

**IN THE CROWN COURT AT MAIDSTONE
(SITTING AT THE CENTRAL CRIMINAL COURT)**



REX

-v-

S, T & O

1. Please remain seated. You will be given a copy of my sentencing remarks as soon as I have delivered them. I have not lifted the reporting restrictions which protect you from identification in public until you become 18 years of age. As I have already explained, because these sentencing remarks are to be broadcast, I will address you by a single letter to avoid unintended slips.
2. All three of you have to be sentenced for the manslaughter of Alexander Cashford at Warden Bay on the Isle of Sheppey, on the evening of 10 August last year. T and O you were convicted on 16 February. S you pleaded guilty shortly after the trial had begun. It was an appalling incident and a senseless loss of a life. The three of you decided to attack a man none of you knew, and two of you had never even met. You T were given his business card in an arcade two days earlier. That is all he did. He didn't touch you, he gave you a business card. You could have thrown it away. If you had any reason to be concerned you could have turned to all the adults in your life who care about you. Instead you showed it to your uncle O, and the two of you went with it to see you, S.
3. You, S saved the phone number in your phone and just over a minute later a text was sent stating it was from the girl at the arcade and that she was 16. He responded telling her she was pretty and asking her name. A reply was sent with the false name, Sienna. From then there was an exchange of over 70 texts culminating in an agreement to meet up in person. Alex said Sienna's age didn't put him off, he said he was 30 although he was in fact 49. Some messages may have been sent by others in your group who are not before the court but I have no doubt you were all aware of the messages being sent and I do not need to decide who was sending any particular message. Between you all, you suggested a meeting at night. He said he worked at nights and offered to meet Sienna in the afternoon. Sienna offered to send him what she called, "a sneaky pic", he suggested using WhatsApp to speak but she said her mother checks her WhatsApp so they continue to text. On 9 August among the exchanges a text is sent asking if he wants to meet at 9pm on the beach but he says he will be working. He asks if Sienna likes champagne and gets a response that she loves it.
4. On 10 August Sienna contacts Mr Cashford, "*Hey u able to meet today I really wanna see you and after the beach we can go back to mine my parents won't be there.*" Before

he can respond, another message is sent to him, “*bring alcohol with you. I love vodka, it gets me so drunk.*” He maintains that he will be working. After further exchanges they agree to meet at 7pm to take a walk for an hour. His last message to her before leaving home is “*How about 6.45. Down by the beach wall.*” The three of you were together in Leysdown passing time in the arcades.

5. Once he arrived in Warden Bay Alex Cashford called S’s number which he had saved under ‘Sienna’. You, T spoke to him and then you met him by the beach wall in Leysdown. You walked away with him for about 11 minutes with the boys S and O following at a distance with another girl. On the way S picked up a beer bottle that someone had left on the sea wall. Once you all reached a less populated area, towards Warden’s Bay, O and the girl moved ahead of T and Alex Cashford, T started filming and S attacked the victim with the bottle, hitting him on the head. He runs away while T shouted and screamed “Fucking paedophile, I’m fucking 16” and “Get him”. S pursues him. Mr Cashford falls over and gets up again to run off. The bottle is thrown at him. O also chases after him but he falls over and gets up. T, you can be heard shouting, “Get him, fucking nonce.” That footage lasts 31 seconds and is shocking.
6. Alex Cashford ran along the path, down onto a rocky, gravelly area. CCTV footage filmed from some distance away shows that he is pursued. The first 999 call is five minutes after the first attack was filmed on S’s phone. Those five minutes of trying to escape must have been terrifying for Mr Cashford. Eventually he fell and didn’t get up again. T you were yelling that he had hurt O which was untrue. Witnesses saw S throwing rocks at the man on the ground at his head and body. He then went close and kicked him in the side. Members of the public shouted at you and tried to intervene, both S and T were shouting and swearing that the man prostrate on the ground was a paedophile. T was screaming that she was 16. Those two left, pursued by someone who had asked for the police to be called. S and T met up with O who had stopped the pursuit some distance before. As you all walked back together to Leysdown, the recording of S hitting Alex Cashford while T screamed at him was sent to three of S’s friends with the message, “*Fucked pedo up LOL*”.
7. After you were arrested S you told the police that the man you attacked had hit two minors and tried to sleep with another one. T you repeatedly shouted that Mr Cashford had tried to stamp on O’s head, that he was a paedophile, that the police were stupid. O you said you hadn’t done anything. None of you told the truth.
8. Alex Cashford was a loving and beloved son, brother and uncle. He lived with his parents, who are in their 70s, and who relied on his help, and he was working on a building project. His family have had to endure the publicity this case has attracted, and the notoriety now attaching to their much valued family member who has had no opportunity to defend himself. His death will be a source of sorrow for a long time. Despite the sustained efforts at CPR from members of the public and the emergency workers at the beach Mr Cashford died there, just over an hour after he had met you, T in Leysdown.
9. The post mortem examinations carried out by a number of experts in different fields were not able to establish a clear cause of death. He had suffered a number of rib fractures leading to internal bleeding and a collapsed lung. These may have been caused by a kick or a fall or the combination of all that had happened to him. He had previously suffered a heart attack. He had a large, swollen area at the back of his head as well as

