

**A child's age objectively affects how they experience police questioning: minors are more susceptible than adults to perceived pressure and authority, are more suggestible, and are at greater risk of falsely confessing, so age is materially relevant to whether a reasonable person would feel free to leave or to remain silent.**

Evidence strength: Moderate

Scientific consensus: Established

**BOTTOM LINE**

There is consensus, scientific and judicial (J.D.B.), that children experience interrogation differently and are more vulnerable to pressure and false confession. The harder questions are how large the effect is and how it applies to any individual case — not whether youth matters.

**WHAT THIS CLAIM DOES NOT SAY**

- Does not claim a confession by a minor is necessarily false or involuntary.
- Does not claim age determines the outcome of a custody or voluntariness analysis by itself.
- Does not claim all minors are equally suggestible or vulnerable; individual and situational variation is large.
- Does not claim minors cannot give reliable, voluntary statements.
- Does not claim science can determine whether a specific confession was true or coerced.

**SCOPE — WHERE IT HOLDS**

Holds as a developmental generalization most pronounced for younger adolescents (roughly 15 and under) and intensifying with coercive interrogation tactics and longer questioning. It concerns objective, commonly understood effects of youth on the interrogation experience — the basis the Supreme Court used in J.D.B. — not a claim about any particular child's subjective state.

**EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS**

Laboratory experiments show younger and more suggestible participants are more likely to take responsibility for acts they did not commit, especially when confronted with false evidence; large studies of adjudicative competence find adolescents 15 and younger more often perform at impairment levels comparable to incompetent adults and more often defer to authority; and developmental reviews document why youth heightens suggestibility and compliance under interrogation. In *J.D.B. v. North Carolina*, the Supreme Court relied on these commonly understood effects of age to hold that a child's age is relevant to the objective Miranda custody question.

**STUDIES (VERIFIED SOURCES)**

## SEMINAL

**Grisso, T., Steinberg, L., Woolard, J., Cauffman, E., Scott, E., Graham, S., et al (2003). Juveniles' competence to stand trial: A comparison of adolescents' and adults' capacities as trial defendants. *Law and Human Behavior*, 27(4), 333-363.**

Cross-sectional · N = 1393 · adolescents vs. young adults · doi.org/10.1023/A:1024065015717

Adolescents 15 and under more often show impaired adjudicative capacity and compliance with authority.

## SUPPORTING

**Redlich, A. D., & Goodman, G. S (2003). Taking responsibility for an act not committed: The influence of age and suggestibility. *Law and Human Behavior*, 27(2), 141-156.**

Experimental · 12-13, 15-16, young adults · doi.org/10.1023/A:1022543012851

Experimental: younger, more suggestible participants more likely to falsely take responsibility.

**Owen-Kostelnik, J., Reppucci, N. D., & Meyer, J. R (2006). Testimony and interrogation of minors: Assumptions about maturity and morality. *American Psychologist*, 61(4), 286-304.**

Review · doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.61.4.286

Developmental review of why youth heightens suggestibility and compliance in interrogation.

## LIMITATIONS

Experimental false-confession paradigms involve low-stakes acts and cannot ethically replicate real interrogations; field false-confession rates are estimated from exonerations and are uncertain; samples are largely U.S.-based; and individual suggestibility varies widely, limiting case-level inference.

## COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

(1) That a juvenile's confession is reliable simply because it is detailed — youth raises the risk of false or compliant confessions. (2) That age only matters subjectively — J.D.B. treats it as objectively relevant. (3) That all minors are equally vulnerable — variation is substantial.

## EXPERT WITNESS NOTES

Tie directly to J.D.B.'s holding that age is objectively relevant to custody, and to the voluntariness and reliability of confessions. Present youth as one objective factor among the totality of circumstances, not a determinant. Be candid about the ethical limits of false-confession experiments and the difficulty of estimating real-world rates; frame the science as explaining mechanism and elevated risk, not adjudicating a specific confession.

## LEGAL MAPPING

### RELIED ON BY

J.D.B. v. North Carolina — 564 U.S. 261 (2011)