

James Crumbley found guilty of involuntary manslaughter for Oxford High School shooting

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The father of Michigan school shooter Ethan Crumbley, who murdered four of his Oxford High School classmates on November 30, 2021, was convicted of involuntary manslaughter by a jury on Friday.

The 12-person jury deliberated for approximately 11 hours before finding James Crumbley, 47, guilty on all four counts following a trial that lasted eight days. The conviction follows by five weeks the conviction of James' wife, Jennifer Crumbley, 45, in a separate trial in the same Oakland County courtroom in Pontiac, Michigan.

James Crumbley remained silent and shook his head as the guilty verdict was read out by the jury foreperson. Both parents are due to be sentenced on April 9 and face a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison.

The dual Crumbley cases mark the first time in the US that parents have been charged and convicted of homicide for killings carried out by their child. While other parents have in the past been convicted of crimes for the actions of their children, those cases involved charges such as reckless conduct, child neglect or illegally providing the weapon used in a killing.

Ethan Crumbley, who was 15 years old when he carried out the shootings between classes at his high school, was charged as an adult. He ultimately pled guilty and was convicted on multiple counts, including first-degree murder of Hana St. Juliana, 14; Tate Myre, 16; Madisyn Baldwin, 17; and Justin Shilling, 17, and injuring seven others on October 24, 2022.

More than a year later, the teenager was sentenced to life in prison without parole. Before his sentencing, Ethan Crumbley, who was 17 years old by then, apologized to the courtroom and said, "Any sentence that they ask for, I ask that you do impose it on me."

The prosecution in the trial of James Crumbley, led by Democratic Party Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald, made essentially the same arguments to the jury that were advanced in the trial of his wife.

She argued that Ethan had mental health issues and his efforts to bring these problems to his parents' attention were ignored; that James Crumbley purchased the murder weapon, a Sig Sauer 9mm handgun, as a Christmas present for Ethan. Jennifer took her son to a firing range four days before he carried out the shootings, and the parents failed to secure the weapon in the household. The parents failed to mention that Ethan had access to a weapon when they were called to the school on the morning of the shootings to discuss morbid drawings of gun violence their son had made on a math paper.

In one piece of evidence, for example, the jury saw a text message Ethan sent to his friend that said, "I told my dad to take me to the doctor yesterday, but he gave me some pills and told me to suck it up."

Prosecutor McDonald also showed the jury that the Crumbleys had purchased a cable lock for the gun but failed to use it to secure the gun. The cable lock, along with a gun safety manual, were found by investigators during the search of the Crumbley house after the tragic shootings at the high school.

Based on these facts, the prosecution convinced the jury that the shooting rampage carried out by Ethan Crumbley was foreseeable and the parents failed on multiple occasions to do anything to stop it from happening.

James Crumbley's defense, led by attorney Mariell Lehman, argued that there was no way for the father to know that Ethan was preparing to carry out the shootings or that his son had obtained the handgun and ammunition from an unlocked drawer and brought it to school that day.

The one major difference between the two Crumbley trials is that James did not testify in his own defense, whereas Jennifer did testify. At one point during her testimony, Jennifer made the extraordinary statement that she "wouldn't have" done anything differently in parenting her son.

The conviction of James Crumbley concludes the

precedent-setting prosecutions in which the parents of a teenage shooter have been held criminally responsible for the deaths of four high school students, even though they did not pull the trigger.

After the jury's guilty verdict on Friday, Prosecutor McDonald made a statement that exposed the core deception of the prosecutions in the first place. "I hope," she said, "it leads to more prevention of gun violence. I hope it leads to people taking more responsibility. I don't want a situation where a lot of prosecutors are charging people or parents for things that their children did, or are doing."

While, as the evidence showed, the Crumbleys were guilty of poor parenting, to charge them criminally in this way is to blame them for what is a serious and deepening social crisis. This truth was actually recognized by the parents of Ethan Crumbley's young victims, who also spoke to the media after the verdict.

Buck Myre, whose son Tate was killed, said his family started a mentoring program to help kids. "Our kids are not doing well these days. We're in a mental health crisis," Myre told the news media. "The gun is just a tool. We got to look at other things other than the gun. We're going to see what we can do to support these kids better."

Craig Shilling, father of 17-year-old Justin, who was killed in a school restroom, said, "We have to go for the big picture and wrap this thing up and hold everybody accountable."

According to a school shooting tracker maintained by *Education Week*, there have been 10 shootings in which 23 people were killed or injured at K-12 schools so far this year.

The worst incident took place at Perry High School in Perry, Iowa, where a sixth grade student was killed and seven others—four students and three faculty members—were wounded in a shooting at the school. One of the wounded—the school's principal—died from his injuries 10 days after the shooting.

It is a fact of life in America that the number one cause of death among children under the age of 18 is gun violence. According to the Gun Violence Archive, 1,682 children were killed by firearms in 2023. That number was slightly lower than the record number of 1,694 child deaths in 2022.

Meanwhile, the number of annual mass shootings—defined by the Gun Violence Archive as four or more shot or killed, not including the shooter—has more than doubled in the past decade from 272 in 2014 to 656 in 2023.

Studies have shown that between 40 and 50 percent of school shootings are carried out by students or former students, and 25 percent are carried out by someone with no relationship to the school. Nearly 50 percent of the shootings are the result of an escalation of a dispute or grievance,

while the next biggest category of causes is accidental shootings, at between 10 and 16 percent.

These studies also show that 40 percent of school shootings take place inside school buildings, while the majority (60 percent) take place on school grounds outside of the buildings.

As it has been pointed out by numerous legal experts, the conviction of James and Jennifer Crumbley sets a precedent and will lead to an explosion of parental prosecutions, Prosecutor McDonald's "hopes" notwithstanding.

Michigan attorney Lisa Baratta, who represented parents who were charged with violating a local parental responsibility ordinance in 1996, told NBC News:

Parents will need to keep tabs on their child's mental health, friend group, social media presence, etc. Responsible parents already do these things. The concern is that the definition of "responsible" will get blurred and innocent parents will be charged.

Jeffrey Swartz, a former county judge in Florida and a professor at Cooley Law School in Michigan and Florida, told NBC News:

It's a dangerous precedent if prosecutors try to follow it, because they don't have to limit it to guns. Maybe a child has hunting knives. Maybe a baseball bat. And maybe it doesn't have to occur in a mass killing.



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