Discussion

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The age of the accused children – at which they should be treated as adults – depends upon their mental and emotional maturity. Most of the scholars would default to the typical reasoning of relying on the age of majority in the applicable jurisdiction. In some places, juveniles are treated as adults when they reach the age of 16, others 18 or even 21.  Some legal and social experts would propose the following: responsibility begins with the ability to choose to act, with potential consequences subject to the usual tests of competence (Keenan, Rush, & Cheeseman, 2015).  Even for capital crimes - death penalty eligible cases - being nominally under some arbitrary number of years should not shield someone from severe consequences after committing a serious crime. By the same token, no one should be assumed to "know better" simply because they are above a certain age and thus subjected to greater scrutiny (Guggenheim, 2012).

The question of the age at which juveniles should be treated as adults defies a black and white answer, however, scholars believe everyone should be responsible for their actions, regardless of age. Young children can be taught right from wrong with the usual moderate ration of a minor (yet escalating) punishments when necessary (Keenan et al., 2015). However, they need to be taught that they do have a responsibility to answer for their behavior. Besides, there is a very thin line between what some of the people express as “spare them the adult content” and what some comment as “treat them as equals from very young”.

Being able to understand the consequences, and take responsibility for actions has a lot to do with when children are considered as adults. When a child can make good decisions and handle the consequences of those decisions, he/she will gain privileges and responsibility (Guggenheim, 2012). Eventually, the goal should be to turn children out into the world an independent and responsible member of society.

References

Guggenheim, M. (2012). Graham v. Florida and a Juvenile’s Right to Age-Appropriate Sentencing. *Harv. CR-CLL Rev.*, *47*, 457.

Keenan, S. J., Rush, J. P., & Cheeseman, K. A. (2015). Judicial waiver decisions in two southern states: A study of judicial perceptions. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, *40*(1), 100–115.