

IN THE CROWN COURT AT STAFFORD

R v SEAN JEFFERSON & AMY CLARK

## **SENTENCING REMARKS OF MRS JUSTICE BRUNNER**

16 APRIL 2026

1. You may stay seated during my sentencing remarks.
2. The appropriate statutory victim surcharges will be applied.
3. Sean Jefferson, on 16 March 2026, you were convicted at this court, after a trial, of the murder of your daughter, Darcy-Leigh Jefferson, and two counts of causing her really serious harm with intent to do so.
4. You, Amy Clark, were convicted after trial of causing or allowing your daughter's death. You were also convicted of two counts of causing or allowing serious harm, that harm being two sets of fractures which Sean Jefferson inflicted. I will pass sentence on you after I have sentenced Sean Jefferson.
5. The death of a young child is a terrible tragedy. Darcy-Leigh should have had a long life, being loved by her family and friends, spending happy time with her brother and extended family. You have deprived her of her life, and you have deprived others of the pleasure of getting to know her and sharing her life. The sentences that I am about to impose should not be seen as a measure of the value of Darcy-Leigh's life. Nothing that I can do will compensate in any way for that loss.
6. Darcy-Leigh was born five weeks prematurely on 20 Feb 2022 and left hospital as a healthy but tiny baby weighing 1.8kg, just under 4 pounds. At the time of her death aged just five weeks old she was still tiny, and, developmentally, was like a newborn. Darcy-Leigh must have suffered terrible pain for most of her short life as a result of the campaign of violence that you Sean Jefferson inflicted on her, in three separate episodes. By the time she died she had 47 fractures to her ribs, broken bones in both legs and a catastrophic brain injury. In the face of your silence and lies, the expert medical evidence which was heard at trial reveals what you, Sean Jefferson, did to her.

### **SEAN JEFFERSON**

7. You were born in June 1990 and so at the time of Darcy-Leigh's birth and death you were 31. You Sean Jefferson and Amy Clark were in an on-off relationship when she became pregnant. Darcy-Leigh was Sean Jefferson's only child. During your relationship with Amy Clark you abused cannabis. Text messages show how reliant on the drug you were, and how you prioritised your need for cannabis above caring for your partner and child. The evidence is unclear about whether you were directly affected by cannabis at the times that you hurt Darcy and so I do not make that finding. You and Amy Clark had separate homes and you worked part of the time, but you spent much time at Amy Clark's home with your baby, and at times cared for her alone.

8. The first set of fractures were inflicted in the first fortnight of Darcy-Leigh's life. These were three rib fractures. Those fractures are consistent with gripping and squeezing with significant force- a 'really violent squeeze' in the words of consultant paediatrician Dr Stalker. It is clear from messages and other evidence that you are a man with a short temper, and I find that you lost your temper and squeezed Darcy-Leigh with terrible force, snapping her rib bones.
9. You must have known that your daughter was injured and in pain, but you did nothing about it.
10. On 26 February 2022 Amy Clark and you Sean Jefferson took Darcy-Leigh to hospital. It was said that she had vomited on you. At the time the hospital said that she may have been overfed and discharged her. The jury heard from Dr Stalker that Darcy-Leigh's presentation with poor circulation, poor feeding and lethargy may have been caused by a previous head injury. I cannot be satisfied so that I am sure that there was a previous head injury.
11. Darcy-Leigh did not thrive, no doubt because you had injured her. She lost weight and was difficult to settle. She was seen repeatedly by healthcare professionals, including a further hospital visit on 27 February, an examination by a GP on 4 March, and examinations by a midwife and health visitor. In many of those appointments she was examined and weighed without her clothes on. The professionals did not note any bruising or other injuries. On 18 March you, Amy Clark, told a health visitor that Darcy had headbutted Sean Jefferson's collarbone and her mouth had bled a little, although the health visitor could not see anything. I am satisfied that you Amy Clark were repeating an account which Sean Jefferson had given you. That account is unlikely to be true given that Darcy-Leigh would not have had the neck strength to move her head forcefully, but the real cause of that bleeding is not clear and I do not make a finding of any further assault linked to it.
12. Your violence, Sean Jefferson, escalated. The second set of fractures were inflicted five to ten days before Darcy-Leigh died. These were 34 separate rib fractures to the front, side and back of her ribcage. Some were to her first rib, which indicates more force than other rib fractures, as those first ribs are protected by the collarbone. In addition there were two leg fractures to her left leg. The type of fracture, called a Classic Metaphyseal Lesion, is caused when significant forces are applied to the limbs. Experts described how squeezing a baby around the chest with great force and shaking her so that her legs flail in an uncontrolled way can cause both rib and leg fractures and I am satisfied that is what happened here.
13. I am also satisfied that those fractures were inflicted on the night of 23 March. You were in sole charge of your daughter at around 11pm when Amy Clark was in bed, and you sent a message to Amy Clark saying you did not know what to do because the baby would not stop screaming. I am sure that you again lost your temper with Darcy-Leigh and squeezed and shook her extremely violently, causing those multiple fractures to her ribs and leg.
14. Following that assault Darcy-Leigh would have been in great pain. Some of the fractures were displaced, which would have caused particularly severe pain. The following day, on 24 March she was seen by a health visitor who noticed that she was distressed. You, Sean Jefferson, were not there. Amy Clark pointed out small

