

The Negative Effects of Separating Families at the U.S.-Mexico Border

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SAINT PAUL, Minn. — The current U.S. practice of separating immigrant children from their families at the U.S.-Mexico border will have harmful, lasting effects on all members of the family, especially upon children and their parents.

Research in Family Science demonstrates that children experience increased anxiety, depression, fear, and confusion when separated from their parents. Children may also experience financial and housing instability, internalizing and externalizing behavioral difficulties, academic problems, and social withdrawal. Children placed into foster care may begin to experience boundary ambiguity the longer they are separated from their parents and as they grow closer to new caregivers. Long-term effects of separation on children include damaged parent-child relationships and emotional trauma.

These outcomes may all be experienced regardless of the length of separation. Even if and when families are reunited, research suggests that families will continue to experience many of these same negative effects in the long term. Even the threat of detainment or deportation is damaging to parents' ability to care and provide for their family, and this fear and uncertainty creates a harmful environment for child development. Negative outcomes of detainment or deportation include trauma and stress, economic and emotional instability, ambiguous loss, and changes to the family structure that may lead to a permanent family dissolution.

Research published and cited by the National Council on Family Relations demonstrates the importance of keeping families together. Findings were gathered from the references below. See additional resources and statements from other organizations below for more information.

References

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Additional Resources

- American Psychological Association. (2018). *Immigration resources*. Retrieved from www.apa.org/advocacy/immigration/index.aspx
- Chaudry, A., Capps, R., Pedroza, J. M., Castañeda, R. M., Santos, R., & Scott, M. M. (2010). [Facing our future: Children in the aftermath of immigration enforcement](#). Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute

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- National Council on Family Relations. (2018.) Resource Collection: [Immigration and Families Resources](#). Retrieved from www.ncfr.org/resources/resource-collections/immigration-resources

Further Statements from Research Organizations

American Psychological Association: [Statement Regarding the Traumatic Effects of Separating Immigrant Families](#) | www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2018/05/separating-immigrant-families.aspx

American Public Health Association: [Separating parents and children at US border is inhumane and sets the stage for a public health crisis](#) | www.apha.org/news-and-media/news-releases/apha-news-releases/2018/parent-child-separation

March for Science: [Stop the Separation of Immigrant Families](#) | actionnetwork.org/petitions/stop-the-separation-of-immigrant-families-2

National Council on Family Relations: [NCFR Response to President Trump Executive Order on Immigrants and Refugees](#) | www.ncfr.org/news/ncfr-response-president-trump-executive-order-immigrants-and-refugees

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This information is available online at ncfr.org/news/separating-families-at-border