- grazes, bruises and cuts to his limbs and body. It is entirely possible that the hit with the bottle to the head, followed by the fall, the chase and the adrenalin produced throughout, led to a heart attack, which may have been contributed to by an accelerated fall at the end and this together with the subsequent blood loss and collapsed lung combined in a way impossible now to determine. I have no doubt each of you was shocked to hear, as you did soon after your arrests, that he had died. But even though the medical evidence continued to be obtained, I am satisfied that before your trial began in January this year, there could not have been any doubt in the minds of any of you, that but for your attack on this man, he would not have died that day, in that place.
10. The approach to determining disputed facts before reaching a basis for sentence is no different in a case involving children to adults. I heard the trial, I have listened to the submissions made by leading counsel on your behalf and I am sure of the facts I am setting out in these sentencing remarks.
 11. I am prepared to accept it started as a bit of mischief, among a group of bored teenagers on holiday, seeing how far you could go in tricking this grown man who had behaved, according to what S was told, creepily, into texting with a girl much younger than he was. What could you get him to agree to. You may well have enjoyed laughing about it and thought you could expose him as someone behaving inappropriately towards a 16 year old girl, a child, albeit someone capable of giving legal consent to sexual activity. So it was that you initiated contact. You were the ones who suggested meeting up, you (and I mean you collectively because your group were all in on this) offered to send a flirtatious “sneaky pic” and so on.
 12. So far, it was relatively harmless. It didn’t stay that way. S you told the jury that even that first evening there was a plan to persuade the man to meet the girl, and when he turned up for that meeting he was going to be attacked. This is where your joint activities become darker and move from what might have been excusable as childish mischief to dangerous misconduct which risked, and ultimately took, a man’s life. As I directed the jury, however unwise it was for him a 49 year old man to give you, T, his card and flatter the 16 year old he was speaking to, engaging in the kind of messages that were exchanged, that did not give the three of you justification for doing what you did. That was to plan to do him significant physical harm, record it and publish it for friends to see.
 13. In this country we have law. We have police. We have a justice system. Everyone is equal under the law. Everyone has the right to expect to be treated fairly and allowed to give their side. No one can be punished without law. I am sure you knew, and know now, that if you had a complaint there was a right way to go about making it. None of you chose that right way and on everything I have read about you I am sure that each of you was mature enough to understand that what you were doing was completely wrong and unlawful. This was not a spontaneous incident of violence. It wasn’t a group acting together by instinct, egged on by each other. None of you can sensibly claim to have been led on, manipulated or to have fallen into bad behaviour without thought. This is simply not that kind of a case. You all planned to trap and harm this man, over a number of days and as a group.
 14. The sentence I impose must be proportionate to the seriousness of the offence. Manslaughter is a serious offence. In your case the foundation for manslaughter rather than murder was only that your intention was not to cause really serious harm or death,

but less than really serious harm. The approach of the courts to sentencing children is driven by the principal aim of the youth justice system under s.37 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to prevent re-offending and the duty under s.44 Children and Young Person's Act 1933 to give due regard to the welfare of those under the age of 18. I have reminded myself of the Sentencing Council's definitive overarching guideline on the sentencing of children and apply the following approach; while the seriousness of the offence is the starting point, I have reached sentences for each of you on an individual basis, focussing on you as a child. None of you has any previous history of criminality and that is an important feature. I have sought a lot of information about each of you because the court wants to understand as much as possible in order to do justice and I will explain what conclusions I have reached from the various sources although I will not set out detail because these remarks are being broadcast. You should be assured that I have read every report and everything else provided, more than once.