bruises on Darcy-Leigh's chin and reported that you, Sean Jefferson, tended to hold her under the chin when winding her. The health visitor said that said Sean Jefferson needed to hold Darcy more gently. Amy Clark you also pointed out some dried blood on Darcy-Leigh's mouth. The health visitor said it was a possibility that the blood was caused by a bottle being put into her mouth too forcefully. I am satisfied that again you, Amy Clark, were repeating explanations which had been given to you by Sean Jefferson, and that those injuries were caused during the second assault. The health visitor followed protocol and referred the issue to a social work team. A social worker visited the same day and did not consider that there was any cause for alarm.

15. Again, you, Sean Jefferson, must have known that your daughter was seriously injured, but did nothing to help her to get medical assistance or pain relief. On 24 March you sent text messages to work colleagues with bizarre lies, saying that Darcy-Leigh was seriously unwell in hospital with internal injuries and that it was not looking good, implying that she might die. Darcy-Leigh was not in hospital at that date although you put her in hospital just three days later. Those messages are a clear indication that you were well aware that you had severely injured your baby- at the time you sent those messages you had broken most of her ribs in more than one place.
16. A few days later on 27 March your violence against your baby reached its peak.
17. I accept from the accounts that both you and Amy Clark gave to medics and police that Darcy-Leigh was well at 7am. You took Darcy-Leigh downstairs and began to prepare a bottle of milk. I am satisfied that you lost your temper and attacked her for a third time, this time with even more force. You squeezed her very tightly and roughly whilst you shook her vigorously.
18. Darcy-Leigh screamed in pain when you shook her, before losing consciousness. Her mother Amy Clark heard that from upstairs, later describing it to a friend as a scream which she had not heard before. You inflicted ten further rib fractures, to the front and back of her ribcage, and again including a first rib fracture. There were a further two classic metaphyseal leg fractures, this time to Darcy's right leg. You also caused a fatal catastrophic brain injury. There was extensive bleeding over both sides of the brain and extensive retinal damage. As experts described, Darcy's brain had moved with great force backwards and forwards within her skull, and her brainstem was injured. That caused her to stop breathing, resulting in brain cells being starved of oxygen. She would have immediately become semi-conscious or unconscious and her heart would have stopped soon after. These injuries were described by Dr Stalker as being at the severe end of the spectrum. They were the result of a severe level of violence, comparable to injuries caused in a high-speed head-on collision or a fall from a second storey window.
19. This time, you did seek help, realising that you had injured her even more severely than you had previously. You called 999. You followed the call-handlers instructions and tried to resuscitate Darcy-Leigh, but it was too late. Despite the best efforts of paramedics who attended, and hospital staff Darcy-Leigh died two days later on 29 March.
20. On post mortem there were other injuries including a frenulum injury and bruising to Darcy-Leigh's leg. I am satisfied that you Sean Jefferson caused those

injuries, but they may have been caused on the occasions that are already marked by Counts 1, 5 and 8. I sentence you on the basis that you assaulted Darcy-Leigh on three separate occasions including the fatal assault.

