

Age of accountability – psychology

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In the case study provided, one can see many areas where the development of the child in question can be taken into consideration when looking at the case from a law standpoint. In any case involving children, one must always take into account their environment, their developmental age, and their true age. With each age group, there is a norm for development and each child must be evaluated regarding that norm. In this case, the current law regarding the “age of accountability” can be upheld through three basic points.

These points are the biosocial, the cognitive, and the psychosocial areas of development. Each area plays a huge role in whether or not a child (at the age of six) can be held accountable for such a violent act. In the area of biosocial development, everything from a child’s nutrition to brain development to abuse can affect their perceptions (Berger, 2008). In the case provided, the six year old boy, coming from a single parent household, could very easily suffer developmentally in this area.

Historically, single parent households make much less than households where both parents are present. Less income (socioeconomic status decline) could equal less nutritious food to aid in proper development. At the age of the child provided for this case study, he seems to be at the norm for brain development. At this age, even though children can think in rapid succession, they do not process the information to the point of seeing the true consequences.

The child is also not completely able to use deductive reasoning when thinking the situation through from beginning to end and vice versa (Berger,

2008). Emotions at this point also play a key role in the development of the child provided. At this age, emotions such as anger (which would commonly be felt after the scuffle on the playground) can grow over a few hours and especially overnight, in a child who has anger or guilt problems anyway.

While anger is a normal emotion, some children at this age struggle with the appropriate way to deal with it and lash out, resulting in injury. Taking into consideration the lifestyle of the juvenile in question, abuse and/or neglect could also be a large problem in his dealing with anger issues. While he may see the maltreatment he could be receiving as just basic attention, he is unable to process the true impact of the situation at his age (Berger, 2008). When the child sees anger at home, he is more likely to engage in anger motivated activities outside the home.

Cognitive development of the six year old boy must also be taken into consideration when upholding the age of accountability law. Due to the fact that children of this age tend to be very self-centered and have the ability to focus on one idea (regardless of perception), a child with anger issues will see their problem is the whole world and that that one focal point is to stop the angry feeling (Berger, 2008). While to an adult this is irrational thought since the consequences are not planned for, to a child this creates harmony in their world of “ me. Social learning at this age is a huge influence on how they react to their environment. In the case provided, the child is reacting the only way he knows how. Since both his father and grandfather are in the corrections system for gun related charges, it is likely that the child is only modeling the behavior he feels is set forth by those before him (Berger,

2008). While the child does not realize what he is doing at the time, he is an apprentice in thinking in the same way the other male figures have acted in his life.

Even though the child has a male influence in his life (his uncle), it does not seem to be constructive as the uncle is likely the one who left the gun out irresponsibly. To uphold the current law, it should also be taken into consideration that a child at this age is merely attempting to make the difference between belief and reality. What a child sees on television and plays in video games can also play a role in their perception of the world as well as their cognitive and psychological development (Berger, 2008).

Children before the age of seven have a difficult time realizing the reality and the fantasy within their environment. To them, a violent act is just the means to the end, the consequences are not their concern, and their goal is to end their own suffering regardless of the cost due to their self-centeredness. In the area of psychosocial development, a child should not be held accountable at the age of six due to their emotional status, ability to receive and internalize emotion, and falling victim to their parents' style of parenting (Berger, 2008).

If a child is subjected to authoritarian parenting, they are more likely to be less happy, suffer from depression, and feel guilty about situations in their environment. In the case presented, this could very well be the case for the child as his reason for extreme anger could be internalizing guilt for his father and grandfather being out of his life and in prison. Permissive parenting could also be a cause of developmental issue in a child of this age

as they would be lacking of self control and unhappy. Again, the media begins to play a role in the lives of children this age.

When a child observes violence and hatred, then they will most likely exude this type of behavior as well if it does not go corrected by a parent (Berger, 2008). When the media is the "parent" of the child, television used as a babysitter, the only role model they have are the actors on television to mimic and model their behavior. Overall, based on the information provided by Berger in the text, the law regarding whether or not the child in the case from Michigan should be held accountable should be upheld.

It can be seen from the information provided above that the child is not developed enough to weigh the consequences of their actions and are most likely victims to their environment. Children cannot control what they are shown and thus at age six should not be accountable for their violent actions when they do not understand what the repercussions of their action could be and do not understand something as complex as taking another life.