



Association for Training on Trauma and Attachment in Children

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The Association for Training on Trauma and Attachment in Children (ATTACH) is an international organization of professionals and therapeutic parents with the mission to provide training to parents and professionals to promote healthy attachment and heal trauma. As leaders in the treatment of attachment and trauma disorders in children, we strongly urge our government to stop all practices which result in temporary or potentially permanent separation of immigrant children from their parents, and of holding children, with or without their parents, in secure prison-like detention facilities or institutional warehouse facilities. The scientific community, through research in neurodevelopment and neurobiology has discovered the many ill effects that loss of a child's primary caregivers and the trauma that is experienced through loss, separation, neglect, abandonment or institutional placement often leads to long lasting negative effects on development of normal skills and capacities in affected children. These losses in multiple domains of development are significant and long lasting with neurobiological and cognitive development adversely affected. They also tend to be resistant to therapeutic treatment which leaves the child and their family at a tremendous disadvantage in dealing with delays in academic and social skills.

The ATTACH organization is deeply concerned about the long-lasting damage these government policies and practices is already having and will continue to have on the specific children involved. In addition, there are at least two other serious concerns. The first is the impact upon the workers in ICE, DHHS and other agencies required to enforce these policies. Witnessing trauma without being able to alleviate it in meaningful ways can cause lasting harm to our government officials which they then carry home to their own families and communities. The second concern relates to the significant scientific evidence that trauma continues to adversely impact the health and well-being of adults and multiple future generations. This is not only a grave humanitarian concern but sets the stage for overwhelming economic and security issues for generations to come. These challenges will affect not only the specific families harmed by these policies but by the entire community and nation far beyond what we can imagine or plan for at this time.

Although there have been recent changes in the government policy, these changes continue to result in children being placed in detention facilities. Furthermore, children who have already been separated from their families have been scattered across the United States and there is not a coherent plan for their reunification. Thus the crisis continues and the ATTACH organization calls for immediate action which would include the following recommendations:





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- Immediate achievable plans for reunification of the over 3000 children who have been separated. The U.S. government should work closely with organizations with the knowledge, expertise and capacity to ensure this is done in the most efficient, expedited, and trauma-responsive manner possible.
- Immediate cessation of placing children (even if with their parents) in prison-like detention facilities. Explore and utilize alternative to detention options for the processing of families as they seek asylum or other immigration status.
- Clarity around who can be considered as family and immunity from deportation for family members such as older siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, who step forward to take in their kin children.
- No efforts or procedures initiated to permanently separate these children from their families through adoption or any other means.

ATTACH joins with other organizations, who are speaking out on this issue. We direct our readers to these other valuable resources (listed below) which are attempting to raise awareness about this practice of separation, which unnecessarily adds to the trauma burden of children who already have suffered much in the process of escaping from their home countries and communities that threaten their safety.

- Center on the Developing Child
Harvard University <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/about/press/shonkoff-statement-separating-families/>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/nctsn-resources-related-traumatic-separation-and-refugee-immigrant-trauma>
- North American Council on Adoptable Children <https://www.nacac.org/2018/06/19/nacac-stands-against-trump-administrations-separation-of-family-and-parents/>
- Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute <https://www.sensorimotorpsychotherapy.org/>
- Multiracial Americans of Southern California <http://www.mascsite.org/category/updates/>
- Trauma Recovery EMDR Humanitarian Assistance Programs <https://www.emdrhap.org/content/>

The ATTACH organization offers parents and professionals the Hope for Healing book with in-person trainings available in local communities. The ATTACH website offers listings of other educational videos and books that are of special interest to the communities who work with attachment and trauma conditions in children and adolescents. The annual conference, held this year in Virginia Beach, VA, offers a many workshops of interest to mental health professionals, and parents who work with children who have been through situations of loss of caregivers, trauma or abuse.

