable. If you have to smoke, step outside, and be sure to extinguish your cigarette completely before you walk away from it.



### 4. COOK WITH CARE.

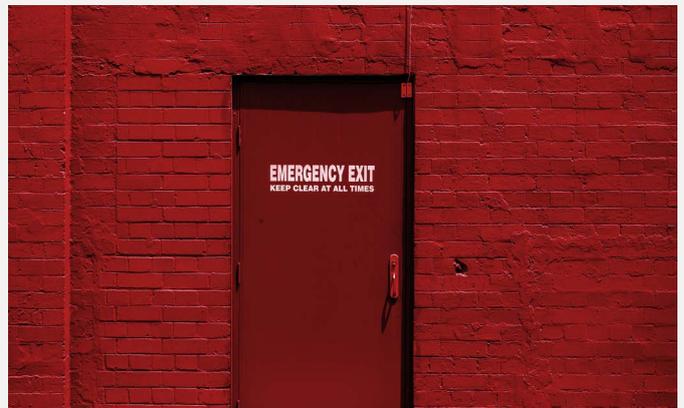
Life is busy, and it can be tempting to multi-task at dinnertime. But leaving food on the stove while you do something else is a potentially deadly mistake. Nearly half of home fires are started by cooking equipment, and out of those, the leading

contributor to fire deaths was unattended cooking.<sup>3</sup> To prevent kitchen-related fires, stay by the stove. Keep an eye on your flame height, and make sure towels, wooden spoons, and other flammable items are far away.

# **PREPARE:**

**ALWAYS BE READY**





## 5. HAVE TWO EXITS AND A RENDEZVOUS.

Fire most often strikes at night, when the darkness can be disorienting.<sup>4</sup> To evacuate your home quickly and safely, plan ahead for two possible ways out of every room. At least one option should not involve using the stairs, since stairways can be extra

dangerous. In case of a bedroom window exit, a fire ladder stored under the bed can provide peace of mind and a safe retreat. Select a rendezvous spot for all members of your household to meet up, a safe distance away from your home.

## 6. KEEP ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTS SAFE.

If you only have a few moments to evacuate, don't spend them going through a filing cabinet. Scan and store copies of all your important documents digitally in the cloud. Invest in a fireproof, waterproof safe to store your hard copies. Include birth certificates, passports, social security cards,

and any essential identification for each family member. Also include wills, insurance policies, medical information, keys to safety deposit boxes, and anything that's sentimental or irreplaceable. Having these items makes post-fire recovery much easier.

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## 7. HAVE A GO-BAG AND A GO-PLAN.

Your go-plan is a quick outline of what you'll do if fire strikes. It should be short enough for all family members to remember and complete in a minute or two. If you have small pets and can't get to their carriers, putting them in a pillowcase is a fast way to get them out the door, if not comfortably, at

least safely. Your go-bag should be packed with essentials like a change of clothes, prescription medications, pet food, and a first aid kit. Keep it in your car, or somewhere you can grab it on your way out in case of fire (or any other kind of emergency).



## 8. RUN FAMILY FIRE DRILLS REGULARLY.

Once you've established a go-plan, make time to review it with your whole family. Show each family member the two exit options from every room in the house, and establish the rendezvous point. Then, run a drill to make sure your plan works. Remember to stay low to the ground while

practicing (see #11 below, "Know how to move through a burning house"). The goal should be for all family members, pets, and go-bag to exit your home as safely and quickly as possible. Repeat the drill a couple times a year so it stays fresh.

# **PRACTICE:**

## **WHEN FIRE STRIKES**





### 9. IF YOU CAN, PUT THE FIRE OUT.

If a fire breaks out, assess the situation and decide if you can do something to stop it. A quickly-executed PASS with your fire extinguisher could save your home from going up in flames. If you're unable to safely and easily put out the fire, don't try to be a hero. Get everyone out as quickly as possible, call 9-1-1, and leave the rest to the professionals.

### 10. STAY CALM AND STICK TO THE GO-PLAN.

In an emergency, panic is the enemy. You need to be able to think clearly, and make quick, smart decisions. If you and your family have practiced your go-plan, you'll be able to find your best exits and to vacate safely. Stay calm, get low, and head for your rendezvous point.



### 11. KNOW HOW TO MOVE THROUGH A BURNING HOUSE.

In a burning building, smoke and toxic fumes will be worst near the ceiling, and temperatures can easily reach 600 degrees or more at eye level. The most breathable air will be along the floor. As you exit, stay as low as you can and crawl to safety. Test each doorknob. If it feels hot to the touch, don't

open the door (doing so could cause a backdraft of air and make the fire worse). If you do open it, go slowly and be ready to shut it again if conditions are worse on the other side. Remember: never take an elevator during a fire, and never re-enter a burning building for any reason.



## 12. BE PROACTIVE WHILE YOU WAIT FOR HELP.

If you become trapped, stay proactive. Start by sealing any cracks under doors with blankets or rugs (wet them down first, if possible). Look for a backup exit, such as a window, fire escape, or fire ladder. To help your rescuers find you more quickly, call 9-1-1, or yell for help. Stay close to the floor and try to get to an open window for more breathable air. Hanging bedsheets out the window can let firefighters know where you are. Remember: panicking will not help. Stay calm while help is on the way.

# STAY VIGILANT

Fire safety is not a “one and done” issue—it’s an ongoing set of habits. For example, you should adjust your family’s go-plan anytime you switch homes or sleeping arrangements. You can also ask your local fire department to come inspect your home, and give you specific pointers for fire prevention. And check those extinguishers and smoke alarm batteries once a month. Remember, if it saves your life or the life of someone you love, it’s worth your time.

As scary as fire can be, proper preparation can keep your family safe. By spending some time now to equip yourselves, you will increase your chances of survival. As always, if there is any way we can make sure you’re protected and ready for whatever comes your way, just let us know.

## SOURCES

- 1) [U.S. Fire Administration](#)
  - 2) [National Fire Protection Association](#), 2013 (most recent data available)
  - 3) [National Fire Protection Association](#), 2016
  - 4) [Ready.gov](#), 2017
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