

Making Adults with Developmental Disabilities Safer Outcomes of the Fire Safety Course Taught by DDS D Trainers



Since October 2006, the Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) partnered with Oklahoma ABLE Tech and Fire Protection Publications to teach a fire safety course to adults with developmental disabilities.

The results of this program were extremely positive with 56 individuals completing the course. The course consisted of three group classes and a home visit. Five DDSD trainers attended two training sessions that covered the curriculum and teaching methods. Then, they began recruiting participants through local assisted living providers. Sixty three individuals began the course, and even with extensive scheduling conflicts, 56 were able to complete the course. The class size varied from one-on-one to eight participants.

DESCRIPTION OF CLASSES & CURRICULUM

During the group classes (Classes 1-2), the trainers explained how to keep exit paths clear, how to test and maintain a smoke alarm, and how to create and practice a fire escape plan. During the home visit (Class 3), the trainer or a professional installer installed a specialized smoke alarm that can be tested and silenced by remote control. The trainer then asked the participant to test the smoke alarm and demonstrate his/her escape plan, including a designated meeting place. Class 4 focused on a review session of the fire safety information.

The curriculum is based on treating adults with developmental disabilities as adults and training them to take care of themselves during a fire emergency. The fire safety vocabulary has been developed to be easy to understand and remember with words such as “fire plan” and a key message of “Get up, Get down, Get out, Get safe.” Throughout the lessons, simple visuals reinforce the concepts while trainers and participants also physically demonstrate the activities of testing a smoke alarm, cleaning the alarm, and crawling to get out of a smoke-filled room.



The following concrete items reinforce the curriculum principles:

- **Fire Safety Poster**—illustrates the main message of “Get Up, Get Down, Get Out, Get Safe” with a reminder to call 911 once out of the house [distributed during the first class]
- **Installed Smoke Alarm**—can be tested and silenced by remote control and comes with a 10-year lithium battery that lasts the lifetime of the alarm [installed during the home visit]
- **Mini Flashlight**—comes with a key ring and can be easily stored on a bedside table to illuminate the exit path [awarded during the final class]

MEASURING KNOWLEDGE GAINED

To measure knowledge gained through the course, pre- and post-surveys were given. Survey 1, consisting of 10 questions, was given at the start of Class 1; Survey 2, asking the same 10 questions, was given at the end of Class 4. The surveys consisted of closed- and open-ended questions with corresponding visuals. The trainer read the question aloud to the participants, showed the visual, and recorded the participant's responses on a worksheet.

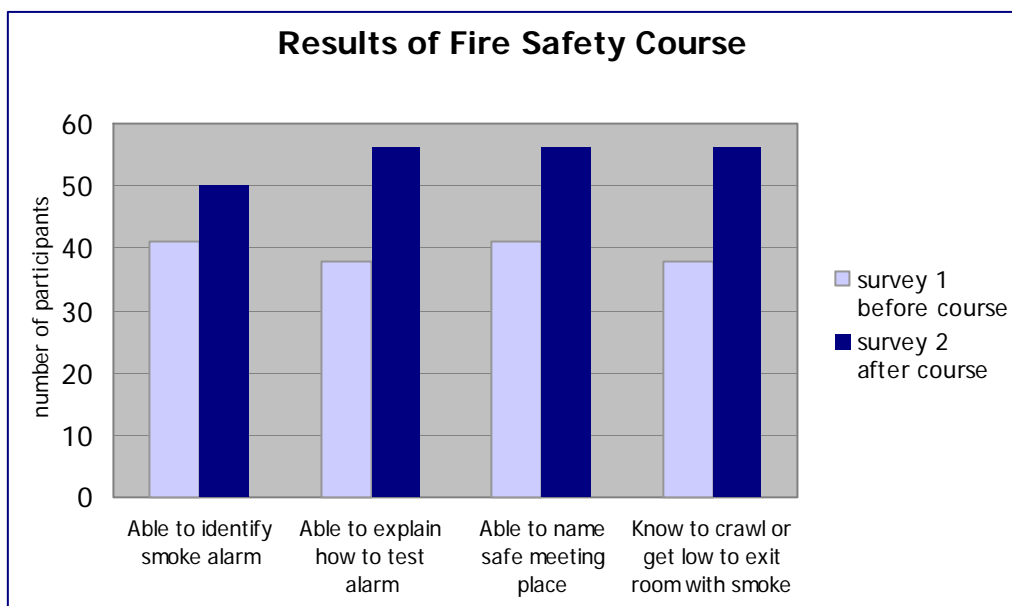
SURVEY 1: BEFORE THE COURSE

Survey 1 responses showed the need for fire safety education. For example, when asked how to test a smoke alarm, some respondents said "911" or "staff," meaning they would call 911 or that only staff should test the alarm. Several responded "I don't know" or said they didn't like the alarm. Several could not identify the smoke alarm when asked to choose between a picture of a smoke alarm and one of a fire extinguisher.

One of the questions asked about the location of his/her meeting place. Stunningly, several responded "I don't know," and one said he would hide in his closet. Likewise, several responded with troubling answers when asked what to do in a room full of smoke. Seven participants said they would, "stop, drop, and roll" or "drop and roll," and one said she would phone for help, meaning the first instinct is not to exit the room. These are the reasons people with developmental disabilities need to know how to keep themselves safe rather than relying on staff to tell them when to exit or how to maintain the smoke alarm.

SURVEY 2: AFTER THE COURSE

Survey 2 responses showed a greater understanding for fire safety and vital life-saving skills. Every single participant correctly explained how to test the smoke alarm, either by pushing the test button or using the remote control. Every single participant named a designated meeting place that was outside and a safe distance from his/her home. Most importantly, every single participant responded to get down and crawl or get out of a room full of smoke. Many used the language of the poster and the main message of the course: Get up (take action), Get down (down or low to the floor, crawling in a room full of smoke), Get out (exit the house), Get safe (go to the meeting place and call 911). The use of the main message shows the participants have internalized the message and associated actions.



One family's story is proof that this fire safety course is effective. They explained how they had tried to encourage their daughter to practice testing the smoke alarm and the fire escape plan. Before taking the course, the daughter could not understand. She would not leave the house when the smoke alarm sounded, even when prompted by her parents. However, after finishing the course, the daughter was excited to show her parents how to test the smoke alarm and how she leaves the house if there is a fire. The parents were elated and relieved to see what their daughter had learned.

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

Overall, given the dedication of the DDS D trainers and the effective fire safety materials and curriculum principles, these participants will be safer. Each participant understands how to test the smoke alarm, when to test it, and how to dust it to keep it functioning properly. Each participant understands how to escape during a fire and where to go to stay safe. Finally, they all feel confident in their new knowledge of fire safety.