

Focus

1 Should we be hard or soft on young criminals? Should we throw them into prison, or should we try to understand and help them?

Read about it

Teenage killers free after 5 months

by Cherry Norton

THE PARENTS of 12-year-old Louise Allen, who was killed last year, have reacted with horror to the news that her killers are to be released on the anniversary of her death.

Louise was kicked to death by two girls in a fairground in Corby, Northamptonshire.

She had intervened to separate two girls who were fighting. A fourth girl joined in, thinking the fight had become a two-against-one affair.

Louise was attacked and kicked repeatedly, once while lying motionless on the ground. She died the next day.

The teenagers were convicted of manslaughter in December, and given a two-year custodial sentence.

The original charge of murder was dropped after extensive negotiations involving the police, defence lawyers and Louise's parents.

The girls will be released on April 30, just five months after being convicted – the term is based on a 12-month reduction for good behaviour and seven months spent in custody before the trial.



Louise's mother said she could not believe they were going to be released on the first anniversary of Louise's death.

She will visit her grave on Wednesday with her ex-husband John and Louise's brothers, John, 12, and Dean, 2. The family intends to put flowers in the red and white of Manchester United, her favourite football team, on the grave.

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Key Language

Here is some important language for talking about crime and the courts.

If the police **arrest** you, they **charge** you with a crime; the **charge** could be theft, possession of drugs, murder etc.. In court there are two **lawyers**: one against you, and one representing you – the **defence** lawyer. If the court decides you are not **guilty**, it **releases** you – you are free to go. If the court finds you guilty, it convicts you of the crime. The judge then decides on the **sentence** – eg. how much you must pay (as a **fine**), or how long you must stay in **prison**. **In custody** (a **custodial** sentence) means in prison or, if you are too young for prison, in a special children's home. **Manslaughter** means killing a person, but it is not as serious as murder – perhaps you wanted to hurt, but not kill, him/her.

4 Use the words in *italics* from the text above to fill the gaps.

- a I don't like it in prison. I hope I will be soon.
- b They arrested her on a of theft.
- c The charge of murder was reduced to .
- d A £250 fine wasn't a hard enough .
- e You are a danger to the public. I'm giving you a sentence.
- f You'll be OK. Get a good lawyer.

Talk about it

5 The two girls who killed Louise were only 11 and 12 years old. Do you think that the sentence was right?

6 Here are some of the sentences possible in an English court.

SENTENCE	What does it mean?
Community service	You have to do a period (eg. 100 hours) of unpaid work in hospitals/old people's homes
Fines	You pay money to the court
Probation	You have to stay out of trouble. Once a week you visit a "probation officer", who asks about your behaviour
Suspended prison sentence	You don't go to prison immediately, eg. "a six-month sentence suspended for one year" means if you behave well for one year, you are free. If you do something wrong, you go to prison for six months
Prison	You go for a fixed period (ranging from a very short period to "life")



2 Which of these headlines would be suitable for the article? Explain your choice.

- a **Shock at 12-year-old girl's death**
- b **Anger at early release of killers**
- c **LOUISE: MURDER CHARGE DROPPED**

3 Correct these sentences.

- a Five girls were involved in the fight.
- b The girls were found guilty of murder.
- c When they were arrested, they were charged with manslaughter.
- d Because of good behaviour, their sentence was reduced by a year and a half.
- e They will be released just two years after the crime.
- f The family will put flowers at the place where Louise died.

anniversary the same date, one year/two years etc. later
fairground park with amusements (eg. the big wheel, ghost train)
intervened got involved
motionless not moving

Now look at these cases. If you were a judge, what sentence would you give to these people? Choose from the chart, give full details (eg. a £1000 fine/3 years in prison/one year on probation) and discuss your decision(s).

- a 18-year-old Miranda worked in a shoe-shop. She lost her job when she stole £92 from the shop.
- b Nigel is 38. He drank a bottle of wine and then drove home. He had a car accident and killed a 13-year-old boy.
- c Kevin, 15, was caught travelling on the train without a ticket. The correct ticket would have cost £1.75.
- d Stacey, aged 22, was caught selling marijuana at a disco. At her flat about 50 grammes of the drug were found (value: around £250).
- e Dean, 17, broke the window of a new Mercedes and stole a mobile phone and four CDs.
- f Samira is 32. She killed her husband with a knife while he was asleep. He had been very cruel and violent with her for more than 10 years, and he often had girlfriends.