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The Six Year Old Accused of Shooting His Teacher Shouldn't Be Punished Under the Law

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According to the police, a 6-year-old boy at Richneck Elementary School in Virginia used a gun legally purchased by his mother to intentionally shoot his teacher on Friday. The event is shocking and unnerving, and, as with other crimes, we instinctively want justice for the victim and a way to ensure the perpetrator doesn't do further harm.

So it's easy to see this child as deeply troubled and label him a menace to society. Some of us may want to lock him up and throw away the key. But as a psychologist who researches traumatic stress and treats its survivors, I hope we don't. Instead, I hope we have compassion and provide mental health intervention for the injured teacher, the classmates who witnessed the shooting, the community that's reeling from the attack — and also for the child who pulled the trigger. Why? Because, research shows that most children who get intervention early for violent behaviors recover.