



July 3, 2018

## **ACSSW** Calls for End to Separation of Families Policy and Immediate Reunification

The American Council for School Social Work (ACSSW) strongly condemns the continued practice of separating children of any age from their parents and families at the United States-Mexican border. This practice is not only abhorrent immigration policy, it has the potential to deliver irreparable harm and trauma not only to the children but to their families as well. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (adopted November, 1989) declares that the best interests of children must remain the focus of all actions which affect them.

Placing separated children in make-shift and unfamiliar housing with no access to parents, family or friends and with no knowledge of their particular mental or physical needs nor prior trauma is in direct opposition to what their mental, emotional, and physical health and well-being require.

There is no data to suggest that this practice does anything to secure the border. Offering minimal media access promotes speculation and misinformation and suggests a lack of transparency that warrants immediate investigation into the practice. Further, it appears to be a practice that was not well thought out nor well planned for prior to implementation.

Despite recent administration rhetoric to address this unjust situation, there remain over 2,300 children under the age of 13 years<sup>1</sup> who are separated from their parents. Immediate effective actions must be taken to prevent further harm and reunite families.

As defenders of social justice and ethical and humane treatment of all human beings, particularly infants, children and youth, ACSSW stands with our colleagues in censuring this behavior and calls upon all like-minded individuals, agencies, and organizations to join in condemning this unjust and cruel practice and demand that families be reunited immediately and wholly. ACSSW strongly supports legitimate and immediate efforts to interview and

investigate the welfare of these children and enjoins that social workers trained in interviewing children and trauma be key players in assessment teams.

While school social workers do not profess to fully understand immigration law and processes, they interact daily with children in schools and their parents. They are trained in family systems, are experts in child and family development, and can attest to the potential psychosocial damage that is being inflicted on these children and families, many of them seeking refuge from frightening and dangerous homeland situations.

The social/emotional violence that is being visited on these children can only serve to exacerbate their mental health challenges in the future. Rather than deterring undocumented border crossings, this practice serves to increase the risk of future problems socially, emotionally, psychologically, and academically due in part to the cruelty of its implementation. Adverse childhood experiences such as crisis family separation can contribute to the disruption of “the synapses and the neurological connections that are part of the developing brain.”<sup>2</sup> Many of these children will ultimately find themselves in schools across the United States, requiring the intervention and support of school social workers and other related school mental health providers.

Whether one agrees with the goals of this policy or not, it is unconscionable to submit children to such frightening and confusing emotional and mental cruelty and to deliberately put them at risk for future dysfunction, marginalization, and disenfranchisement.

There is never a place for practices which are deliberately cruel to children and which attack their well-being and undermine their futures. As school social workers, it is our responsibility to advocate for that which is right, just, and healthy for children no matter where they were born. This policy of family separation is the antithesis of that, and ACSSW vehemently condemns this misguided practice and its slow and vague redress.

<sup>1</sup>Luthra, Shefali and Taylor, Marisa. (2018, June 20). “1 in 5 Immigrant Children Detained During ‘Zero Tolerance’ Border Policy Are Under 13.” Retrieved 1 July 2018 from: [https://khn.org/news/trump-administration-unprepared-for-fallout-from-detaining-children/?utm\\_campaign=KHN%20-%20Weekly%20Edition&utm\\_source=hs\\_email&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=63977953&hsenc=p2ANqtz-8lzuVIWMQB-wvrweRMIt-MailPtUy1zX968xC-jgbFOE8PhWFXu3BNocgOUBFhxuIAPKFADHbwo3j7XdAfs9v967QT0Q&hsmi=63977953](https://khn.org/news/trump-administration-unprepared-for-fallout-from-detaining-children/?utm_campaign=KHN%20-%20Weekly%20Edition&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=63977953&hsenc=p2ANqtz-8lzuVIWMQB-wvrweRMIt-MailPtUy1zX968xC-jgbFOE8PhWFXu3BNocgOUBFhxuIAPKFADHbwo3j7XdAfs9v967QT0Q&hsmi=63977953)

<sup>2</sup>CBS News Interactive, Inc. (2018, June 18). “Pediatric doctor says separating families at border is ‘a form of child abuse.’” Retrieved 19 June, 2018 from: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/doctor-colleen-kraft-separating-families-at-border-form-of-child-abuse/>