

## **Support Humane Policies & Treatment of Families Crossing Borders into the United States**

Initiated by the American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences Global Perspective Community

Supported by the AAFCS Public Policy Community and the  
AAFCS Family Relations & Human Development Community

*WHEREAS*, All people should be treated with dignity, respect, and concern for their needs and human rights throughout the lifespan.

*WHEREAS*, Adverse childhood experiences can have lifelong consequences that compromise and diminish children's future potential.

*WHEREAS*, Parents and strong families are fundamental to the wellbeing of children.

*WHEREAS*, There has been inhumane treatment of people, even our own citizens, in the past.

*WHEREAS*, The policies adopted, amended, and implemented shall include considerations of the best interests of children and their families.

*WHEREAS*, Family and Consumer Sciences has a holistic, integrative perspective that provides a comprehensive understanding of individual, family, and community issues on equity, justice, and optimal solutions.

*WHEREAS*, The American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) has worked collaboratively with other organizations and agencies to support the wellbeing of families.

### *BE IT RESOLVED THAT*

AAFCS members, affiliates, and communities not be silent and not allow history to repeat itself in the inhumane treatment of individuals, families, and groups of people.

AAFCS members, affiliates, and communities actively support policies and practices that consider and uphold the best interests of families.

AAFCS members, affiliates, and communities actively collaborate with other organizations through the promotion of awareness, education, analysis, and action to support the rights and wellbeing of families who have entered or are entering the United States.

## BACKGROUND

At the United States-Mexico border, U.S. federal authorities separated 1,995 children from 1,940 adults between April 19 and May 31, 2018 with inadequate tracking data needed for reuniting these families. As of July 6, 2018 nearly 3,000 children have been separated from their parents while crossing into the United States (Ainsley, 2018). Today 40% percent of those who have crossed the border into the U.S. are families and children; whereas, in 2011, 90% were single adult males (Homeland Security, 2018). The “zero-tolerance” policy of arresting parents as they crossed the border, fleeing from violence in their home countries, was initiated with the stated intent of separating children, including infants, from their parents, then dispersing them across the nation. In some cases these families had been turned away when they approached the immigration centers with the aim of entering legally. This initiative from the U.S. Attorney General’s office was enacted without an adequate process of reunification (Hegerty, 2018).

On June 26, 2018 San Diego federal Judge Dana Sabraw ordered that children separated from their parents be reunited within 30 days and within 14 days for children under age 5 (Ms. L v. ICE, 2018); however, the government is having difficulty complying with that order. As of July 6, 2018, according to Ainsley (2018), authorities could not locate the parents of 38 migrant children under the age of 5. For 19 of these children, because their parents have been released from custody into the United States, the whereabouts of their parents is unknown, and for another 19 children their parents have been deported. The government has requested an extension.

Advocates claim there is not enough space in the family detention facilities to reunite and detain all the families that were separated since this policy went into effect (Barrett, DeBonis, Miroff, & Stanley-Becker, 2018). The temporary facilities hastily erected in the desert and other inhospitable environments with inadequate food, water, and medical care are inhumane. These detentions are for indefinite lengths of time (often years) while their asylum cases are reviewed (Chaplin, 2018). Some border-crossers are being charged criminally because of their illegal entry and without due process are being deported (some without their children), clearly violating human rights and contradicting research indicating what is necessary for healthy child development and family life. Further trauma and sometimes death are experienced when parents are deported back to the violence in the countries they fled (Stillman, 2018; The Guardian, 2015), which is a clear violation of international law governing treatment of asylum seekers (Ainsley & Soboroff, 2018).

### AAFCS - Comprehensive Perspective

“The American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences is a broad-based membership organization that connects FCS professionals across multiple practice settings and content areas to share knowledge, research, and experience...Our organization understands today’s complex social and economic issues and helps members make an impact on the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities” (AAFCS, 2018, para. 3). As interdisciplinary family and consumer sciences professionals, we know that separating children from their families has immediate and long-term negative effects on physical and mental wellbeing of children, family members, and communities (Berger Cardoso, Scott, & Faulkner, 2018; CDC, n.d.; Prevoo & Weel, 2015). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have consequences for negative health and wellbeing across the lifespan and can affect future generations of families as well (Felitti et al., 1998).

