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| **International Children’s Day 2017****June 1, 2017** **Partner Organization Advocacy Toolkit** |

# International Children's Day is a global celebration of the rights and well-being of children residing in different parts of the world.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is using the day, on June 1, as an opportunity to speak up in the media, with Congress and on social media to support the needs of immigrant and refugee children, and invites you to do the same.

Whether opposing the harmful Executive Orders that have targeted immigrants and refugees to your legislators, referencing the Academy’s recent policy opposing child and family detention, or elevating patient stories, your voices can play a critical role by sharing messages on the need to protect, nurture and support these vulnerable children and families.

Please consider:

* **writing an op-ed, letter-to-the-editor or blog** about any of these topics
* **sharing messages on social media** to urge your federal legislators to support immigrant children, and/or to share personal stories about your immigrant or refugee patients

# **Speak up on Social Media to Protect Immigrant Children**

Please consider sharing why it is important to protect immigrant children and families on social media on **June 1st, International Children's Day**.

To emphasize messages opposed to detention, please use *#CareNotCárceles,* a bilingual hashtag that means “care not prisons.” All other messages can use *#PutKids1st* to emphasize the general importance of elevating children as part of the online conversation. There is not an official widely used hashtag for the day itself.

* On International Children’s Day & every day, {insert org handle} celebrates all children, no matter where they or their parents were born.
* On International Children’s Day, I stand for health and well-being of all children, no matter where they or their parents were born. #PutKids1st
* On International Children’s Day, I….{insert why you stand for immigrant/refugee children}
* Pediatricians reflect on their experiences caring for immigrant kids, via @healthychildren: <http://ow.ly/xona309GbAR> #PutKids1st
* Immigrant children should be treated with dignity & respect, not detained. {insert link to resources or personal stories from your organization} #CareNotCárceles
* Immigrant children need our compassion & #CareNotCárceles. #PutKids1st
* Immigrant children should not be detained. On International Children’s Day, I urge #CareNotCárcelesfor all children entering the U.S.

# **Write a Letter-to-the-Editor or Op-Ed on Protecting Immigrant Children**

Please consider **writing an op-ed to your local newspaper explaining why it is important to protect immigrant children and families**. Op-eds are an effective medium to communicate your opinion about a timely issue in a local or national media outlet. Op-eds are typically 500-600 words in length, though it is always important to check with the individual publication for specific length requirements (most have guidelines listed on their websites).

Here are several examples from AAP that have been written on the topic in case they help guide your efforts: The [Huffington Post](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/58910743e4b04c35d583540a?timestamp=1485899826022), [Philly.com](http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/healthy_kids/Make-no-mistake-immigration-order-harms-children.html) and [AAP Voices](https://www.aap.org/en-us/aap-voices/Pages/Children-Should-Be-Cared-for-Not-Caged.aspx).

# **Key Recommendations from AAP Policy on Family Detention**

According to U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, in fiscal year 2016, a total of 59,692 unaccompanied children were detained. These are people who crossed into the U.S. over the southern border. The length of detention varies, but children can be detained in processing centers for several days at a minimum. Below are key recommendations from the AAP’s April 2017 policy statement, “[Detention of Immigrant Children](http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2017/03/09/peds.2017-0483)” and [news release](https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/pages/American-Academy-of-Pediatrics-Urges-Compassion-and-Appropriate-Care-For-Immigrant-and-Refugee-Children.aspx). **Feel free to draw from these in your own messaging.**

**Children deserve our compassion and assistance.**

* Children do not immigrate, they flee. They are seeking safe haven in our country and they need our help and support.
* Many of the children approaching our southern border have been victims of unspeakable violence and have been exposed to trauma. They are fleeing countries with the highest rates of violence in the hemisphere, overlaid with high rates of poverty. These children are vulnerable, scared and deserving of our compassion. Most of all, they deserve to be healthy and safe.
* All immigrant children and families seeking safe haven in the U.S. should be treated with dignity and respect. In every decision about children, government decision-makers should prioritize the best interests of the child.
* Broad scale expansion of family detention only exacerbates their suffering.

**Children should never be separated from their parents or caregiver.**

* When families are separated, it causes harm to children. When children are scared, it can impact their health and development. As children develop, their brains change in response to environments and experiences. Fear and stress, particularly prolonged exposure to serious stress – known as toxic stress – can harm the developing brain and harm short- and long-term health.
* Many of these families have fled violence, assembled belongings with little notice and undergone danger in transport across the border. Separating children from their caregivers at the time they most need their parent's support is cruel and devastating.
* Supportive, caring relationships with parents and caregivers can help children overcome stress and buffer the impact of traumatic events. Traveling across the border and being detained are often traumatic for children. Maintaining contact with caregivers, especially as they confront new and unfamiliar experiences, is critical for these children.

**Children should never be placed in detention centers.**

* No child should be in detention. Most of these families are not a risk to society and they should be released as a family to the community, not held in detention.
* There is no evidence that any amount of time in detention is "safe" for children. In fact, even short periods of detention can cause psychological trauma and long-term mental health risks for children.
* Studies show that children show signs of physical and emotional stress when they are detained. These can include developmental delay, poor psychological adjustment, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and other behavioral problems.
* Post-traumatic stress symptoms can last long after children are released, negatively impacting their emotional, mental and physical health into adulthood.