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## Editorial: Fitting punishment

The Supreme Court took a proper step Monday in seeking the right balance when judges sentence juveniles convicted of brutal crimes.

The court ruled that juveniles who commit crimes in which no one is killed shouldn't be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. It was the second major decision from the court in recent years regarding punishment of teens. In 2005, the Supreme Court abolished the death penalty for juveniles.

The court agrees with the emerging science that says teen brains are less developed than adults'. As such, teens are more susceptible to peer pressure, and less able to make good decisions.

While the crimes at issue are often very heinous, teens also stand a better chance to be rehabilitated with the passage of time and maturity.

That's not to say every teen should eventually be set free. But all should at least be given a chance to show they have learned their lesson. That is essentially what Justice Anthony M. Kennedy wrote for the majority.

"A state need not guarantee the offender eventual release," Kennedy wrote, "but if it imposes the sentence of life, it must provide him or her with some realistic opportunity to obtain release before the end of that term."

The ruling supports the Eighth Amendment's protection against harsh punishment and is in line with the country's "evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society."

The ruling is also in line with the judicial standards for much of the free world.

The case before the court involved a 16-year-old who helped rob a Florida restaurant in which an accomplice beat the manager with a steel bar. The teen was sentenced to one year in prison and three years probation. The following year, the teen and two others committed a home invasion, and he was sentenced to life for violating his parole.

Justice Clarence Thomas disagreed with the majority, saying that when the Bill of Rights was adopted, capital punishment existed for children as young as 7.

But Justice John Paul Stevens showed how Thomas' "strict constructionist" logic was deeply flawed. He said under Thomas' argument, a 7-year-old who steals \$50 today could be sentenced to death. "Knowledge accumulates," wrote Stevens, who is retiring this summer. "We learn, sometimes, from our mistakes."

Stevens' accumulated knowledge will be missed.

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