## Long-term Consequences of Multiple ACEs

According to the CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, American Psychological Association, the American Public Health Association, and other professional organizations, ACEs have been linked to risky health behaviors (e.g. alcoholism, substance misuse), chronic health conditions (increased risk of heart disease, cancer, and obesity); psychological problems of anxiety, depression, suicide; academic difficulties; lowered life potential; and early death (CDC, n.d.). The more ACEs experienced, the more negative impacts the children and families' experience (Gilbert et al., 2010; Lowry & Salay, 2018). These families, having already experienced trauma and hardship in their home countries and on the trip to the border, are now being subjected to more trauma where they hoped to find relief. According to Megan Gunnar, Regents Professor and Distinguished McKnight Professor of Child Development, University of Minnesota, "when children are torn from their parents for prolonged periods, it can create toxic stress ... While not all children who are ripped from their parents will realize the full consequences of toxic stress, many may. They will be set on developmental pathways toward impulsivity, poor academic achievement, a sense of aggression, and/or depression" (Center for American Progress, 2018, para. 6). Because of the numerous long-term negative consequences, ACEs have multi-generational impacts on individuals, families, communities, and for our nation (Larkin, Shields & Anda, 2012).

## American History of Inhumane Treatment of Individuals and Families

What is happening now to immigrant families at the United States-Mexico border is not the first time our government, founded to protect rights and freedom, has violated its democratic principles. Slavery in America, established long before we declared independence, forcibly separated mothers from their babies and sold mothers to the highest bidder (Brown, 2018).

In 1879, U.S. cavalry captain Richard Henry Pratt opened the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. It was a government-backed institution that forcibly separated Native American children from their parents in order to, as Pratt put it, "kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (Little, 2018, para. 6). This forced assimilation was to make Native people more like the white Anglo-Americans who had taken over their land. Over the next several decades, Carlisle served as a model for nearly 150 such schools around the country (Little, 2018). Treatment at these schools caused trauma for many children that continued in subsequent generations (Bear, 2008).

World War II prompted the largest displacement of human beings the world has ever seen, —although today's refugee crisis is starting to approach its unprecedented scale. But even with millions of European Jews displaced from their homes, the United States had a poor track record offering asylum. Most notoriously, in June 1939, the German ocean liner *St. Louis* and its 937 passengers, almost all Jewish, were turned away from the port of Miami, forcing the ship to return to Europe; more than a quarter died in the Holocaust (Gross, 2015). In reaction to Pearl Harbor and WWII, the U.S. government violated citizens' civil rights between 1942 and 1945, when government policy was to inter and isolate citizens of Japanese descent in camps. These Japanese internment camps are now considered one of the most atrocious violations of American civil rights in the 20th century (History.com, 2009).

This is particularly ironic in terms of the U.S. leadership role in developing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted by Eleanor Roosevelt and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948. It calls on all member nations to uphold the basic human rights, some of the relevant articles follow (United Nations, 1948):

- Article 5. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Article 14. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
- Article 16. (3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.
- Article 25. (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Seventy years later, these basic human rights are being violated in our nation. Currently, U.S. policies are being enforced that separate families from their children because of immigration status with little regard for these basic human rights.

Parents and strong families are fundamental to the wellbeing of children and all individuals essential for a healthy society. In response to the crisis at the United States-Mexico border, the American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences' Board of Directors adopted a resolution (AAFCS, 2015) calling for AAFCS members to actively support policies that consider and uphold the best interests of children. Separating asylum-seeking parents from their children, either by detention or deportation after they cross the border into the United States, is an inhumane policy. As professionals and citizens, we must hold our elected officials accountable when they violate human rights and moral decency.

#### Take Action

1. Substance of these actions should include:
  - a. Providing fair consideration, due process, and humane treatment of those seeking asylum;
  - b. Reunifying separated family units; and cease separating children and parents;
  - c. Holding children and families in facilities that provide for age appropriate needs;
  - d. Avoiding the separation of children and families and the further infliction of trauma caused by detaining them in geographically separated facilities, in facilities that do not provide for basic needs and care, and environments that are prison-like; and
  - e. Negating the assumption that unreliable phone contact alleviates the stressors of separation.
2. Be aware that consequential decisions can be made at local, state, and federal levels. Contact relevant policymakers. Find local, state, and federal policymakers at <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>.
3. Participate in rallies/protests.
4. Write opinion editorials and/or letters for your local/regional paper.
5. Support other organizations that are filing lawsuits and taking actions to bring about positive change.
6. Bring this concern to the awareness of people in multiple contexts (e.g., schools, universities, communities, as well as faith-based, public, private and non-profit organizations).

