



AMERICAN COUNSELING
ASSOCIATION

Your Passion. Your Profession. Our Purpose.

June 20, 2018

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

The American Counseling Association is deeply disturbed by the treatment of families seeking entry into the United States. Specifically, we are concerned about the separation of children, some as young as 18 months, from their families. Separating children from their families, with no clear timetable (or real expectation) of reunification has been called immoral, disgraceful and inhumane. We agree with these descriptions—and consider this course of action to be unacceptable.

Therefore, the American Counseling Association writes to ask that you order the Department of Homeland Security to immediately halt its practice of separating immigrant families at the U.S. border. As the largest professional association representing Licensed Professional Counselors, who are highly trained mental health professionals, ACA is aware of the profoundly negative affect on the emotional and mental health of children when they are separated from their families in a manner such as this.

Some of these families are seeking asylum in our country. They come from countries where they have witnessed, and or have been subjected to, violence. To arrive at a place, thousands of miles from home, only to be taken away from their parents, exposes these children to another traumatic event, causing further harm to their mental health. All families who are entering the U.S. deserve humane treatment, in keeping with our nation's values and ethics.

In sending this letter and making this request, ACA adds its voice to other leaders who have called on your administration to end this practice, including former First Lady Laura Bush, the Reverend Franklin Graham, the Southern Baptist Convention, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and former White House Communications Director Anthony Scaramucci. Each called for an end to this practice—and their concerns and protests have been echoed by members of Congress, both Republicans and Democrats.



As mental health clinicians who are trained in providing support for others, we are compelled to address this shocking practice. We are also compelled to act. Counselors use the concept of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) to understand how children's experiences affect their current functioning, and also serve as risk factors for future mental health and substance abuse issues. We know from our training that this practice is inflicting harm on families and children.

Fortunately, the prevention of these issues is accessible and effective, but it begins with prioritizing the health and well-being of all children in our communities.

The American Counseling Association and its members call on your Administration to take the following corrective actions:

- Immediately end the separation policy for families attempting to enter the U.S.
- Present a plan clearly describing how U.S. federal government agencies will reunite the children currently in custody with the parents or legal guardians who brought them to the U.S. border.
- Present a plan clearly describing how the U.S. will provide for treatment of the trauma inflicted on all of these family members.
- Refrain from engaging in this practice for the duration of your presidential term.

Mr. President, safe borders can be maintained without engaging in this terrible practice. We will concede our association members are not experts when it comes to immigration. However, it is worth noting that none of your predecessors ever engaged in this practice when securing the nation's borders. Maintaining the integrity of our international boundaries need not be mutually exclusive with practices that are un-American and not in keeping with the values of our democracy.

Furthermore, there is no federal statute or case law that requires your Administration to separate these families. Once families who are attempting to enter the country are taken into custody by the Customs and Border Patrol, it is wholly within your power to keep these families intact. We ask that you do so while processing the parents through the detention process. And we would further note, if needed, the American Counseling Association would be more than willing to assist Administration officials in helping to treat the psychological scars that have been inflicted upon these families.



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It is our sincere hope that your Administration will end this practice immediately and help reunite these families. While harm has been done to these individuals and to our nation's standing in the world, the harm is not irreparable at this point. Although this was the wrong action to take, we know that it is never too late to do the right thing.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gerard Lawson, Ph.D., LPC, NCC, ACS
President
The American Counseling Association