

Children who kill

Discussion

1. In your country, at what age is someone considered an adult?
2. Until that age, do children who commit crimes get special treatment, or do they get the same penalties adults get?
3. At what age does a child know right from wrong?
5 years old, 10 years old? 15 years old?

Reading

Read the article.

Then answer this question:

What is the latest 'trend' in American criminal justice?

THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD GETS LIFE Thirteen-year-old Peter Barton (not his real across the United States playing with a little girl of 6. "What we're dealing with is a new kind of Claiming that he was pretending to be a childhood criminal. They're starting professional wrestler, Peter punched, younger and they know what they're doing. kicked and stamped his 6-year-old They won't think twice about killing," said playmate to death. Her liver was severely Florida State District Attorney Adam damaged. Her skull was fractured. Medical Emmitt. The State of Florida alone experts compared the injuries to a fall from registered 312 homicides committed so far the top of a house. Peter was tried in court this year by minors. Most of those as an adult and sentenced to life in prison homicides were gun-related. with the possibility of parole when he is 38. The trend has children's rights activists in a Peter is one of many children in the latest rage. Lisa Weston, a member of one group trend in criminal justice: if you are old which is trying to prevent children being enough to kill, you are old enough to face tried as adults said, "No one understands adult penalties. That is what the Supreme why Peter did what he did – not even Courts of California, Florida and Texas are Peter." Peter Barton begins his life sentence saying – and the trend is spreading fast on Monday.

True or false?

Read the article again and mark these sentences true (T) or false (F):

1. Peter will be released when he is 38 years old.
2. Not all states have such harsh laws.
3. Adam Emmitt thinks the problem is worse now than it was before.
4. Lisa Weston thinks children should be treated differently from adults.

Discussion

1. Peter claimed he was pretending to be a professional wrestler. Could he be telling the truth?
2. Is it really possible that a 13-year-old boy could maliciously and intentionally kill a young girl?
3. Are children the same as they have always been or are they really different these days?
4. Has anything like this happened in your country?

Language

Choose the correct ending for each sentence:

1. What we're dealing a. at is a steady increase in the number of child crimes.
2. What we're talking b. with is a new kind of childhood criminal.
3. What we're looking c. here is a trend that shows no sign of slowing.
4. What we're saying
d. about is the future of our country.
5. What we're seeing . is that children must start to take full responsibility for their actions.

Click on the **vocabulary item that does** not belong in each group. Check any words you don't know in your dictionary.

6. lawyer, evidence, defendant, judge
7. murder, fine, assault, manslaughter
8. adult, minor, infant, adolescent
9. witness, criminal, suspect, offender
10. parole, release, sentence, pardon

Discussion

Discuss the following situations.

Decide what should happen to the people in each situation.

Should they go to prison - an adult prison or a young offender's institution?

How long for?

Or should something else happen?

1. Sean, 9, brings a gun to school. He shows it to his friends and says, "Nobody messes with me or I use this!"

2. Two teenagers, aged 15 and 16, come to school with two semi-automatic guns and begin shooting people at random. They shoot 5 of their classmates dead and critically wound another 12. The 16-year-old commits suicide before he is captured, the younger boy is caught and arrested,

3. 17-year-old Bobby fatally stabs a shop owner in the town centre in an attempted robbery. The shop owner tried to phone the police during the robbery and Bobby panicked.

4. A 14-year-old boy shoots another 14-year-old member of a rival gang. "I had to do it so that they would let me be in their gang," he says. The victim did not die.

5. A 16-year-old shoots his father dead after the father has a violent confrontation with the boy's mother. "He got what he deserved," says the boy. "My mother has put up with enough abuse already."

6. A 6-year-old boy gets so angry with his younger brother that he sits on him until he stops breathing, shouting "I hate you, I hate you." The brother dies. The 6-year-old told his parents he had had enough of his brother.

Did you enjoy class?

Why?