

Juvenile  
crime example  
argumentative essay



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There has always been alarm and despair over escalating juvenile crime. In the 1950s there were reports about the mushrooming problems with youthful gangs in the big cities. In the 1960s we began to hear about a surge of juvenile crime in areas that had been regarded as virtually crime free. In the suburbs as well as the inner cities, youngsters were dropping out of school, using drugs and committing crimes. In the 1970s and 1980s, juvenile court dockets became increasingly jammed with criminal cases. According to the Department of Justice, the percentage increases in arrests from 1985 to 1994 have been greater for juveniles than for adults. During 1994 alone, 2.7 million juveniles were arrested. During the latter part of this century, juvenile courts that customarily provided social services in order to rehabilitate rather than punish lawbreakers were faced with an onslaught of children who were not simply wayward youths, but hardened repeat offenders. The 1980s witnessed an increasingly desperate outcry for courts to take more extreme measures to contain juvenile crime, which is assuming ever more serious forms.

It is almost a daily occurrence to turn on the nightly news and hear stories of ever increasing youths committing crimes. Even more alarming are the ages of these offenders. In Lake Station, Indiana, three first-grade students were plotting to kill a classmate. They even went so far as to draw a map of where the slaying was to take place. In California a six year old boy was charged with attempted murder of a 3 month old baby. In Southern California, three 17 year old girls were charged with false imprisonment, conspiracy, aggravated mayhem and torture when they held a 15-year-old runaway against her will and tortured her for hours. In Mount Morris Township,

Michigan, a first-grader shot and mortally wounded another 6 year old one day after the two had quarreled in the schoolyard. When police arrest 14- and 15-year-olds who shrug off cold-blooded, unprovoked murder as a rite of passage, the rational public response is fear and anger. When 6 year olds shoot each other, the rational public response is shock. What makes a 6-year old point a gun at another and pull the trigger? How does a 6-year old know how to pull the trigger? They may understand from all the attention they receive afterwards, that what they did was naughty, but do they understand the gravity or seriousness of their actions? There is a presumption in the law that a child 6 years old is not criminally responsible and cannot form the intent to kill that is necessary for criminal prosecutions. Children at that age can be fighting with each other one minute and hugging each other the next.

What causes these juveniles to commit such crimes? Some theorize they are affected by problems such as poverty, family breakdowns, neglect, alcoholism and poor education. Upon identifying negative environmental factors, many regard delinquency as a normal adaptive way for the child to cope. A sensible theory is that the child's personality unfolds in response to the people and events around him. A typical response might be that the delinquent behavior represents a neglected child's attempt to compensate for attention that he did not receive in other ways. They may believe the child turned to drugs because of exposure to their parents drinking and pill taking and this alleviated their own anxiety or depression. According to the American Psychological Association, violence is a serious possibility in children who exhibit the following warning signs: Loss of temper on a daily basis? Significant vandalism or property damage? Increase in use of drugs or

alcohol? Increase in risk-taking behavior? Detailed plans to commit acts of violence? Announcing threats or plans for hurting othersThe potential for violence exists in other children, the group says. Children who are in a gang or even who have a strong desire to be in a gang are at risk. If they start withdrawing from friends and usual activities, they are at risk. Even youngsters who suddenly start getting bad grades could be prone to violence. There is no formula for pinpointing exactly who will become violent. Numerous studies have been performed however, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry has focused on certain factors that pinpoint violent behavior. These include: Previous aggressive or violent behavior? Being the victim of physical abuse and/or sexual abuse? Exposure to violence in the home and/or community? Having a parent who is violent? Heavy exposure to violence in TV and movies? Use of drugs and/or alcohol? Presence of firearms in home? Brain damage from head injuryYouths who grow up in extremely stressful circumstances such as living in poverty or living with a single, unemployed parent are also at risk the experts say.

These warning signs and factors are examples of what experts believe to be stereotypical of most juvenile criminals. It is not sufficient to blame poverty, the 1960s, drugs, uncaring parents, short-sighted social programs, misguided justice programs or any of the reasons so often stated for juvenile crimes. The simple truth is that there is no pat answer that works for everybody. Each juvenile and their situation is unique.

Environment can affect behavior, but it can be less crucial than the choice the individual makes as they respond to that environment. For example, a single mother of two works two jobs to make ends meet. She is not at home

when her children get home from school but makes arrangements for them to go to a neighbors house each day after school. They have to call her at work to get her permission to go anywhere other than the neighbors. One son follows the rules and goes to the neighbors, does his homework and waits for his mother, the other son uses the situation as license to do whatever he pleases. Here is a situation where two boys grow up with the same mother, in the same house, in the same neighborhood and who have the same opportunities and temptations, but each chooses to react to his environment in different ways. Children make choices, although they do not choose the environment in which they are raised, they can choose how to deal with it. There are children who make a series of choices not to live within legal, moral, or social bounds; they have contempt for rules and ignore others expectations.

