

ELLA NOKES
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YOUTH CRIME

Youth crime in the modern community is an ever increasing and multi-faceted problem. There are a variety of punishments and laws surrounding the issue, however the pressing question is whether the criminal justice system is adapted so that it is fair to young offenders. I will be discussing this question in my essay.

Although there are a wide range of crimes being committed by young people, there are several which occur more frequently. These include anti-social behaviour, minor assault, vandalism and shop lifting. Possible reasons for these crimes being popular are that it is possible the offender has known someone who had got away with committing the same crime before; a troubled, vulnerable home and school life, which puts the offender into many complex situations; drug and alcohol addiction or problems and mental illness; unemployment, deprivation and homelessness and peer group pressure. Gang crime in the UK has started to rise in recent years, with children as young as 9 possessing weapons and being pressured into illegal group activities. Many youths will go to extreme lengths in order to impress friends, and they could soon find themselves coming face to face with the law.

When a young person is arrested for committing an offence, they are presented to the custody officer, who will then assess the severity of the situation, given all further evidence. A young person is criminally responsible for their acts from the age of 10, and can therefore be arrested from this age. Factors to be considered will include whether the offender has committed a crime in the past (re-offending is growing problem in the UK), and the impacts the offence made on other people. Following this decision, a young person will then be sentenced accordingly. There are many ways in which a youth can be sentenced including the following:

- Discharge: This is where a young person has committed a minor offence and no further action is taken. Conditional discharge is when an offender has to comply with certain specifications.
- Fine: The parents are presented with a fine measured on the severity of the case
- Reparation Order: The offender has to repair the damage done to the community.
- Curfew Order: The offender has to stay in an certain area for specified amounts of time

Some of these punishments, in my opinion, work better than others. For example, a reparation order gives people the opportunity to realise the damage afflicted to a community, and to realise the error of their ways. However, with a discharge, an offender may then go on to commit other crimes, which essentially worsening their situation.

The criminal justice system tries to keep the younger generation out of prisons and young offenders institutions because the system wants to offer offenders a chance to reform and get their lives back on track. With many years ahead of them, youth offenders are offered the opportunity to change, which I believe is a very fair aspect to the justice system. It is then

therefore the youth's responsibility to make use of this opportunity, or to dismiss it and re-offend, where the rules may not play to his favour.

In all countries across the world, the right to a fair trial is a usually fulfilled entitlement, and youths in Britain are no exception. If the matter is severe enough, youths will receive a neutral judge and ideally, an uninfluenced witness, just like adults around the country. Treating them like adults in this way helps young people to behave in a mature manner, which may influence them outside of court conditions.

Overall, I believe that the criminal justice system is fair to young offender because it offers the chance to reform, and attempts to treat the offender like an adult. I believe minor changes to the system could be more beneficial such as changing some of the punishments to avoid reoffending. I also believe more work can be made on prevention methods to stop crime before it happens. If this took place we would all be living in a slightly safer world, with less youth crime blemishing the community.