

Separating Children from Families

Cynthia Peters

BEFORE YOU READ: Share what you know about what happens when children are separated from their families.

When immigrants cross the border into the U.S. from Mexico, they are looking for a safe place to live. However, the U.S. government often separates children from their parents. Often the parents do not know where the children are. In 2018, two children died in detention.

Native people remember when the U.S. government took their children away. From the 1860s to the 1960s, the U.S. government forced Native children to go to boarding schools far away from their homes.

Sometimes the children did not see their parents for many years. At the boarding schools, teachers did not allow children to speak their Native language. They could not wear Native clothes or practice Native customs. The leader of one school said his goal was to “kill the Indian and save the man.”

When the children finally came home from boarding school, life was hard. They



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*Immigrant child in custody in Texas.
Photo by Eddie Perez.*

could not speak the same language as their parents and grandparents. They forgot how to do Native dances and prayers.

Now, Native people are fighting to reclaim their language and their culture. Many people are also asking the U.S. government to stop taking children away from their parents at the border. They don't want these families to be hurt.

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Three Lakota boys before and after they were admitted to Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, which was thousands of miles away from their families.

Cynthia Peters is the editor of The Change Agent.