



National Children's Alliance
516 C Street NE
Washington DC 20002
202 548 0090 telephone
202 548 0099 facsimile

National Children's Alliance Position on Family Separation

Earlier this year the Trump Administration began enforcing a "zero tolerance" policy that arrests and prosecutes all individuals who illegally enter the United States. However, because this policy applies to adults and not children, families that are attempting to cross the border together are being separated, with the parents being arrested and the children being placed with sponsors, in shelters or other facilities.

We are deeply concerned of the impact a policy of separating families at the border may have on children. Because Children's Advocacy Centers have been on the front lines in protecting children and serving abused kids for almost 30 years, we see first-hand the effects childhood trauma can have on children, families, and communities.

Individuals may differ on the best policy prescriptions to address immigration and border security. What is indisputable, however, is the potential for lasting harm to children experiencing family separation due to the implementation of such policies.

A sizeable body of research literature exists on the negative health and mental health outcomes of children who endure traumatic separation from parents and caregivers. For a child to grow to a healthy and contributing adulthood he/she must be able to trust, feel safe, and form lasting familial attachments. Threats to any of these seriously threaten healthy childhood development.

Children who are separated from their parents experience overwhelming fear, anxiety, loss of attachment, and terror. That is greatly exacerbated when the separation is sudden, inexplicable, and neither the child nor parent knows the location of, nor can communicate with, each other. Whatever the intended public policy outcome of such practices, the only sure outcome for children is trauma.

To prevent lasting harm to these children, we urge Congress and the Administration to work together to end family separation immediately and permanently as a part of immigration policy and border enforcement.