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It's Your Community.

To solve the immigration crisis, let's think like moms and dads

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The other night, on our drive home from visiting “*Oma*” (German for “*Grandma*”) in the small New Hampshire town where I grew up, my two year-old son insisted on holding my hand. He gave no explanation and accepted no excuses on my part (reaching into his car seat is a stretch). He just wanted to be in contact with his dad, to know that I was with him at the end of a long day.

Holding my little boy's hand for much of that 45-minute drive was enough to melt my heart. The same way it melts every time he or his twin sister runs into my arms or asks for a kiss or calls out “*Baba!*” Every person who's ever had the privilege of raising a child knows what I'm talking about. That's just the way it is between parent and child, the way it's meant to be.

After putting my son and daughter to bed, I pulled out my phone to catch up on the news of the day. That's when I saw the photograph for the first time. The little two-year-old girl with the pink shirt and scuffed pink shoes was standing in the dirt and looking up as a U.S. Border Patrol agent patted down her mother before making the arrest. Mother and daughter had just finished their nighttime crossing of the Rio Grande River in a raft, the culmination of a long and perilous journey from Honduras to the United States, according to news reports. She was not much taller than the wheel of the Border Patrol pickup truck behind her. Her face was locked in an expression of grief and dread.

Although we would later learn that this young asylum-seeker, Yanela, was spared the ugly fate of family separation suffered by over 2,300 other undocumented immigrant children in recent weeks, her photo came to symbolize the practice. More broadly, it has put a human face on the Trump administration's new ‘zero-tolerance’ policy on immigration, which requires that anyone committing the petty misdemeanor of entering the United States without permission be jailed in a detention center until their day in court and likely deported.

In the process, little Yanela is forcing Americans to reckon with an issue that strikes at the very heart of who we are and what we stand for. And reckon we must.

As I reflected on her story and thought of my own two kids, one thing became crystal clear. As thorny and complex as immigration policy often appears, there is nothing to discuss when it comes to breaking the bond of love between a parent and child. It is evil. It should not have happened to a single asylum seeker, much less 2,342 innocent children entering the United States. It must never happen again.

That the president has finally awoken to this fact, under intense political pressure, is a start. Yet his executive order rescinding the practice last week did nothing to assist the children already harmed. Days later, hundreds of migrant kids remain separated from their parents with little help from U.S. government officials. Many remain in shelters hundreds or even thousands of miles from where their parents are being detained. Some are too young to even know their parents' names. I shudder to think of the damage being done each day they are apart, without the calming voice or touch of those who love them most.

It is our leaders' responsibility to think like moms and dads and reunite all 2,342 children with their parents as quickly as possible. It is our responsibility as citizens who love our kids to see that it is done.

The issue does not end there. Even after all families have been restored, the administration's 'zero-tolerance' policy on immigration remains morally wrong and practically ineffectual. Already we have seen children and parents jailed in detention centers for long periods of time, a violation of international human rights standards.

Media investigations have found certain private for-profit detention facilities, funded by U.S. taxpayers, to be plagued by health issues and a lack of legal services. A recent lawsuit alleges that a detention center in Houston forcibly injected children with medications, and points to other systematic violations of safety and health on the part of private contractors. At another detention center in Pennsylvania, mothers went on a hunger strike to protest the way they were treated and the lengthy detention of their young children.

The moms were right to be concerned, as even a brief detention can hamper child development, cause depression and PTSD, and may even amount to torture, according to the U.N.

To solve this humanitarian crisis, we must begin with the basic recognition that immigrants and refugees are human beings whose needs and aspirations are no different from our own and our kids'. Contrary to the president's relentless portrayals of darker-skinned 'illegals' as 'rapists and murderers,' research by the conservative Cato Institute and other sources finds undocumented immigrants are actually less likely than US citizens to commit a crime. They also pay billions in taxes – including for services like Social Security they cannot use – while filling menial jobs that few Americans would accept.

Recognizing these facts, it is up to us moms and dads who enjoy the blessing of U.S. citizenship to demand an end to the administration's cruel and unnecessary policies, and press for comprehensive immigration reform in Congress instead. Such reform must provide security to Dreamers in the land they call home; create a path to citizenship for law-abiding immigrants who are making America stronger; ensure due process for asylum seekers and refugees; and support

the development of Central American countries racked by poverty and insecurity to stem the migrant crisis at its source.

These policies are not about open borders or impunity; every nation has a right to protect its international borders and enforce its just laws. At the same time, every nation has a responsibility to treat all people with humanity and respect. Especially children.

That is what I expect for my little girl and boy and for my immigrant mother and wife. It's what I demand from my elected officials this November. It's the American way.