15. S, you were 15 and 10 months old in August last year. You are now 16 ½. The jury heard a character reference from your special guardian who described you as not violent and unlikely to get into scrapes. Another friend described you as a gentle giant whose nature is kind. I have an education report from Feltham, a witness statement from your special guardian/your mother, I understand that you spend much of your time on your own and find it hard to socialise. I have read a full report from the Adolescent and Youth Justice Service, indeed each of the three of you have been the beneficiaries of excellent input from the Youth Justice professionals for which I want to pay tribute. In your case Natalie Mitchell has summarised your childhood and the adverse experiences you have had. It is hoped that you will now receive an Education, Health and Care Plan which may help you make progress. However, I am not able to accept her conclusion that your actions were not deliberate. I have a report on the parenting you have received and, again in common with T and O, you have been loved and cared for by a supportive adult who wants the best for you.
16. You have had many challenges in your young life which I do not need to mention but you should know I have reflected on them and give credit to the kind woman who has brought you up and who has produced someone she can be proud of, except for the events I have to deal with. I take into account the Sentencing Council's definitive guideline for sentencing offenders with mental disorder, developmental disorders or neurological impairments, although that applies to offenders over the age of 18 so I have also reminded myself of the relevant cases such as *R v PS and others* [2019] EWCA Crim 2286. You are autistic and have ADHD. I am not persuaded that you have any learning disability or anything that prevented you from appreciating, to the degree that any other 15-year-old would realise, what could happen if you attacked a man to the head with a bottle. I do take into consideration that the rigidity of your thinking as a person with autism may have made it harder for you to desist from the agreement the three of you had reached once it had started, especially given your family history. But there is no evidence that you did want to desist, it was your phone that was used to communicate with Alex Cashford, and you were the one who decided to pick up the bottle.
17. T, you were 16 and 2 months. You are now 16 and 10 months old. You are the oldest I have to deal with today. Character references described you as kind, caring and respectful, someone who helps with her younger autistic brothers. Your parents

described you as having maturity beyond your years and they found your behaviour concerning Alex Cashford completely out of character. As your barrister said, Tim Sharp has prepared a detailed and thorough report from the Youth Justice Service and he has my thanks. One important feature in your case is the gaps in attending school that you have experienced. It is not easy to see why the anxiety you experienced didn't lead to your parents obtaining help for you. You experienced friends being physically assaulted in the area where you lived and this added to the fears you had. At Lincolnshire Secure Unit you have blossomed. All indications are that you are now on the right track, taking advantage of every opportunity available to you. You have achieved a Gold behaviour standard almost every week which you can be proud of.

18. I have a report from your social worker and I have read letters from you and you parents. You are sorry for what you did and you wish you could go back and change your decisions. I believe you. I also believe that you value your family and your parents' support. They are committed to helping you in the future and look forward to having you back home.
19. Psychological reports by Ms Shallow explain that you have social anxiety and probably a degree of autism although that is not formally diagnosed. She concluded that your emotional and social development may be less mature than would be expected typically. This is in contrast to the view of your parents. You may also have some psychological vulnerability rooted in neurodevelopmental differences Ms Shallow found but these are not features that provide evidence of a lack of understanding about right and wrong, or an inability to appreciate basic moral boundaries. In a similar way to S I make the observation that your behaviour in relation to Alex Cashford does not fall easily into a description of someone who is unduly peer-influenced but equally the evidence is clear that when in an emotionally charged state you do not control yourself as an older or more disciplined person of your own age might do.
20. O, you were 14 and 8 months old, you are now 15 and 4 months. You are the youngest of seven siblings and T's mother is one of your older sisters. You are sporty and had been visiting Leysdown all your life for holidays. Typically you spent days at the arcades, or playing at the caravan site club. The reports prepared on you show that you have enjoyed a strong, supportive family background. The character references present you as a healthy, strong and decent child with a positive future ahead. Your school report, and the statements from your parents confirm that you had a good upbringing by people who did their very best for you. You appear to have all the attributes that should have enabled you to put a stop the plan that the three of you had formed, especially as it was two days between the first meeting and the attack.
21. The psychological reports by Dr Ormond bear out your emotional resilience and lack of underlying health condition or vulnerability. You have coped well with being in secure accommodation and complied with the requirements as well as taking up the opportunities available. You have normal adolescent development and until August last year, you were well on the way to a potentially very successful young life in sport. Although the psychological assessments do not raise any particular issues so far overall it is clear that the longer you are away from your family and a normal life, the harder it will be for you to catch up. I have listened carefully and considered long the invitation that in your case a Youth Rehabilitation Order with a 3 year supervision requirement and intensive supervision and surveillance as well as electronic monitoring would be

the right outcome. The report prepared by Michael Gordon has not persuaded me that I would be doing justice to this case by imposing such an order despite what I am about to say.

