

# Former Police Officer Sentenced to 7 Years in Prison

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BENTONVILLE, Ark. (AP) - A former Gentry police officer has been sentenced to seven years in prison after admitting to having sex with a 16-year-old girl.

Charlie Harp, 39, pleaded guilty to second-degree sexual assault in Benton County Circuit Court. Harp told the judge the only reason he delayed entering the guilty plea was because he wanted to make sure his family was going to be well taken care of.

"I'm stepping up to take my punishment," Harp told Circuit Judge Tom Keith last week.

Harp was arrested in September and charged with having repeated sex with a girl he befriended and was tutoring in math and English when she was 16 and 17 years old.

The girl's mother complained to police that she thought Harp and her daughter were having an inappropriate relationship based on the content of e-mail and instant messages the two were sending each other.

Harp was a 10-year veteran of the Gentry Police Department and had supervised the criminal investigation division. The girl told authorities Harp began tutoring her after school in math and English about a year before, and she considered Harp a father figure.

Harp's sexual relationship with the girl wouldn't have been second-degree sexual assault except for his job. The charge normally requires a victim be age 13 or younger, but state law allows prosecutors to charge a person older than age 20 for having sex with someone 18 or younger who is under his or her care and control.

Harp must serve at least 14 months before he's eligible for parole.

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