## REFERENCES

- American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences. (2018). AAFCS and FCS FAQ. What does AAFCS do exactly? Retrieved from <http://ww.aafcs.org>
- American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences. (2015). Unaccompanied children entering the United States resolution. Retrieved from <https://www.aafcs.org/resources/advocacy/resolutions>
- Ainsley, J. (2018, July 6). Trump admin lost track of parents of 38 young migrant children. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/trump-admin-asks-more-time-reunite-kids-parents-separated-border-n889301>.
- Ainsley, J. & Soboroff, J. (2018, July 3). New Trump admin order for separated parents: Leave U.S. with kids or without them. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/new-trump-admin-order-separated-parents-leave-u-s-kids-n888631>
- Barrett, D., DeBonis, M., Mirotta, N., & Stanley-Becker, I. (2018, June 27). [Congress, courts, stymie Trump border crackdown](#). *The Washington Post*.
- Bear, C. (2008). [American Indian boarding schools haunt many](#). National Public Radio.
- Berger Cardoso, J. , Scott, J. L., Faulkner, M. & Barros Lane, L. (2018), [Parenting in the Context of Deportation Risk](#). *Family Relations*, 80: 301-316.
- Brown, D. (2018, May 31). [‘Barbaric’: America’s cruel history of separating children from their parents](#). *The Washington Post*.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). ACE study. Retrieved June 28, 2018. <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about.html>
- Chaplin, I. (2018, June 22). [Process to reunite detained children with immigrant families is ‘total chaos’](#). *Huffington Post*.
- Center for American Progress. Experts Sound Alarm on Impact of Family Separation on Children. (2018, June 15). Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/press/release/2018/06/15/452251/release-experts-sound-alarm-impact-family-separation-children/>
- Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., Koss, P., & Marks, J. S., (1998). Relations of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The adverse childhood experience (ACE) study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245-258.
- Gilbert, L. K., Breiding, M. J., Merrick, M. T., Parks, S. E., Thompson, W. W., Dhingra, S. S., & Ford, D. C. (2010). [Childhood adversity and adult chronic disease: An update from ten states and the District of Columbia, 2010](#). *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 48(3),345-349.
- Gross, D. (2015, November 18). [The U.S. government turned away thousands of Jewish refugees, fearing that they were Nazi spies](#). *Smithsonian.com*.
- Hegarty, A. (2018, June 27). Timeline: Immigrant children separated from families at the border. *USA Today*. Retrieved July 6, 2018 at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/06/27/immigrant-children-family-separation-border-timeline/734014002/>
- History.com. (2009). [Japanese internment camps](#). A + E Network. Retrieved July 3, 2018.
- Homeland Security. (2018). [To secure the border and make America safe again, we need to deploy the National Guard](#). Retrieved at <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2018/04/04/secure-border-and-make-america-safe-again-we-need-deploy-national-guard>
- Larkin, H., Shields, J. J., & Anda, R. F. (2012) The health and social consequences of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) across the lifespan: An introduction to prevention and intervention in the community. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 40(4), 263-270.
- Little, B. (2018, June 19). [Government boarding schools once separated Native American children from families](#). *History.com*.

- Lowry, M., & Sala, B. (2018). [Separating parents and children at US border is inhumane and sets the stage for a public health crisis](#). *American Public Health Association*.
- Ms. L v. ICE - Order granting plaintiffs' motion for classwide preliminary injunction. (2018, June 26). Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/legal-document/ms-l-v-ice-order-granting-plaintiffs-motion-classwide-preliminary-injunction?redirect=ms-l-v-ice-order-granting-plaintiffs-motion-classwide-preliminary-injuncti>
- Prevo, T., & Weel, B. (2015). The effect of family disruption on children's personality development: Evidence from British longitudinal data. *De Economist*, 163(1), 61-93.
- Reuters. (2018, June 20). [Over 2,300 Children Separated From Parents At U.S.-Mexico Border From May 5 To June 9](#). *Huffington Post*.
- Stillman, S. (2018, January 15). When deportation is a death sentence: Hundreds of thousands of immigrants in the U.S. may face violence and murder in their home countries. What happens when they are forced to return? *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/15/when-deportation-is-a-death-sentence>
- The Guardian*. (2015, October 15). America's refugee crisis: Death, danger and the border crackdown. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/series/us-refugee-crisis-death-danger-border-crackdown>
- United Nations*. (1948). Universal declaration of human rights. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>