

UC Berkeley Department of Psychology Statement on Family Separations

Note: The following statement was drafted by the 'Open Letter' Positive Action Team formed by the department in late 2017 to 'create public facing statements affirming our department's mission and values' and further edited according to input from members of the department. If you have not yet endorsed the statement and wish to do so, please enter your details [here](#) and we will add your name.

Faculty, staff, and graduate students from the UC Berkeley Department of Psychology add our voice to the [American Psychological Association](#), [The American Psychiatric Association](#), [The American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [the American Public Health Association](#), [the American College of Physicians](#), the [Society for Research in Child Development](#), [international attachment researchers](#), and [the American College of Nurse Midwives](#) in condemning in the strongest possible terms the Trump Administration's policy of detaining, separating and/or keeping separated families attempting to enter the US on our southern border. With the aforementioned groups, our department considers this policy to be irresponsibly and unnecessarily harmful and cruel, completely unjustifiable, and utterly contrary to the moral values of our nation.

Psychological research indicates that forced separation of families, especially the separation of young children from their primary caregivers, carries enormous risks of severe and potentially irreparable harm. Forced separation may lead to acute trauma, which can trigger increased vulnerability to mental illnesses, including depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder, and can impair children's neurological, social, and cognitive development. Long-term outcomes known to be associated with childhood trauma include substance misuse, depression, suicide, and poor physical health. These kinds of impacts are likely to be especially severe for families already dealing with the considerable stress of fleeing war, violence, and instability in their home countries. Resilience is certainly possible for children undergoing extreme stressors and family separations. That is, children experiencing the kinds of trauma just noted can avoid lasting negative effects, with the right, timely interventions. Yet adding to such severe stress with family separation is not a humane or scientifically defensible strategy.

It is morally abhorrent to deliberately and callously inflict such harms on innocent children for any purpose. We call on the Trump Administration, Congress, and the Department of Homeland Security to immediately reunite families who have been separated and end this shameful chapter in this nation's history.

Signed,

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