

An Open Letter on Trump's Policy of Separating Immigrant Children From Their Parents

IPA Committee on Couple and Family Psychoanalysis

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Amidst the recent news surrounding the Trump Administration's policies towards the separation of migrant parents and their children, Co-Chair for North America of the IPA's Committee on Couple and Family Psychoanalysis, Richard Zeitner, shares his thoughts on the impacts.

The IPA has released an official statement outlining its position on this issue, which you can read [here](#).

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Although psychoanalysts around the globe applaud President Trump's executive order just yesterday to end the separation of children from their families under his "zero tolerance" policy, an action that had already separated approximately 2,300 children from their families, there is no plan for the reunification of those children with their families and it appears so far that an apparent chaos in record keeping may render the process of reconciliation extremely difficult – if it is undertaken at all.

This set of events *is* one of America's darkest and most shameful moments in history, and perhaps the most egregious since the internment of Japanese-Americans in World War II. These actions were originally undertaken as justification for achieving national security, and in the service of delivering on his promises to bring about immigration control, all while Attorney General Jeff Sessions deviously used Biblical scripture to give credence to them, is unimaginable in a nation whose moral foundation has been immortalised by the poet Emma Lazarus's famous lines, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free", inscribed on our Statue of Liberty. While our New York harbour has been a golden symbol of freedom, our Southern border has now become a dark sign of America's inhumanity.

For us as psychoanalysts, mental health professionals who pride ourselves on the understanding of the impact of early trauma and the damage these children will undoubtedly incur as a direct result of separation from their parents or caretakers, we are appalled. We know that many or all of these children will experience severe disruption of their development, introducing constitutional physical and mental vulnerability throughout their lives.

There are decades of research on the residual effects in children who suffer early parental separation and loss, and the adverse systemic effects of the resulting prolonged surge of stress hormones on the human body. We cannot expect the average lay person to be knowledgeable about these intricacies of human functioning. And yet, what we share with our fellow men and women— a sense of sadness and heartbreak about what has transpired with these children and families, the sense of horror that defies common sense about something so abjectly wrong and immoral – all these feelings attest to the truth of the scientific research on the horror that is unfolding in an educated, fundamentally good country that has stood as a beacon of progressiveness since its inception.

As psychoanalysts, we now speak out about this travesty and against the corruption of political machinery and heartless actors who fail to understand the tragic human impact of this dreadful policy.

**Richard Zeitner, PhD
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