



The Association of Child Psychotherapists

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Statement from the Association of Child Psychotherapists (ACP) on the recent enforced separation of children from their parents on the American Mexican border.

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The recent scenes of children forcibly taken from their parents has horrified the world. This action is not new to us but is especially shocking as it takes place in a country not ravaged by war but one that according to its President aims to bring about world peace.

The Association of Child Psychoanalysts in the USA has expressed their condemnation of the forcible separation of children from their parents. The UK Association of Child Psychotherapists (ACP) felt compelled to join our American psychoanalytic colleagues in condemning the separation of children from their families, not only on the Mexican border, but in all cases of families escaping slavery, trafficking, organized violence, war and domestic violence.

It is well known that the abrupt separation of children from their parents has immediate and long term significant negative psychological consequences. Children may be unable to speak, appear frozen in terror or react in a way that is clearly disturbed. Children who receive treatment can change and grow but those who are not able to access such support will suffer long term psychological damage and many will develop mental health problems in the future. Incontrovertible evidence for this has been accumulated by child psychotherapists and psychologists since the Second World War.

The UK, like America, has child protection laws. It is a basic human right for parents and children to remain together and legislation endeavours to keep families together unless it is deemed to be damaging to the child or children. Children and adolescents arriving at a 'place of safety' are often forced to wait in limbo whilst governments decide their fate. This is in complete contrast with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the idea of the 'Best Interests' of the child being paramount. It is intolerable for children and adolescents to wait in such conditions and as a profession we want to raise awareness of the profound and lasting damage that is being inflicted in such circumstances.

The UK ACP urges the British Government to speak out against this horror but also to recognise that children are our future. Investing in good care, good mental health provision and education allows a nation to thrive. Poverty and abuse by individuals, institutions or governments produces children who grow into angry and disturbed adults.