

Killer's mum and dad face decade in prison

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Crumbling down: James and Jennifer Crumbley were convicted after their son shot dead four students.

Should parents be guilty for their children's crimes? In a historic first, the parents of American school shooter Ethan Crumbley have been sentenced to at least ten years in prison.

What's happening?

In 2021, Ethan Crumbley shot dead four students at his school in **Michigan**, USA. He was 15 at the time.

Now, his parents have been told that they will each spend at least 10 years in prison.

Find out more

In two separate **trials**, **jurors** found both parents guilty of involuntary **manslaughter**. They bought him a gun even though there were clear signs his mental health was getting worse.

Gun violence is one of the biggest issues in American society. In 2023 there were 82 school shootings, the highest number in recent history. But it is very unusual for a parent to end up in prison.

Should it be a crime to raise a criminal? Research has linked poor parenting to youth crime — so some say putting **responsibility** on parents could be a key tool in the battle against school shootings.

Some think if parents knew they could end up in jail, they would keep closer eyes on their children and get them more help for their mental health.

Others are less convinced by this solution. They say that gun violence is really a **systemic** problem, not down to individual parents. Instead of blaming the parents, the USA needs more gun control laws.

Should parents be guilty for their children's crimes?

Some say

Yes! Parents need to take responsibility for the actions of their children. They should act if their children need help with their mental health, and try to stop them from accessing harmful content.

Others think

No! The USA needs more laws controlling guns, not punishment for parents. And sometimes poor mental health or violence are nothing to do with the way a child has been raised.

Some people say

"She was my mother and she would not leave me. This I had simply accepted and expected. I had no more thanked her for it than I did the sun for shining on me."

Khaled Hosseini (1965 –), Afghan-American novelist

What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Do you think that this was a fair sentence for Ethan Crumbley's parents?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: What sentence did Ethan Crumbley receive?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain about this story and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - Imagine that your parents or guardians are being put on trial for how they raised you. How would you feel?

5. Express

What do others believe? - What should the US do to tackle gun violence? Discuss as a class.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Should being a bad parent be a crime? Write down your answer with an explanation.

Glossary

Michigan - A state in the northern USA.

Trials - When the facts of a crime are put in front of a jury or judge, who decides whether or not someone is guilty.

Jurors - Ordinary people who are chosen at random to decide whether someone has taken part in a crime or not.

Manslaughter - The crime of killing another human either without meaning to, or in circumstances that are not as serious as murder.

Responsibility - When you have a duty to look after or deal with something or someone.

Systemic - Something that is deeply rooted in a system or society.