

Dear President Trump,

As of September, [hundreds of children](#) remain separated from their parents, in spite of the deadline set by a federal judge in late July for your administration to reunite the more than 2500 children that had been separated from their parents due to your Zero Tolerance Policy. We now know that over 13,000 migrant children are locked in family detention centers throughout the United States.

Make no mistake, Mr. Trump: detaining children and their parents is [not an alternative](#) or a correction of the Zero-Tolerance Policy. It is a substitution of one traumatizing and terrorizing situation for another. And it is our expert opinion that indefinite detentions of children and their parents is child abuse.

President Trump, your consistently misguided and inhumane immigration policies are traumatizing children and families seeking asylum. By implementing your policies, Jeff Sessions and the Justice Department, along with Kirjsten Nielsen and the Department of Homeland Security, are criminally and intentionally perpetuating child abuse. In addition, you are all defying the 1997 Flores Agreement, which mandates that migrant children shall not be held longer than 20 days in detention. You have either come to the irrational and illegal conclusion that detaining children in custody with their parents is less abusive or, alternatively, you simply do not care that these children are being traumatized.

Let us remind you that within these detention centers, children and parents are given badges and numbers. Their lives are dictated by schedules enforced by guards they do not know who treat them like criminals. While there is variability from child to child, we know that it is destabilizing for a child to see a parent in a consistent state of fear, hopelessness, or helplessness. When a child continually sees his or her parents confused and disempowered, the world turns into a frightening place where they can feel responsible for their parents' well-being in a role reversal that can have long-lasting effects.

You are a parent, Mr. Trump. You must know that in optimal environments, parents help children know when it is time to sleep, eat, or wake up. In detention centers, it is the guards, untrained in child care or family health, who are in charge of children and parents. There is limited opportunity for

families to be together and play together freely, and there are reports of children being disciplined for climbing into their mothers' beds for comfort. You may not care that parents must endure having to decide between holding their frightened child and not doing anything that might threaten the possibility of asylum, but we do.

President Trump, there are [multiple reports](#) of children in detention centers becoming violent towards themselves and others; of not eating; of not sleeping; of not playing; of having suicidal thoughts; of exhibiting symptoms of anxiety and depression and acute and post-traumatic stress. There are also reports of physical and sexual [abuse](#) and the denial of medical treatment when timely care is critical. These children will be more likely to suffer from substance abuse, future trauma, heart disease and poorer overall health, difficulty in relationships, attention problems, and are likely to live a life of looking over their shoulder in fear and avoiding social programs that could ease their suffering.

We want you to know, President Trump, that we are unwavering in our position that these cruel and abusive policies are a consequence of your misguided and dangerous thinking. And your Republican held Congress continues to fail to hold you and your administration accountable for the enactment of policies that are inhumane and illegal. To be clear, Mr. Trump, the indefinite detention of children amounts to child abuse, and the [International Criminal Court](#) identifies engaging and enforcing child abuse as a crime against humanity.

In the United States of America and in the year 2018, children are being moved [in the middle of the night](#) with no more regard for the psychological and physiological disruption this causes than we would show farm animals. President Trump, you are traumatizing over 13,000 children without blinking an eye, but we are not blind. Our eyes will be kept open and we will continue to speak as witnesses of a deliberate cruelty that does the opposite of keeping us safe. Both the law and our basic humanity compel us to hold you accountable for this abuse, and we will continue to do so. We are watching, Mr. Trump. The world is watching. And we will remember this atrocity ten fold in November.

Authors:

Dana L. Sinopoli, PsyD, Clinical Psychologist in private practice, Philadelphia, PA

Robin G. Freedman, M.A., LPC, Psychotherapist, Lafayette Hill, PA, Cherry Hill, NJ

Mary Intermaggio, R.N., Neonatal and Pediatric Intensive Care(retired), San Rafael, California

Barbara Lavi, PsyD, Clinical Child and Adult Psychologist, Author, ACT Now
Psychotherapy Weston CT

Bandy X. Lee, M.D., M.Div., Forensic Psychiatrist at Yale School of Medicine and
project leader for the World Health Organization

Signatories:

National Coalition of Concerned Mental Health Experts

Psychologists for Social Responsibility

Psychotherapy Action Network