

# FASPE

## **FASPE**

### How We Think About the Family Separation Issue A Question of Ethics

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The Fellowships at Auschwitz for the Study of Professional Ethics (FASPE) is an organization that is devoted to ethical behavior within our professions and among our professionals as they face ethical issues today—institutionally and personally. We study the behavior of the professionals in Germany between 1933 and 1945 in order to consider what leads professionals to abandon ethical and professional principles and to encourage today's professionals to be active in behaving ethically.

FASPE believes in the power and responsibility of professionals. FASPE asks our professionals to be *ethical leaders* within their professions and, by virtue of their expertise and status, within the larger civil society.

A complex set of circumstances is bringing non-citizen parents and children to and across America's southern border. American laws and policies are being applied in a fashion that is separating thousands of children from their parents and detaining them apart from each other.

A respectful debate on immigration policies and programs is entirely appropriate. The United States is a sovereign state with state-related interests. However, we must not conflate the question of separating children from their parents with immigration policy.

Aside from the international and domestic legal issues implicated by these policies, family separation presents ethical challenges for professionals in many fields. Therefore, the professions must respond.

FASPE rejects the idea that the large-scale separation of parents from children is a mere political choice. To paint an ethical question solely in political terms suggests that it is appropriate both to confine the issue to political debate and to resolve it through political compromises. That is simply not acceptable when we are dealing with what are ultimately

matters of morality. Ethical questions must be resolved on the basis of the primacy and priority of ethical behavior. That has always been, and must remain, the aim of American discourse and policy, and it is the responsibility of our professionals to protect and preserve that tradition.

To be clear, many categorize issues as ethical (and not merely political) at their peril. We must not accept the use of the “morality card” as a convenient debating advantage.

With that background, FASPE concludes that the family separation policy raises clear and significant ethical questions. The requirement for *ethical leadership* demands a careful consideration of how to ask the ethical questions and then how to address those questions in an effective manner. From the perspective of the professionals, we urge the following considerations:

- To our **Clergy**: Do you have a responsibility to speak out, including from the pulpit, if you are moved by the ethical implications of separating children from their parents—even if some of your parishioners may disagree with your conclusion? Should you reach out to other faith leaders to seek to expand your voices?
- To our **Business Leaders**: Are issues that reach the level of ethical gravity to be prioritized over possible profits? Here, should your companies be participating in the creation of the infrastructure whose purpose is to hold these children in isolation from their parents?
- To our **Lawyers**: Does the rule of law and do the ethical groundings of law in a liberal democracy permit the separation of children from their parents? Put differently, does the lawful state interest to protect our borders require abandoning ethical principles, especially where there are alternative policy approaches that are lawful and do not have ethical challenges? What can you do as lawyers within our legal system to address the family separation issue?
- To our **Journalists**: Are you ethically reporting the issue, are you dispassionately and accurately describing the situation and, at what point may you, as a matter of the ethical practice of journalism, editorialize in your reporting and in your photography?
- To our **Doctors**: Is the separation of children from their parents resulting in physical or psychological harm to these children? What is the means by which doctors can employ their expertise in the pursuit of ethical policies?

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We expect our professionals to act affirmatively to promote ethical behavior, not to participate in unethical behavior and not to remain silent in the face of unethical behavior. We expect our professionals to use their expertise and their positions in their communities to act as defenders of our ethical foundations. We expect our professionals to accept their responsibility to be

*ethical leaders.* We expect this of our professionals as we think about the separation of children from their parents. And, we ask our professionals to act and to speak effectively—which means with real facts, actual expertise, learned experience and intelligent language.

It is our responsibility, as professionals, to answer the above questions in a manner that can lead our country away from the unethical separation of children from their parents and not to be complicit in it.

David Goldman  
Founder and Chair  
FASPE