

Crumbley conviction shows that punishing parents for the actions of their shooter children is no longer a hypothetical

By Jeffery M. Leving SM

If you search for school shootings in America you'll see that they have happened for more than a hundred years — but sadly they have become more deadly and more commonplace over the last 30 years. While the public and the politicians continue to debate what, if any strategy, can put a stop to this national shame, last week with the conviction of Jennifer Crumbley of four counts of involuntary manslaughter, a precedent was made as it was the first time in American history that a parent was held criminally responsible for the actions of their minor child.

While on the surface this may seem alarming to some, on the flip-side it should put parents everywhere on notice that their actions and inactions can come with real consequences.

This does not mean every parent of a child who does the unthinkable — opens fire in a school — should be prosecuted. Many times the parents of these misguided kids are victims themselves. However, in this case, once you learn the details, you will discover that it was a unique case where the prosecution proved to a jury that Jennifer Crumbley not only provided her son, 15-year-old Ethan

Crumbley, with a gun, but ignored warning signs exhibited by him before he killed four students and injured seven others in 2021 at Oxford High School in Michigan.

The actual shooter, 15-year-old Ethan Crumbly, has already been sentenced to life in prison after pleading guilty to 24 charges, including first-degree premeditated murder and terrorism causing death. His father, James Crumbley, has also been charged with four counts of involuntary manslaughter and is scheduled to be tried separately in March.

In addition to the Crumbley's, in November, Robert Crimo Jr. pleaded guilty to seven counts of misdemeanor reckless conduct as part of a plea deal with prosecutors in Illinois. Crimo Jr.'s son, Robert Crimo III, is pending trial for allegedly shooting and killing seven people and injuring dozens of others at a Fourth of July parade in 2022.

Crimo Jr. was accused of ignoring warning signs and signing his son's application for an Illinois Firearm Owners Identification card nearly three years before the reported massacre in Highland Park. The card is required for gun purchases in Illinois and people under 21 need a guardian to sign the application. As part of the deal with prosecutors, Crimo Jr. will be on probation for two years, serve 60 days in jail and complete 100 hours of community service.

It's important to note that not all parents of shooters should be responsible for what their kids do. However, in a small number of cases there seems to have been accusations of negligence on their part. Keep in mind that 3 cases out of hundreds is still not many, but regardless, all parents everywhere need to pay more attention to warning signs.

Now, with the guilty plea of Crimo Jr. and the conviction of Jennifer Crumbley, cases against the parents of minor shooters are not just hypothetical possibilities. Parents need to be more aware of what is going on in their children's lives and in some extreme cases, not be afraid to seek outside help as well, even if that means your child may be arrested.

One famous example of that is what Washington State resident Nicole Schubert did in 2019. That was when she reportedly discovered her then 17-year-old's journal was filled with a meticulously detailed plan to commit a mass murder at his Washington high school. She responded by making the heart-wrenching decision to call the police on her own son and it was a decision that she later told Good Morning America that she believed not only saved the lives of others but her own son's too. He was reportedly arrested and pleaded guilty to a felony charge for threatening to bomb or injure property and misdemeanors for harassment. He also underwent a mental evaluation and completed a rehabilitation program and community service afterward but the lesson here is that no one was

killed. And since his arrest, he reportedly has not had any trouble with the law.

The Schubert case is an extreme example of parental intervention and hopefully most parents will never face that type of circumstance. However, as the cases against Crimo Jr. and Jennifer Crumbley demonstrate, parents everywhere need to be more proactive and try to be aware of warning signs when it comes to guns and their children, or risk their own freedom.

Attorney Jeffery M. Leving is the recipient of President Biden's 2023 Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award.

Leving, who has dedicated his career to safeguarding children and reuniting them with their fathers, has written three acclaimed books: "Fathers' Rights," "Divorce Wars" and "How to be a Good Divorced Dad," the latter of which was praised by President Obama and by Cardinal Francis E. George, then the Archbishop of Chicago. Follow Jeffery M. Leving on Facebook and X @DadsRights.