

24109 Father of Michigan school shooter found guilty of involuntary manslaughter

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The father of a school shooter in Michigan has been found guilty of involuntary manslaughter in a case that created headlines across the United States for seeking to find a parent criminally responsible for the actions of their child.

James Crumbley, 47, is the father of Ethan Crumbley, a 15-year-old boy who took a gun from home and killed four students at Oxford high school on 30 November 2021.

In February, Ethan's mother, Jennifer Crumbley, was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter, raising the prospect that parents of future school shooters will also face trial in American courts. The Crumbleys are the first US parents to be prosecuted in such a way.

During the five-day trial for James Crumbley, prosecutors showed that the gun, a newly acquired Sig Sauer 9mm, was not safely secured at the Crumbley home.

Although Michigan did not have a storage law at that time, James Crumbley had a legal duty to protect others from possible harm by his son, prosecutors argued.

“James Crumbley is not on trial for what his son did,” prosecutor Karen McDonald told the jury.

“James Crumbley is on trial for what he did and for what he didn’t do.”

He “doesn’t get a pass because somebody else” actually pulled the trigger, she said.

Ethan’s mental state was slipping on the day of the shooting: he made a macabre drawing of a gun and a wounded man on a math assignment and added: “The thoughts won’t stop. Help me. Blood everywhere. The world is dead.”

But the Crumbleys declined to take Ethan home after a brief meeting at his school, accepting only a list of mental health providers as they returned to work. They did not tell school staff that a handgun similar to one in the drawing had been bought by James Crumbley just four days earlier. Ethan pulled the gun from his backpack a few hours later and began shooting. No one had checked the bag.

The verdicts – one each for the four victims – were read out at the end of a full day of deliberations. “I know this verdict will not bring the victims back,” said McDonald, the prosecutor, “but I hope it will serve as an example of the importance of holding those who enable gun violence accountable.”

James and Jennifer Crumbley are the first US parents to be charged with having responsibility for a mass school shooting by a child.

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