Environment is not completely irrelevant either. There are external factors that can either inhibit or facilitate a persons inclination to break the law. If drugs were not available, a child would not become a drug addict. If parents ignore irresponsible behavior by their child, it is likely to persist. If guns were not easily accessible, a child would not use it to commit crimes. The Department of Justice reported that during a thirteen-year period (1983-1996), gun homicides by juveniles have nearly tripled. Handguns were used in two thirds of the youth homicides involving guns over a recent 15-year span. In 1996, an estimated three million crimes were committed in the nation's schools and some 100, 000 guns were carried to school every day. The number of juvenile murderers tripled between 1984 and 1994. Youthful murderers using guns increased four-fold over the same period. Juvenile

gang killings have nearly quadrupled between 1980 and 1992. In 1994, eight in ten juvenile murderers used a firearm, up from five in ten in 1983. The number of juveniles murdered increased 82 percent between 1984 and 1994.

Murder is not the only type of juvenile crime. So what is juvenile crime? In its simplest definition, crime is any specific act prohibited by law for which society has provided a formally sanctioned punishment. This also can include the failure of a person to perform an act specifically required by law. Crimes are classified by the seriousness of the offenses. A felony is the most serious offense, punishable by a sentence to a state institution. Felonies generally include violent crimes, sex offenses and many types of drug and property violations. A misdemeanor is a less serious offense for which the offender may be sentenced to probation, county detention, a fine, or some combination of the three. Misdemeanors generally include crimes such as assault and battery, petty theft and public drunkenness. An infraction is the least serious offense and generally is punishable by a fine. Many motor vehicle violations are considered infractions.

Juvenile crime, in law, is a term denoting various offenses committed by children or youths under the age of 18. Such acts are sometimes referred to as juvenile delinquency. Children's offenses typically include delinquent acts, which would be considered crimes if committed by adults, and status offenses, which are less serious misbehavior such as truancy and parental disobedience. Both are within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court; more serious offenses committed by minors may be tried in criminal court and be subject to prison sentences. Under Anglo-American law, a crime is an illegal <https://assignbuster.com/juvenile-crimeexample-argumentative-essay/>

act committed by a person who has criminal intent. A long-standing presumption held that, although a person of almost any age can commit a criminal act, children under 14 years old were unlikely to have criminal intent. Many juvenile courts have now discarded this so-called infancy defense and have found that delinquent acts can be committed by children of any age.

Juvenile offenders are generally placed in one of four legal categories depending primarily on the seriousness of the offense committed. Two of these categories are for juveniles who commit adult-like crimes. These categories are criminal offenders and juveniles remanded to superior court. The other categories, informal probationers and status offenders are for youths who have committed less serious offenses or offenses unique to juveniles, like curfew violations.

Teenagers commit the largest portion of all violent crime in America. Juvenile courts in the United States processed an estimated 1, 555, 200 delinquency cases in 1994. More murders and robberies are committed by 18-year-old males than by any other age group. More than one-third of all murders are committed by offenders under the age of 21. The number of 13- to 15-year-olds arrested for murder jumped from 390 in 1982 to 740 a decade later. Juvenile arrest rates for heroin and cocaine rose more than 700 percent between 1980 and 1990. There are currently about 70 death row inmates (all male) sentenced as juveniles, about 2% of the total death row. 12 men have been executed for crimes committed as juveniles since 1976 and since 1985 there are documented executions of juvenile offenders in eight states worldwide.

With such alarming statistics, what then can be done to deter juvenile crime. If the experts are right, there will be a devastating rise in juvenile crime, plus an ongoing problem with the current offenders as they move into adulthood. There is no way to tell how juvenile crime will shrink or expand in the coming decade. However, victims of juvenile offenders are demanding changes in the juvenile justice system and challenging the long-standing belief that juveniles who kill, rob or rape should be treated in different ways than adult criminals. They want them prosecuted and sentenced as adults and put into maximum security prisons or executed and this has provoked a campaign against juvenile courts.

Juvenile courts were created to give juveniles a combination of punishment, treatment and counseling to straighten out their lives. The juvenile justice system has evolved over the years to combat these crimes based on the premise that juveniles are different from adults as well as the idea that juveniles who commit criminal acts should be treated differently from adults. Separate courts, detention facilities, rules, procedures and laws were created for juveniles with the intent to protect their welfare and rehabilitate them, while protecting public safety. In modern-day reality however, too many are arrested, held and released time after time in a revolving-door process that ends only if a heinous crime is committed.

Recently there have been attempts at other solutions to curb juvenile crime. For instance, in Jacksonville, Florida, prosecutors have tried more than 1, 100 juveniles as adults but then arranged to have them incarcerated in local jails that offer a variety of education and treatment programs. Youth crime in the area dropped, bucking the general trend. There is no way to tell if this



system would work for all courts and all areas. As long as there are juveniles, there will more than likely be juvenile crime.

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