

# Should parents take charge of their children's crimes



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### **Abstract**

Children nowadays are becoming more and more dishonest and are eventually growing up to be criminals. The blame on children's crimes nowadays is going onto the parents, mostly under the statement "failing to exercise reasonable care, supervision, protection, and control over children". However, many of the crimes children are committing are almost unrelated to their parents and the way their parents raised them. Many other factors however may explain these actions or crimes the children are committing, such as outside influences, age, biological influences, being independent and responsible as well as ethical. Therefore deducing that this has nothing to do with the parents.

### **Should Parents Take Charge of Their Children's Crimes**

After not studying for a test, a 10-year-old calls in a fake bomb threat to his school. An unarmed 15-year-old steals a stereo from an electronics store to resell. Over a two year period, a 13-year-old sexually assaults an 8-year-old neighbor. A 17-year-old takes a sawed-off shotgun to school and kills several students and teachers. In which of these cases, if any, should the parents be held responsible for their children's acts? And the phrase "held responsible" goes beyond fines or parenting classes; it means incarceration. Nowadays children's actions are becoming more and more reckless, nevertheless disastrous. Ranging from being disrespectful to sexually molesting and even murder. And the fact that they can just go take sanctuary behind their parents is definitely not facilitating the issue. What makes matters even

worse is that in most of these cases the parents would not only take the blame and pay for their children's crimes but also suffer the consequences for "failing to exercise reasonable care, supervision, protection, and control over children" (Parental Responsibility Laws, 1994). Everyday more and more stories come up on the news about children committing horrific crimes. What is even more absurd than parents taking the blame, is that the environment the parents put their children in is perfectly fine. There have been cases in which the way a child is brought up or raised has no bearing on how he or she will turn out. There are cases where a child becomes violent or prone to criminal activities because of outside influences like their peers, television or music. For instance, in December 2002 Adam Lanza attended school with a firearm and began shooting inside his school for one simple reason, he was a fan of the Call of Duty video game series (Cable News Network, 2013). A parent can only regulate so much of their children's life that they cannot control every little aspect. Sometimes children, regardless of whether their parents have done their best or not, are likely to commit crimes as part of their adolescence. No one can really stop it, not even their parents. However, if this law were to be withdrawn, things may not be as bright as they may seem to be. Parents might give less care to their children and not take responsibility for their actions and for them in general. They could throw them on the streets and that would not be considered as a crime whatsoever. Even though withdrawing the law that gives parents full responsibility for their children's crimes may backfire to certain extent, children's actions and crimes' consequences should not be put on their parents for a vast number of reasons such as outside influences,

age, biological influences, being independent and responsible as well as ethical.

Utmost of the children committing crimes today are teenagers, the aim for teenagers at school is to begin erudition on how to be independent. For in a couple of years, most of the children would be in university and there would be no one hurtling after them prompting them to do this and that. How is one supposed to expect to teach a child to be responsible for his or her actions if every time he or she is to do something the blame would just go straight to the parents? At this rate the child would just relax and do as he or she likes and they the parents would have to pay the price. One can have the best parents in the world and their kids are going to make mistakes. The point of making mistakes is succumbing the consequences and learning from them. If they do not get the consequences how are they supposed to learn anything from it? Another factor would be ethics. Regardless of the method of raising a child, with love or without love, with respect or without respect, a child knows right from wrong. If his or her parents will not teach him or her, their environment will teach them. Whether it may be friends, teachers, strangers, or fictional characters. Crime is something that is erroneous, and all people are brought up learning what is 'right' and what is 'wrong'; even a young child, such as seven year old, would know that certain things are 'wrong' and are not supposed to be done. Due to this, how can ones parent be held responsible for something that someone else did out of his or her control? Another surprising factor would lean more towards the scientific side of things. James Chattara M. D., a pediatrician based in Redmond, states that a teenager's brain is in a constant and rapid state of development. He

suggests that the prefrontal cortex (the “ thinking” part of the brain) experiences a significant shift, where a bulk of the neurons within the brain are temporarily “ wiped out.” This process makes certain teenage reactions incredibly difficult to control. (Chattara, 2010) James Chattara states his theory in which a child’s brain, in its state of rapid development, experiences a shift in which makes the child’s actions hard to control.

Many accusations come towards the parents when children commit crimes question how the parents brought up the child. In some cases the child-parent relationship is not a healthy one; for instance, it could be a matter of very minimal respect and love between the two. However, what one should focus on is the other side, in which the child and the parent have a healthy relationship and the parent has raised his or her child with love, care, and all the other fundamental necessities. One would ask then where else would the child learn all these harmful and disrespectful acts if it is not from his or her parents. One thing to note down is that the parent is not always mentoring his or her child 24 hours a day and seven days a week. For example, a child goes to school in which he or she interacts with other children, the child watches television, browses the internet etc. These are just some of many external factors. External factors can influence the child just as his or her parent would. The child could be talking to another child whose parents completely disrespect and treat with utter ignorance, therefore corrupting the child. Then the child would commit a crime in which the parents would take the blame. Therefore one can infer that the story repeats itself with so many different conflicts, however, observe how the parents have nothing to do with this. What are the parents supposed to be convicted of? Sending the

child to the wrong school? If anything, the school should take the blame.

