

SEEDS has been awarded a grant from the National Fire Protection Agency for the year 2011, to provide fire safety education that targets people with autism and others who use picture communication systems. While it may be difficult to teach an individual on the autism spectrum about the dangerous *nature* of fire, it may be possible to teach him or her about how to behave when it comes to fire safety. SEEDS' goal is to adapt and create fire safety messages and to use social stories (short, personalized stories that explain social situations and break down a situation or task into easy-to-follow steps) to reinforce lessons about smoke alarms, home escape and in-home fire prevention.

People with autism are at high risk of injury in a fire. Individuals with autism have died in fires when they retreated to a favorite hiding place; others have died in fires after running back into a burning building to seek shelter in a place where they felt safe. This has become critically evident in recent headlines:

February 18, 2007 – Thirteen-Year-Old Boy Dies in Missouri Home Fire

A 13-year-old boy with autism died in a fire in his Missouri home when he refused to escape. He panicked, ran into the bathroom and locked the door.

June 15, 2007 – Firefighter Injured Rescuing 10-year-old Virginia Beach Boy

A Virginia Beach firefighter was injured while carrying a 10-year-old boy with autism down a flight of steps in thick black smoke. The youngster was safely removed from the home by his mother but ran back into the blazing home seeking sanctuary in his bedroom.

February 17, 2008 – Oregon Couple Sentenced in Fire Death of Autistic Son

In February 2008, an Oregon couple was sentenced to six months in jail for criminally negligent homicide in the fire death of their autistic son. The parents of the 19-year-old locked him in the apartment when they went out together because he had no sense of danger and would wander away. The fire occurred when the young man was home alone and unable to escape.