

Posted: 12:00 AM

[Our View: Supreme Court hits right balance on youth sentences](#)

Because teenagers can grow and change, they should not be denied the chance to do so.

This week's Supreme Court decision striking down life sentences without parole for juvenile offenders in non-homicide cases reflects what everyone who works with teenagers knows: They are different from adults.

PPH Opinion

With their still-developing brains, even older teens are less capable of controlling impulses than are adults, and are therefore less culpable for their actions. They also are more likely to change and grow with time, compared with an adult offender.

Writing for the court, Justice Anthony Kennedy cited this potential for change as a reason that no court should give up on a young person, even if they have committed very serious crimes that would result in a life sentence for an adult. After the death penalty, a life term is the most severe punishment available to our courts.

Kennedy noted that although the state does not take a life when it imposes a life sentence, it alters that life irrevocably, removing any hope that good behavior or a change of character could improve a juvenile's situation.

Sometimes, even with juveniles, that is appropriate -- the court's opinion does not affect life sentences for underage murderers.

But those sentences should be reserved for the most extreme cases, and because teenagers have the capacity to grow and change, they should be given the opportunity to do so, even those who have committed serious crimes.

Find this article at:

http://www.pressherald.com/opinion/supreme-court-hits-right-balance-on-youth-sentences_2010-05-19.html

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