21. You lied to medics and to the police. You pretended that Darcy-Leigh had been fine, and then had inexplicably collapsed. Although you did not directly blame Amy Clark, you have conducted this trial on the basis that she must have assaulted and killed her own child. I do not add to your sentence because of that, but it reinforces my judgment that you are callous and unremorseful.
22. In relation to you, Sean Jefferson, there is only one sentence that the law allows me to pass for the offence of murder. It is a sentence of imprisonment for life. I am also required by the Sentencing Act 2020 to specify a minimum term which must elapse before you can be considered for release on licence.
23. It is important that you– and everyone concerned with this case – should understand what your sentence of imprisonment for life means. The minimum term is not a fixed term after which you will automatically be released. It is the minimum time that you must spend in custody before your case can be considered by the Parole Board. It is for the Parole Board to say, after expiry of the minimum term, whether or not you are fit to be released. There is no guarantee that an offender will be released once the minimum term has expired, or at any particular time thereafter. If and when you are released, you will be subject to licence for the rest of your life. If for any reason your licence were to be revoked, such as if you reoffend, you will be recalled to continue to serve your sentence in custody. You will, therefore, face the consequences for the rest of your life.
24. In deciding upon the minimum term that you must serve, I must take account of the starting point which is prescribed for this offending by Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020. In your case, the appropriate starting point is 15 years. However, the starting point is not necessarily the end point, and it will not be in your case. I must also take into account the aggravating and mitigating factors. The minimum term will reflect all of your offending including the two previous assaults, and I have considered what is a just and proportionate sentence, bearing in mind the principle of totality.
25. I will deal first with aggravating factors. They are:
  - a. The extreme youth and vulnerability of Darcy-Leigh
  - b. Gross abuse of trust
  - c. Previous violence to Darcy-Leigh
  - d. The pain and suffering you inflicted on Darcy-Leigh before her death, and failure to seek help for her
  - e. The extreme violence of the final assault on Darcy-Leigh
  - f. Your behaviour after the fatal assault.
26. I will say a little more about some of these aggravating features. The vulnerability and abuse of trust are very substantial aggravating factors. Nobody is more vulnerable and reliant on others than a newborn, and Darcy-Leigh was like a newborn on the day that you killed her. As her father, you had significant caring responsibilities and you were a person to whom she was entitled to look for love and protection. I bear in mind the need to avoid double-counting, and that these are closely related factors. However, there is not a complete overlap of these

- factors. An element of breach of trust may apply to any offender trusted to care for such a small baby alone, but it has particular and separate weight here, given that as her parent your solemn duty was to protect her from harm.
27. Previous violence is also a gravely aggravating feature here. This was persistent maltreatment and not an isolated incident of a loss of temper. As the jury found, you intended to cause really serious injury on each of those previous occasions, reflected in Counts 5 and 8, which would have been marked by substantial custodial terms if sentenced separately. They were each offences of high culpability because of Darcy's vulnerability, and offences where grave harm was caused, placing them in the Sentencing Guideline category with a starting point of 7 years. Each was aggravated by the abuse of trust, and the second offence was more serious than the first because it was a particularly violent attack, and because you had previously hurt the baby.
  28. Pain and suffering is a separate aggravating feature. I take care not to double-count, but this factor relates to the harm caused to the baby rather than to your culpability. Darcy-Leigh would have been in terrible pain for much of her short life, and that physical suffering before death plainly makes this more serious. You had the opportunity after each of those previous attacks to contact professionals, to ease Darcy-Leigh's suffering, to ensure that she received appropriate medical attention. You did not take those opportunities.
  29. I have already outlined the brutal violence involved in the final attack.
  30. Finally, in terms of aggravating features you lied about what had happened. Although it seems Darcy could not have been saved, you did not give her every chance of survival by telling doctors what you had done to her. Instead, you put your interests above hers.
  31. I now move on to the mitigating factors, and potential mitigating factors.
  32. I am satisfied that Darcy-Leigh's killing was not premeditated. I am satisfied that on each occasion when you injured Darcy-Leigh you had not intended to seriously harm her until the very moment when you did so, and each assault was carried out in a sudden fit of rage. However, by the time of the fatal attack you knew very well that you could not control your temper around Darcy-Leigh, and you knew that you were capable of seriously injuring her as you had done twice before. When you took Darcy-Leigh downstairs on the morning of 27 March you knew that you posed a serious risk to her, and that risk materialised when you shook her again. The lack of premeditation carries very little mitigating weight in those circumstances.
  33. I am satisfied that you intended to cause serious bodily harm rather than to kill. However, the significance of that potentially mitigating factor also fades away in these circumstances. You shook Darcy-Leigh with extreme force. No-one could have done that to such a tiny and fragile baby without appreciating that there was a real risk of death. In the moment that you assaulted her you did not care whether you killed her or not. The absence of an intent to kill carries little weight in mitigation here.
  34. There is no mitigating factor of remorse in your case. You may have regretted what you did but you have not shown remorse.
  35. It is, to some small extent, a mitigating factor that you were effectively of previous good character. At the time of the offence, you were 31 years old and

you had irrelevant conviction for a driving offences recorded against you and no previous convictions for violence. Given the nature of these offences, and the repeated violence, that has little effect on my sentence.

