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Play it safe: advice from a fireworks survivor

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A 12-year-old girl who was severely burned by fireworks in a Guy Fawkes accident says people need to be sensible when they are playing with fire this week.

Grace Neil was just 6 when a firework fell over in her neighbour's back yard.

She was standing on the deck of the Pt Chevalier home when a ball of flame hit her straight in the chest.

The little girl raised her right arm in an attempt to protect herself. She was left with severe burns to her chest and wrist, and just below her left shoulder.

Grace's mum Dixie Neil, 51, was at home next door making a cup of coffee.

"I just heard this unrecognisable scream, and I looked up to see fireworks hitting the hedge next door. They were out of control."



Neil ran next door and found Grace in the shower. She was rushed to hospital, where she spent two weeks.

Grace underwent surgery where skin was taken from her thigh and grafted onto the burned areas.

For 18 months she wore nylon pressure garments to help minimise the scarring.

Six years on, the Pasadena Intermediate School pupil is still afraid of fireworks.

"But it depends on where I'm standing - if I'm really close I'll probably freak out, but if I'm far away, like in my room, I'll be like 'that's pretty cool'."

Her message to Kiwis letting off fireworks is simple - don't be an idiot.

"Not being drunk and letting off fireworks is probably the main point," Grace said.

Stay inside - watch the display from behind glass, and be more aware of what you are playing with.

"It's literally fire."

Camp Awhi

Grace is one of a number of burn survivors aged between 7 and 17 who go to Camp Awhi.

The five day camp, organised by the [Burn Support Charitable Trust](#), is a free annual event every January where kids who have suffered burn injuries can "just be kids."

On Friday the organisation is holding a charity night to raise funds for next year's camp.

To support the Burn Support Charitable Trust, and kids like Grace, tickets to the black and white gala dinner at Alexandra Park are available for \$65 by calling 09 270 0640 or emailing nikki@burns.org.nz

Playing with fire:

According to the Environmental Protection Authority, the best way to stay safe from fireworks is to leave it to the professionals.

"Most towns and cities hold public fireworks displays for Guy Fawkes and other events," a statement from the EPA said.

"There are a number of rules in place to make sure these events are safe for the public so you can go to one of these to enjoy fireworks safely.

"If you decide to have fireworks at home, you can protect yourself and others by following some simple tips."

EPA safety tips:

- Read and follow the instructions on the firework's packaging. Remember to read the instructions with a torch - not a lighter or other flame
- Wait for a calm evening - lighting fireworks in the wind can be dangerous
- Light fireworks in an open area away from people, pets, buildings, trees and livestock

- Keep a bucket of water, a hose or a fire extinguisher handy
- Only have adults light fireworks one at a time. Keep unlit fireworks in the bag or box they were bought in until you are ready to light them and keep them well away from where they are being lit
- Leave dud fireworks alone - trying to relight them can be dangerous
- Stay sober. Fireworks and alcohol or drugs are a dangerous mix
- Keep pets inside
- Be considerate of your neighbours.