



STATEMENT FROM APA DIVISION 6 SOCIETY FOR BEHAVIORAL NEUROSCIENCE AND COMPARATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

The Executive Committee of Division 6 (Behavioral Neuroscience & Comparative Psychology) of the American Psychological Association (APA) endorses the statement sent by the APA's President and CEO to the President of the United States, which opposes the Administration's horrific new policy of separating immigrant children from their parents (full text at www.apa.org/advocacy/immigration/separating-families-letter.pdf).

The statement is based in empirical evidence of the long-lasting psychological harm that children and parents experience when separated, including evidence bearing specifically on immigrants to the United States. Basic research conducted by behavioral neuroscientists and comparative psychologists in humans and other mammals shows that stable offspring-caregiver relationships are vital to healthy development. It also shows that severe early life stress, including separation from parents, has a host of long-term effects on neural functioning and plasticity and that some stress effects can be transgenerational.

Decades of scientific study demonstrate that early childhood stress has deleterious consequences on physical and emotional health—with impacts on brain structure, immune function, and increased risk for mental health disorders. The heightened risk and health consequences can persist for decades and across the lifespan. This robust scientific literature speaks strongly against the Administration's family-separation policy even without considering the cases of child injury and abuse that will be an inevitable consequence of large-scale warehousing of infants and children away from their parents. For the Administration to persist in implementing this policy—indeed to scale it up—in the face of overwhelming evidence of the damage it has already done is immoral and unethical.

As behavioral neuroscientists and comparative psychologists who are APA members, we are committed to using our scholarship in the service of promoting “human rights, health, well-being and dignity” (APA Vision Statement, 2009).

On these bases, we support the strong urging of the APA President and CEO that the current policy of family separation be reversed immediately.

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