36. It is also necessary to recognise that the offence happened four years ago, but, given the nature of this offence, this has no significant impact upon the appropriate minimum sentence. Throughout that period, you had maintained a false narrative of what happened to Darcy-Leigh.
37. The substantial aggravating factors in this case far outweigh the limited mitigating factors, and require a significant increase to the minimum term. There will be concurrent determinate sentences of 7 years for Count 5 and 9 years for Count 8.
38. Sean Jefferson, for the murder of Darcy-Leigh Jefferson, I sentence you to imprisonment for life. Taking account of all the relevant circumstances, and the aggravating and mitigating factors that I have set out, the minimum term will be 22 years, minus 349 days to take account of time spent on remand. This results in a minimum term of 21 years and 16 days.
39. You will be taken down now.

#### **AMY CLARK**

43. You, Amy Clark, were convicted after trial of causing or allowing your daughter's death, and serious harm. You were acquitted on my direction part way through the trial of murder, the prosecution having withdrawn the case against you, and you were acquitted by the jury of causing serious harm. Given that the prosecution case was that only one person inflicted injuries on Darcy-Leigh, the jury's finding must have been that you allowed rather than caused her death and injuries, and that is the basis upon which I will sentence you.
40. You lived a chaotic life, abusing alcohol and cocaine. You had previously been in a relationship where you were the victim of domestic violence. Your son from that relationship lived with you but you were barely able to care for him, and his grandmother played a very important role in providing him with stability and looking after him. Your substance abuse continued during your pregnancy and after Darcy-Leigh was born. You had a tempestuous relationship with Sean Jefferson, and messages show you both verbally abusing each other. There was some domestic violence- when you were pregnant he kicked a door which hit you, and as you described to a friend that he had grabbed you round the neck. I do not find the domestic violence reduces your culpability; it did not reduce your ability to work out what was going on or to keep the baby away from Sean Jefferson.
41. You struggled to care for Darcy-Leigh . She would have cried a great deal because of the pain she was in, and you found it difficult to feed her and get her to sleep.
42. The jury were satisfied that you were aware or ought to have been aware of the risk Sean Jefferson posed to Darcy-Leigh from before the first fractures were inflicted. There is a difference between the two types of knowledge and in this case the difference is capable of resolution based on the evidence, and will affect sentence. It falls to me to consider whether I can be satisfied that you

knew that Sean Jefferson posed a risk of serious harm to Darcy-Leigh, or whether you ought to have known.

43. It is clear that you knew that Sean Jefferson posed some risk to your family. You sent a message to him after he had kicked a door onto you when you were pregnant, referring to him being a danger to you and your kids. It would have been obvious to you that he had a wild temper, abused cannabis and could not control himself at times. You later told a friend that that on one occasion, Sean Jefferson picked Darcy up by her arm.
44. However, I am not satisfied so that I am sure that you knew that he posed a significant risk of serious harm to Darcy. I accept from all the evidence in the case that you loved Darcy-Leigh, and that you would not have deliberately put her in a highly dangerous situation. There is no evidence that you witnessed Sean Jefferson attacking Darcy, and I find that he hurt Darcy when he had sole care of her while you slept. It is clear that he gave you explanations for minor visible injuries that Darcy had. You pointed out those injuries to healthcare professionals, who treated the explanations you had been given as plausible. You did not hide Darcy-Leigh away from professionals, and when you missed appointments that was the result of your chaotic lifestyle rather than because you were hiding Darcy. I bear in mind the evidence of Dr Stalker, consultant paediatrician, that although a normally competent adult would notice that a child with Darcy's injuries was in pain, it would certainly be possible that a person who had not seen what happened to a baby may interpret signals differently than a person who knew what happened. You were not a very experienced mother and although you plainly knew something was wrong you did not think that Darcy had been seriously injured. Your concerns were that Darcy was not putting on weight and not feeding. You acted on those concerns, taking her to hospital and talking about worries with healthcare professionals in the ways I have set out. In regular examinations, no professional raised concerns that Darcy was seriously injured. That included examinations after the time that Darcy's ribs had been broken. You would have been reassured by those interactions.
45. I therefore sentence you on the basis that you ought to have been aware of the risk that Sean Jefferson posed, but were not in fact aware of the risk. One of the reasons that you were not aware of that risk you was your continued abuse of alcohol and drugs.
46. I take as the lead sentence Count 4, allowing the death of your child. The sentence I pass on Count 4 reflects all of your offending. I have considered totality and the requirement to pass a proportionate and just sentence.
47. The Sentencing Council has published a guideline, effective from any sentence after 1 April 2023 for offences of causing or allowing a child to die and suffer serious physical harm. The maximum sentences for your offences have now increased but the old lower maximum sentences still apply to you. That has little significance here, given that the starting point in the Sentencing Guidelines for this level of culpability and harm is the same under the 2018 and 2023 guidelines. The offence would have been a category 1A offence under the 2018 guidelines, and is a category 1B offence under the 2023 guidelines. Under both

