

THE MEDICAL HUMANITIES, ARTS, AND
ETHICS SERIES

POLITICS AND POLICIES

Fighting for the Health and Well-Being of Children at the Border

A LECTURE BY

Colleen Kraft, MD, MBA

Wednesday, September 30, 2020, 12 p.m. PT
Live via Zoom
University of Southern California

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Dr. Colleen A. Kraft is a pediatrician known for advocating for humane treatment of children at the U.S.-Mexico border.
- Thousands of children have been separated from their parents at the border under the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" immigration policy. Dr. Kraft called the separations "a form of child abuse" and raised public awareness of the long-term negative effects of this sort of trauma.

"As partisan and as divisive as the whole topic of immigration is, we need to start with what's right . . . Can we start with just keeping parents and children together while we figure out some of the other details?"—Colleen A. Kraft to the *Washington Post*, June 16, 2018

COLLEEN A. KRAFT



Colleen Kraft is clinical professor of pediatrics at the Keck School of Medicine of USC and attending physician at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. While serving as president of the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2018, she spoke out against the separation of children from their families at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Kraft is a specialist in primary care pediatrics, pediatric education, and health care financing. She previously led programs at Cincinnati Children's Hospital and was the founding program director of the pediatric residency at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine.





Thousands are marching against the administration's family separation and detention policies. (Washington, DC | June 30, 2018)

THE “ZERO TOLERANCE” POLICY

In 2018, the U.S. Department of Justice announced it had implemented a “zero tolerance” policy toward “unlawful entry” at the southwest U.S. border. In practice, this meant that anyone attempting to cross the border into the United States without permission, including asylum seekers, would be detained and criminally prosecuted. If they were accompanied by children, the children were taken away and held in government facilities. “Prior to the Trump administration, families were generally paroled into the country to await their immigration cases or detained together,” explained the Southern Poverty Law Center.

In a short period in 2017 and 2018, thousands of children were separated from their parents under this policy. (Amnesty International reported that more than 8,000 family units were separated, more than 6,000 of them in a four-month period in 2018; the U.S. government’s stated numbers have varied, but in any case are in the thousands.) Journalists and human rights advocates found that many of the children were living in inhumane conditions. Even in the cases where conditions were somewhat better, the mere fact of being separated from their parents—especially so suddenly—was traumatic for the children. Pediatricians said the thousands of children were likely to develop “toxic stress” in their brains, which could affect brain development and lead to long-term health impacts.

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Adverse childhood experiences (or ACEs) are potentially traumatic events that occur before the age of 18. Studies have shown that ACEs can have life-long effects on health, well-being, and opportunity. ACEs include

- ⦿ experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect
- ⦿ witnessing violence at home or in the community
- ⦿ having a family member attempt or die by suicide
- ⦿ growing up in a household where someone is struggling with substance abuse or mental health issues
- ⦿ divorce or separation of parents
- ⦿ having a family member be incarcerated

ACEs are common. According to the CDC, about 61 percent of adults surveyed said they had experienced at least one type of adverse childhood experience, and almost 1 in 6 reported they had experienced 4 or more ACEs.

Since a landmark 1998 study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, research has confirmed the links between ACEs and serious physical and mental health issues decades later. There is increasing recognition that not only do children need support to build resilience after experiencing trauma, but adults—and societies—also need to heal to stop the cycle of adverse childhood experiences.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- ⦿ How do you feel when you think about the experiences of children separated from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border?
- ⦿ What should be the priorities of governmental policies relating to children?
- ⦿ Why do you think immigration policy is such a divisive issue?



Children and juveniles, showing sleeping mats and thermal blankets on floor. Photo provided by Custom and Border Protection to reporter on tour of detention facility. (McAllen, Texas | June 2018)

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- United We Dream—the largest immigrant-youth-led network in the U.S.
unitedwedream.org
- Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles
chirla.org
- Women’s Refugee Commission
womensrefugeecommission.org
- Children’s Defense Fund
childrensdefensefund.org
- USC Programs and Resources
USC Dornsife Equity Research Institute — Immigrant Integration and Racial Equity Research
USC Gould Immigration Clinic
USC-Keck Human Rights Clinic

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

IMMY SOLIS of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this evening’s event. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. e-books, journals, and databases) are electronic resources, which are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

BOOKS

- Elaine A. Donoghue, and Colleen A. Kraft, *Managing Chronic Health Needs in Child Care and Schools* (Elk Grove Village: American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009).
- Carol Mueller and William Paul Simmons, *Binational Human Rights: The U.S.-Mexico Experience* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).
- Roberta Waite and Ruth Ann Ryan, *Adverse Childhood Experiences: What Students and Health Professionals Need to Know* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

DATABASES

- [Child Development and Adolescent Studies](#)
- [Family and Society Studies Worldwide](#)
- [PubMed](#)

JOURNALS

- [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#)
- [Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#)

FILMS

- [Border South](#) (Bullfrog Films, 2020)
- [Which Way Home](#) (Bullfrog Films, 2010)

