



Family Separation: Is It Ever Justified?

Family members have been separated from each other for centuries and for various reasons. In past times Fathers have left to find work or fight wars. Adult children have left to seek new experiences and lives. Parents and/or children have died due to illness or living conditions. Political situations have forced removal and injury of family members. Child safety has resulting in governmental programs and policies which remove children from abusive and dangerous situations. Based on each society's perspective of the situation separation is justified or condemned.

We tell ourselves that by justifying or condemning the situation the trauma and long term impact of the family separation is mitigated. **IT IS NOT!!** Research repetitively tells us that regardless of the cause or situation there are core elements which reduce or enhance the negative impact.

While there is always trauma for children from family separation it can be mitigated when certain situations and components are in place. These include:

- **When the other parent, siblings and family members are still living with and caring for the child(ren).** Even in the most challenging living conditions children feel safer and more protected when family members are with them.
- **When the traumatic situation is defined and especially if there is a time frame** This provides the child(ren) with the clearer understanding of the threats and solutions
- **When the child(ren)'s basic needs are being met** (shelter, food, clothing, etc) **and a routine is established.** This offers the child(ren) security and predictability.
- **When there is a support system in place for the child(ren) and family.** All children grief the losses which are experienced through trauma. The appropriate long-term support system will assist them in the grieving process and provide them with coping skills which will allow them to build resilience.
- **When there is contact with the family members with whom they are separated**
- **When the child(ren) has some control in the situation** (actual or perceived)

Traumatic experiences create long term, permanent and debilitating impact when these elements occur:

- **Children are separated from all family members,** especially parents and siblings, with no ability to connect or a timeline for the separation.
- **Children's basic needs are not met,** their schedule/routine is disrupted indefinitely and no other schedule is in place.

- **There is no defined cause or defined time period.** The lack of an explanation of the cause is also destructive.
- **There is no method of contact with the other family members,** especially parents and siblings.
- **There is no familiar language or culturally activities for the child(ren)**
- **The removal from the initial traumatic situation causes additional continual trauma**
- **The child(ren) has little or no control in the situation** (actual or perceived)

Children in these trauma situations will experience long term mental, physical, emotional, psychological consequences which will lead to brain damage, mental instability, physical health issues and behavioral choices which are destructive to themselves and others. Local, national and international societies are negatively impacted by these consequences.

How do we support children in healing from the traumas they have endured?

- **We must stop the initial traumatic situation immediately and reverse all the resulting traumatic consequences.** Children must be provided with corrective actions to reconnect with family, especially parents and siblings, and other family members able to care for them.
- **Children need to be provided safe environments with permanent, caring providers** (Preferably parents or family members) **which are able to meet their basic needs**
- **Children need to be provided with long term, professional support services which assist in their grieving process and meets their other needs** (Physical, mental, psychological and behavioral)
- **Children need to be provided with developmentally appropriate life skill support** including education, social relationships, physical activities, and life experiences.

The societies in which we live, smaller such as home/community or larger such as national and international, have both a legal and moral obligation to care for children in a responsible manner. This needs to occur through laws, policies and infrastructures. But those laws, policies and infrastructures also need to be created and implemented by leaders who hold to principles of human sanctity, rights and dignity. All members of each societal structure have the responsibility to ensure that the society in which they reside reflects these principles through their laws, actions and decisions. **This is the responsibility of ALL members of each society to create, instill, monitor, assess, correct and reverse as needed.**

Are you taking action against harmful and unnecessary family separation in your local society and in the world?