That is only one out of many external factors. Another external factor would be television. Television does not directly tell or convince the child to commit crimes and wrongdoings as we stated above with the school issue, but influences him to do those acts. The University of Michigan Health Systems suggest that not only can television mesmerize children to do harmful effect, but also affect his or her way of interacting with others as well increase the chances of the child developing ADD and ADHD. (Zagata, 2009) The child would not have been directly watching something violent or something not permitted for his or her age, but he or she could also stumble upon something with a commercial or an add. Even though the parent would have already disabled all of the adult channels whether they had violent content or other subjects not suitable for the child's age the child is still bound to cross paths with corruption. As stated earlier the parent can only control so much. However, the child will grow to be curious and inquisitive, and will investigate; after all it is he or she's right to be curious. One last example would be the internet, probably the worst of them all. The internet has so many methods of approaching it, the main difference with the internet and the two other examples previously discussed is that it is the combination of both television and interaction with corrupt children. The internet can both display and portray adult and violent content and open a doorway for a child to talk to a stranger regardless of the age and location. Interaction with corrupt children and school looks like child's play in front of the internet. On the internet a child could talk to corrupt adults who are much more deceiving and smart than the children that were previously discussed, and may lead to much worse aftermaths. Now, of course the parents could forbid television

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and internet and homeschool the child, but what kind of life would that be, the outcome may be worse than they expected.

One thing to keep in mind is the age of the child committing the crime, the younger the age the more logical the blame on the parents. A child who is around the age of eight years old vastly differs from a child around the age 13 to 17 years old. The age groups vary in so many different ways. At the age of eight for instance, the child would be dependent on his or her parents much more than a child would be at the age of 17. He or she would also be much less aware of his or her surroundings and much more vulnerable to outside influences. However, take a 17 year old committing murder. It is not as easy to convince a 17 year old boy to go out and kill someone as it to convince an eight year old boy. The 17 year old is much more aware of his or her surroundings and can make choices for himself. In one year, he or she will turn 18, and his or her parents would have nothing to do with him or her. What factors are going to change in that one year that will impact the 17 year old such that he or she will alter wholly and no longer commit any crimes? At the age of 17 he or she is not a boy or girl, but a man and a woman. Other things that could differ between them is the freedom they have. A vast majority of parents will not let their eight year old children out as long and as late without adult supervision, they may not even let them out alone without adult supervision, as they would for their 17 year old children. When the 17 year olds are out they are prone to stumble upon many sorts of things ranging from drugs to prostitution to even inflicting harm on others. Around the age of 17, children begin to encounter peer pressure as well, that is one large factor that a parent as well has nothing to

do with. Parents are doing their jobs by watching over the young and teaching them their ethics and they also know that at the age of 17 their kids can think for themselves and know right from wrong. Anything beyond that is no longer in the parents' range, they can only have so much control over their kids especially at the age of 17. For instance my parents could tell me all they want about something being bad but I can be stubborn enough to find what they are saying to be negligent, and do exactly what they asked me not to do. Whose fault would that be?

One may argue that parents should take charge for their children's acts for numerous reasons, ranging from them taking advantage of not being responsible to a safer and more aware society. Imagine parents being completely independent from their children. Some parents might not take advantage of it and continue teaching their children properly, while on the other hand, one will find a vast majority letting loose on their children. It would not matter to the parents whether the child has murdered civilians or stolen items for the blame comes down to the child and not to the parent. Another idea to keep in mind is that the discussion is revolving around children, regardless of their age whether they are five or 17 they are still children. Many people are set on if you do the crime, you do the time. That may work for some but when you are only 14-15 years old and be inexcitability due to family problems, the adolescent may not be able to handle the repercussions. Many courtroom officials and judges, have been prosecuting juveniles as adults. Whereas the adults are the parents, and the parents chose to get their child and therefore must take responsibility of their decisions. It is like a dog, if a dog sneaks into ones house the owner of

the house will come to the owner of the dog and complain to him and blame him. Of course humans are incomparable to dogs however, the general idea remains the same. As discussed earlier, about parents not being able to supervise their kids on everything is true to a certain extent. For instance 12-year-old Rebecca Sedwick of Florida jumped to her death from a tower in an abandoned concrete plant in late 2013 due to cyberbullying. Two classmates were charged with tormenting the girl so viciously on social media and in person that she committed suicide. (NPR, 2014) The charges of aggravated stalking were later dropped, and much of the blame landed not on Sedwick's two classmates, but on their parents. Now this is a case in which it is the fault of the parents, however the youngster is not completely innocent, but that is not the idea. Parents who let their children use social media as a weapon need to wake up. Even though in some cases parents may seem rightfully responsible for their children, these are just one out of hundreds of cases, in which most of them should come down to the child.

In conclusion, parents should not be responsible for their children's actions and crimes for numerous reasons. Outside influences affect the child vastly, regardless of how his parents treat him. These influences could come from multiple places such as television, internet, and even other people. Another factor would be age, as previously stated age changes a lot when it comes down to judgment, a 12 year old attempting to steal something differs from a 17 year old attempting to steal something. A 12 year old does not really have a mind of his or her own, he depends on his or hers parents judgment. Whereas a 17 year old really does have a mind of his or her own. These thoughts of stealing are most probably not coming because of curiosity or

because he or she does not know what he or she is doing. The 17 year old is definitely aware of his or her actions. From a biological point of view, James Chattara stated, a pediatrician based in Redmond, that a teenager's brain is in rapid development and may experience changes in which the child's actions would be hard to control. Last but certainly not least, ethics. Each child is brought up to know what is "right" and what is "wrong". Regardless of how he was brought up, with who he was brought up, and where he was brought up, the child is bound to know his do's and don'ts. Even though one may argue that some crimes are completely irrelevant to the parents, one must keep in mind that it works the other way around. Another common argument is in the absence of the law which makes the parents take charge for the child's crimes a parent will just forget about his or her child. Yet the whole point of this discussion is that the children are not being affected by their parent's method of raising them, regardless if it is ethical or unethical. So let the government take charge of this matter and set things right without the interference of the parents. Once again it is up to the child to control himself or herself, not his or her parents, even if he or she is to be imprisoned, now is preferable than later; and after aren't they the ones who are committing the crime?

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