**Introduction to Juvenile Delinquency**

***The Law***

Children have not always received special treatment in the criminal justice system. Before 1899, there were no juvenile courts and a 12-year-old child charged with murder would be tried in an adult court, found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging, the most common penalty. The children who were not sentenced to death were placed in harsh prisons with adult criminals, where they learned more effective ways of crime and often became the victims of other crimes. Many of these children were poor and homeless, and they committed crimes such as pick-pocketing to survive.

Public shock at the cruelty of the adult system served as a reason to separate juvenile offenders from adult criminals. In 1847, Massachusetts became the first state to set up a public school for delinquent children, and in 1899, the first juvenile court opened in Chicago. Supporters of these changes believed that something needed to be done to protect and help these children.

For many years, the problems of children were handled in the juvenile court. Various programs were developed to rehabilitate rather than punish the juveniles. Whether these programs work or not has been the subject of many debates.

Today the trend in the criminal justice system is swinging the other way. For example, an increasing number of younger juvenile offenders are treated the same as adults through certification to adult court and extended jurisdiction juvenile status. In addition, if a 16-year-old juvenile commits first-degree murder, the juvenile will stand trial as an adult and be sentenced to an adult sentence.

**Introduction to Juvenile Delinquency**

***Activity: What do you think?***

**Answer these questions based on your own experiences and beliefs. There are no correct or incorrect answers.**

1. Is a separate court system for juveniles a good idea? Why or why not?
2. At what age should a juvenile be held legally responsible for his or her criminal behavior? Provide reasons for and against your position.

**Introduction to Juvenile Delinquency**

***Activity: Juvenile Justice Poll***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **SA=Strongly Agree** | **A=Agree** | **D=Disagree** | **SD=Strongly Disagree** |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Juvenile abuse and neglect hearings should be open to the public. |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Juvenile delinquency proceedings should be open to the public. |  |  |  |  |
| 3. All juveniles over the age of 14 who commit felonies should be tried in adult court. |  |  |  |  |
| 4. Parents should have to pay for the damage caused by their children. |  |  |  |  |
| 5. Even if a juvenile is tried in adult court, he or she should receive a lighter sentence than adults receive. |  |  |  |  |
| 6. Juvenile Court helps children. |  |  |  |  |
| 7. Juveniles who commit murder should face the death penalty. |  |  |  |  |
| 8. The names of juveniles who commit violent crimes should be made available to the news media. |  |  |  |  |
| 9. A 6-year-old who commits attempted murder should face a delinquency hearing. |  |  |  |  |
| 10. Juveniles who commit violent crimes should be removed from their homes. |  |  |  |  |