

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Lengthy Sentences Without Parole for Juveniles

Approved by the Board of Trustees, July 2023

Approved by the Assembly, May 2023

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

The U.S. Supreme Court, in a series of cases beginning in 2005, has found that youth under the age of 18, as a class, are less culpable and more likely to be rehabilitated than adults who have committed similar crimes. These findings about adolescent immaturity and development have been central in the Court’s imposing restrictions on the sentencing of minors to life without parole. The Court decisions have not, however, explicitly addressed the use of other long sentences without possibility of parole for youth convicted of crimes committed when the youth was under the age of 18.

APA Position:

Long-term sentences without possibility of parole for offenders who were younger than 18 at the time of the offense are undesirable as they fail to take into account the developmental immaturity, reduced culpability, and prospects for rehabilitation in many youthful offenders, even those convicted of serious offenses.

Author: Council on Psychiatry and Law