

Letter to the Editor
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Kids' unthinkable trauma

Donald Trump may have bowed to pressure on the separation of immigrant children from families, but in exposing them to this unthinkable trauma, he has created enduring damage to their mental health and development. He has set them on a downward spiral with tragic personal and societal costs. As a leading children's mental health centre in Toronto, we know: We see the impact of childhood trauma every day.

The results of a recent meta-analysis indicate that, on average, 16 per cent of children and adolescents exposed to a traumatic event demonstrate full PTSD.

When children are separated from parents or primary care-givers, they are denied that critical attachment piece which allows them to develop secure, positive and close relationships, which are imperative for the ability to thrive. Children who do not receive this nurturing attachment feel frightened, abandoned, hurt or angry. To help them cope, they develop a range of strategies, such as acting out and challenging authority, which can spiral into violence, cutting, self-medication, crime and withdrawal. These behaviors often continue even after they are back in loving families.

Without appropriate, timely intervention, traumatic childhood experiences can result in enduring adult mental health problems. What are the chances of these children ever receiving the treatment they will so desperately need to help mitigate the damage that's been done? This atrocious, unconscionable deed will never be gone – these children's lifelong suffering will see to that.

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