guidelines the starting point for an offence of this seriousness is 9 years and a range of 7 to 14 years.

48. In relation to Count 4, I find that there was high culpability. You failed to take any steps to protect Darcy-Leigh from offences where there was very significant force used, and which involved multiple incidents of serious cruelty. The most significant steps to protect her in the context of this case would have been ensuring that the baby was not alone with Sean Jefferson, or telling authorities what you knew about him including his substance abuse and temper and violence to you and you did not do that. You did take some steps to seek professional advice, which in the context of this case I will address as a mitigating feature rather than as a marker of medium culpability.
49. It will be clear that I am taking the two previous incidents into account when categorising the culpability of the Count 4 offence. Each of those previous offences if standing alone would attract a starting point of three years before a reduction for mitigating features. However, I have found that you were not aware of the two previous assaults, and so the fact that there were multiple incidents is of less significance than it is in cases where a parent is aware of a number of assaults but continues to do nothing. Here, in effect, the three offences amount to one continuing failure to appreciate the risk that Sean Jefferson posed to Darcy-Leigh over the period that he was assaulting her, a relatively short period of three to five weeks from the first assault to her death.
50. The harm caused was in the highest category because Darcy did not survive.
51. There are the following aggravating features.
52. Firstly, Darcy-Leigh was subjected to prolonged suffering prior to her death. Although I have previously noted the multiple incidents in the context of culpability, this aggravating factor relates to a different aspect of seriousness, being the harm caused to the baby.
53. Secondly, you were at times under the influence of alcohol and drugs which contributed to your failure to identify and act on the risk.
54. There are significant mitigating features.
55. You allowed rather than caused, and you did not have actual knowledge of the risk. That sets your case apart from many others and that alone justifies a substantial reduction from the starting point, which is a point that applies to all offenders in that bracket.
56. You took some steps to seek advice and help for Darcy-Leigh which again significantly lowers the seriousness of your offending.
57. You were effectively of good character at the time of the offending, having no relevant previous convictions.
58. You have endured some difficult personal circumstances, in particular as a victim of domestic abuse and by exposure to substance abuse within your family.
59. I accept that you are remorseful and reflective, having observed your behaviour during the trial and read your letter.
60. You have shown determination to address addiction. References show that you are committed to addressing substance abuse, and to furthering your education.
61. I also accept that you are in some ways a victim of Sean Jefferson yourself, and that you feel extreme grief at the loss of contact with your son and the death of

your child who you failed to protect, although those factors carry little weight in these circumstances where you could and should have prevented the terrible outcome.

62. It is also necessary to recognise that the offence happened four years ago, although that has a minimal impact upon the sentence for this serious offence.
63. After weighing up the aggravating and mitigating features there must be a significantly lesser sentence than the starting point.
64. I must consider dangerousness. I am readily satisfied that you do not pose a significant risk of any further relevant offending.
65. For the offence of causing or allowing the death of a child (Count 4) there is a sentence of seven years imprisonment.
66. For each of the offences of causing or allowing a child to suffer serious harm there will be concurrent sentences of two and a half years. You will be released from custody no later than two-thirds of the way through the total sentence of seven years, and the remainder of the sentence will be served on licence in the community. You must comply with all the conditions of your licence, failing which you will be at risk of recall to prison to serve the remainder of the term in custody. The days which you have spent on remand in custody will automatically count towards your sentence. You will be taken down now.
67. I thank all counsel and their solicitors for their hard work throughout this trial. I repeat my thanks to the jury who approached their role with such concentration and close attention to the evidence and the distressing details. Seven have returned and are welcome back today. They have all performed a valuable public service.