22. Judges understand that custodial sentences for children are always a last resort and should only be imposed where the offence is so serious and the child's level of responsibility is such that no other outcome is appropriate. I know that as children, a custodial sentence will have a greater impact on each of you than it would on an adult who had committed the same offence. I have thought carefully about your maturity, not just your age in years. From everything I have learned about you, and having seen two of you give evidence, I have in my mind the effect the sentence I have to impose will have on your education and the way that you are able to reintegrate into society once the sentence is over. However, I have to tell you that I have come to the conclusion that there is no other option than custody in this case and that applies to all three of you despite there being no indication that you are dangerous. Having reached that conclusion following all the other guidance I have referred to I move on to reach the correct terms. As there is no offence specific guideline for children I have had regard, as a preliminary consideration, to the adult guideline for unlawful act manslaughter.
23. S, you were the person who took the lead in the violence, and you bear the greatest responsibility. It is agreed by your lawyers that had you had been an adult the starting point for a custodial sentence would be 12 years as this is a high responsibility case. I do not apply the guideline that indicates such a sentence because it does not apply to children. I reach a starting point which is two thirds of that, 8 years. This has to be raised a little because you used a weapon, this was a planned attack intended to cause serious but not really serious harm, you were in a group with others and you intended to humiliate the victim by publicly shaming him by recording the attack and sending it around identifying him as a paedophile. That was all part of the plan. Indeed, you told the jury that all three of you planned this on the first day and the intention was that you and O would hit him but it would be in the dark so you wouldn't be caught. T wouldn't join in the violence because she is a girl. As you were following him along the beach wall you gave your bag to the other girl who was with O, you told the jury that was because it would have restricted your movement in a fight. T already had your phone. O and you discussed how you are going to hit him, You were going to attack first and then O would run up and hit him too. This was going to happen in an area where there were not many people and when T stopped walking that was the signal to attack. It was going to be an attack with fists but when you saw the bottle you decided to use it.
24. What was not part of the plan was to kill him. But the law requires you to take your victim as you find him. He turned out to be someone who had had a heart attack in the past. The jury did not convict you of murder and so I do not sentence you on the basis that you caused the rib fractures he suffered with a kick involving the use of severe force. However, you did use the bottle to his head, you did pursue him even after T had taken the video of you doing that while she was screaming that he was a paedophile, you pursued him, and threw rocks at him which I am sure did hit him, and then kicked him to his side using moderate force, while he was lying on the ground. All these things shocked those who saw it. The persistence of your attack and the posting of the video T had taken to three of your friends immediately afterwards make your role more

serious than that of T and O even though they had agreed to the plan to attack Mr Cashford.

25. There is some mitigation of your neurodevelopmental conditions which reduce your responsibility and I do take account of your history. I am sure you are genuinely remorseful. Carefully balancing the factors that make the case more serious than the term of 8 years and those that provide mitigation, I return to 8 years.
26. You pleaded guilty to manslaughter two days after the trial had started. You had never indicated an intention to plead guilty to manslaughter before that although the account set out in your defence statement was consistent with such a plea. The court must take into account when an indication to plead guilty is given. Section 5 of the Children guideline is relevant. It closely follows the adult guideline. Taking all the relevant features into account, I will reduce the sentence by one year to reflect that guilty plea. In your case S the sentence is 7 years custody.
27. T, your role was central. You were the one who shared the business card Alex Cashford gave you and it was only because you wanted to pursue him that any of this happened. You were the one who went to meet him, you walked away from the more populated area with him and it was on your signal that the attack by S and O began. Anyone listening to your screaming encouragement to S to “get him” on the video you recorded on S’s phone, would be horrified, as your parents plainly were. In your case the starting point is also 8 years custody. You saw S use the bottle to Mr Cashford’s head and you continued to pursue the victim with S. You were present when S threw the rocks and kicked Mr Cashford while he was on the ground. You claimed, falsely, to the police when you were arrested that Mr Cashford had hurt your uncle O. You did not strike the man on the ground although you did encourage S to do so by your shouting. You do not have the benefit of a guilty plea. The term is 7 years custody.
28. O, you are the youngest. You agreed with S and T that the man who you had seen talking to T in the arcade would be attacked and the attack filmed. After S hit Alex Cashford with the bottle, you pursued him. I am sure you only stopped because you also fell over and got hurt and so there is no basis for reducing your responsibility for the attack albeit you did not stay involved for the totality of it. You lied to the police when you said that he had hit you. Because of your age, the starting point in your case will be 6 years custody. I make a further reduction because of the proportionately greater impact on a younger child of a period in custody. The term in your case is 5 years.
29. You will each serve one half and then be released on licence. The time you have already spent will count. I am sure you will be given the date of your release very soon after today. I want to make one further observation which I hope you will remember. You are all young and you will still be young when you rejoin society. You did a terrible thing and you are each paying a price for it. But there is great potential for each of you to live a good and fulfilling life when you are released. It is up to you to choose how you will live.

Mrs Justice Cheema-Grubb

30 April 2026