

9 YEARS FOR BEATING

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BY KEITH EPPS

A Fredericksburg man who beat a baby boy nearly to death for no apparent reason was ordered yesterday to serve nine years in prison.

Jordan Scott Johnson, 21, was sentenced in Fredericksburg Circuit Court to a total of 23 years in prison with 14 years suspended. He had previously pleaded guilty to malicious wounding and child abuse.

According to the evidence, Johnson was baby sitting the then 8-month-old child on June 9 at the Forest Village home he shared with the child's mother, who has since had Johnson's child.

The 8-month-old was bruised and unresponsive when the mother got home late that night, and she immediately called 911.

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Doctors said that the child would have died had it taken any longer for him to get medical attention. The child has fully recovered, something everyone involved described as a miracle.

Among the child's injuries were three skull fractures, brain swelling and a lacerated liver. The child was expected to have lifelong effects from the beating.

Judge Gordon Willis referred to the child's recovery as he pronounced sentence on Johnson for his "despicable" actions.

"This child couldn't have done anything to deserve this," Willis said. "It is nothing short of a blessing that the child survived."

Even yesterday, Johnson was unable to offer any reason for the attack, though his lawyer, Cameille Cromer, suggested that he was high on PCP.

"I don't understand why I was able to do what I did," Johnson said prior to being sentenced. "I need change. I need help."

Johnson, who had 15 criminal convictions before this incident, told police that he struck the child with an open hand and shook him violently until "white spit was coming out of his mouth," according to the evidence.

Johnson said he repeatedly slammed the baby's head into the floor and threw him into a bassinet so hard that the bassinet broke.

He told police that the child wasn't crying or doing anything to trigger such rage.

Prosecutor Travis Bird asked Willis to give Johnson the maximum penalty, which is 30 years.

Bird said Johnson did not deserve a break just because the child survived and pointed out that help was not sought until the mother got home.

"But for the miraculous work that [the VCU Medical Center] did, this child would be dead," Bird said. "[Johnson] did everything short of killing him."

Willis didn't give the maximum, but he did go well above what was recommended by the state sentencing guidelines, which called for a maximum penalty of six years and five months in prison.

Keith Epps: 540/374-5404

Email: **kepps@freelancestar.com**