

City man gets two years in child abuse case

BY KEITH EPPS / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

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A Fredericksburg man who beat a 17-month-old girl he was baby-sitting earlier this year was ordered Monday to serve two years in prison.

Warren O. Whistleman Jr., 57, was sentenced to a total of 11 years in prison with all but two years suspended. He had previously been convicted of unlawful wounding, felony child neglect and three misdemeanor counts of contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Judge Gordon Willis' sentence exceeded the recommended state sentencing guidelines, which called for probation only. Prosecutor Travis Bird had argued that the guidelines were inadequate in this case and that "anybody who uses a little girl as a punching bag during a drunken stupor deserves to go to prison."

According to the evidence, Whistleman had the girl and her three siblings—ages 3, 4 and 6—in his home for two days starting April 12. Whistleman was a friend of the children's mother and stepfather and had periodically baby-sat them for about a year.

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The evidence showed that Whistleman drank heavily the entire two days, downing at least a half-gallon of Jack Daniel's whiskey.

He was highly intoxicated when a friend of his saw him punching the youngest child and shouting, "Shut up, you [expletive]."

The friend went to another friend for advice on what to do and it was suggested that he contact the children's parents.

The parents later called police and Whistleman was arrested. The little girl had bruises all over her body, while one of her brothers had a handprint bruise across his face.

Whistleman has repeatedly denied hitting the children and in a recent letter in court files, he suggested that the man who called the parents was actually the attacker. In previous statements to police, Whistleman has told stories ranging from the child falling and hurting herself to him blacking out and not remembering what happened.

Defense attorney Benjamin Burchett urged the judge to follow the guidelines, pointing out that Whistleman had no previous felony record and had cared for the children on other occasions without incident.

Keith Epps: 540/374-5404

kepps@freelancestar.com