

## 'Immature' Student Gets Six Months For Assault On Girl, 5

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SECTION: HOME NEWS

HEADLINE:

A shy teenage member of a strict Jewish community was sentenced to six months youth custody today for indecently assaulting a five-year-old girl.

Student Phillip Eli Cohen, 18, who blamed his behaviour on "evil impulses" and repressive upbringing, looked stunned as Judge Robin Laurie told him he "richly deserved" a custodial sentence. While he accepted that Cohen, of Riverside Road, Stamford Hill, north London, was immature and not street-wise, he was an intelligent young man with an "element of brass if not metal in his character".

"Anyone can see that these assaults have done enormous damage," said the judge. He told Cohen, a member of the orthodox Yekers community, that one of the most serious aspects of the case was the effect it would have on the girl. "In my judgment, this offence is so grave that a non-custodial sentence cannot be justified." He added: "It is high time in my view that you paid the penalty that any other young man in the same circumstances would be expected to pay, which in my view, you richly deserve." Cohen was convicted of the offence four weeks ago after a two-month trial at Southwark Crown Court.

He was cleared of three other offences of indecently assaulting the girl as well as 13 allegations of indecency and one of buggery against the girl's older brother. When the trial opened, the prosecution claimed Cohen had subjected the two children to years of sadistic sexual abuse. John Hilton QC, prosecuting, alleged Cohen had "indulged his sexual fantasies" by abusing the children and dressing up in their mother's clothes during evening sex sessions while the parents were out.

The children made numerous allegations in court against him, but defence counsel Ann Curnow QC maintained their evidence had been orchestrated by their mother and could not be relied upon. The court was told the family also had a long history of psychiatric difficulties. After learning that her daughter had been sexually molested, the mother wrote to Cohen threatening to kill him if he came near her children again. Cohen wrote back apologising for his actions, saying he had succumbed to evil impulses.

In evidence Cohen, who said he prayed several times a day, admitted he had twice indecently assaulted the girl after seeing her running around in a nightie. A repressive upbringing in a strict Jewish household led him to assault her. Miss Curnow urged the judge to show mercy and not pass a custodial sentence on Cohen, who had already paid a "very heavy penalty" for what he had done. His health had suffered and he had felt "suicidal" during the trial. His A level studies had been affected and his plans for a law career had been made virtually impossible. Miss Curnow told the judge Cohen had changed during the "anxious and terrible" 18 months since the offence. He was now much more mature and "genuinely remorseful". After the case, Cohen's solicitor Martin Zeidman said he was planning to appeal against the sentence.

During the trial, 41-year-old community police liaison officer Jonathan Rosenthal, also of

Riverside Road, Stamford Hill, was acquitted of indecently assaulting the children after the jury used an ancient common law right to decide the Crown's evidence was not strong enough.