



What are the acceptable excuses for child rape - the case of Luke Grender

[Luke Grender](#) is an 18 year old who has admitted to raping a girl under the age of 13 three times. Grender was 16 - 17 at the time of the crime. He was given a suspended sentence by Judge Philip Richards at Newport Crown Court due to the "[exceptional circumstance ... \(of\) ...heartbreak](#)" experienced by his family.

In 2011, Grender's sister Nikitta, who was 8 months pregnant at the time, was raped and murdered. The perpetrator, Carl Whant, then burnt down her house. Whant, rightly, received a 35 year sentence for his crime.

There are numerous difficult questions that arise out this case - many of which we fail to answer appropriately and frequently fail to ask:

- Is trauma an acceptable reason to give a young man a suspended sentence for child rape?
- Why do we assume there is a link between trauma in childhood and the potential to become a sexual offender?
- Are we doing enough in preventative support for children who experience trauma?
- At what point do we hold people who have experienced trauma accountable for their actions?
- Why is the excuse trauma used mostly in conjunction with male perpetrators?
- What about the trauma experienced by the victim of child rape?

Many of the questions that arise from this case are similar to those used by supporters of [Roman Polanski](#) who suggest that his experiences as a Holocaust survivor and as the widow of Sharon Tate, who was murdered whilst 8 months pregnant, means that he is less culpable for the crime of [child rape](#). If this were true, we would see an increase in sexually predatory behaviour in all people who survived the Holocaust - whether they be Jewish, Roma, Sinti or Soviet POWs. The simple fact is that there is no direct correlation between trauma and sexually predatory behaviour. If there was, we would see a surge in the number of women who sexually abuse children since girls make up the majority of victims of child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse remains a crime perpetrated mostly by men against women and children. It is a myth to suggest that most of these men experienced child sexual abuse and were replicating patterns of behaviour learned in childhood.

It is also clear from media coverage that trauma is only considered a mitigating factor in conjunction with certain perpetrators. The mother of the child known as Baby Peter experienced systemic sexual abuse and rape whilst in the care of the local authority as a child. Never once did the media refer to this trauma as a contributory factor in her perpetration of the fatal abuse of her son Peter. The two boys found guilty of the murder of James Bulger also had extremely traumatic childhoods - at least one of whom was a victim a child sexual abuse. At no point has the British media ever suggested these two boys were also victims deserving of a second chance (although the judicial process did recognise this).



It is absolutely essential to recognise trauma in childhood when dealing with young perpetrators, but we also need to be clear that trauma is not an excuse for illegal behaviour. A two year suspended sentence and signing the sexual offenders registry for 10 years without any other form of intervention does not speak to the seriousness of the crime or represent an adequate attempt to ensure that Grender does not continue to perpetrate sexual crimes against a child.

UPDATE: This case was referred to the Attorney General's Office as unduly lenient. The three judge panel has now sentenced Grender to [three years in a juvenile detention facility](#).