



## Material 3 English Version

### Informational Text on Child Media Ethics

**„Children, youth, and (digital) media: What constitutes child media ethics?“, with contributions by Dr. phil Ingrid Stapf, expert in children’s rights and media ethics, University of Tübingen, Germany**

Children and young people are considered digital natives who have been in contact with digital media since early childhood – via their parents' smartphones or smart home applications and later their own use of tablets, smartphones, smart TVs and laptops. This means that children and young people are also increasingly exposed to algorithmic systems and artificial intelligence. Child media ethics is a research field that deals with the question of what a good childhood and adolescence with digital media could look like. In the following, Dr. Ingrid Stapf from the University of Tübingen describes what she, as a media ethicist and expert on children's rights, considers to be children's media ethics. She refers to children as a group of young people up to the age of 18, as this is how it is formulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This therefore also includes young people (“youth”) under the age of 18.

*„My main area of focus is child media ethics, which means I look at children and media from an ethical perspective. And there are currently many, many questions in society. And they start with the question: what actually constitutes children in comparison to adults? How does childhood change in the context of digital media, and vice versa? What constitutes a good childhood or perhaps even a good media childhood? And what is also linked to this is the question of how we can support children in their self-determination without endangering them too much? Because that's exactly what security issues are all about: the balance between freedom and safety. And that's why another question is what challenges are perhaps also important for children, what experiences SHOULD they have to develop critical skills, to develop their own resilience, to really make self-determined decisions, what is good for me, what endangers me, how can I protect myself and what is important to me? That is to say, as an ethicist, I want to raise these questions in the first place.“*

Raising awareness of these issues and not taking it for granted that media must be handled in a certain way - that is important to Ingrid Stapf. After all, children and young people should have the freedom to develop themselves, even in the digital world. This is not always unproblematic, because with freedom comes the risk of having an unpleasant, harmful or even dangerous experience. This is where Ingrid Stapf raises tensions within the research field of child media ethics and describes how children's rights are sometimes in conflict with each other, such as the right to participation and the right to protection.

*“If we consider, for example, that children often like to play online games, as we know from empirical data, that they use social media, then it is very often about child development issues. Children want to try out who they are. They want to communicate with friends. They want to see what their role models are doing. They want to have fun. Sometimes they really want to find information or further their education. So, these are very different developmental topics and skills that children engage in digitally. And these are legitimate interests of children, and in some cases they are also children's rights. And that's why these children's rights need to be seen in a broader context. So you have to see that all these different rights are often in tension with each other. For example, the more participation children have, the more it can affect their*



*privacy. And the more they reveal about themselves, perhaps because they want to communicate, the more they may also be violated because others have access to information about them. And children often don't know this yet because they don't have the experience, because they may not yet be able to assess the consequences, because they may not know enough about the technical offerings, what is actually happening in the background, what is being made visible to whom or who knows something about them.”*

Child media ethics is therefore about identifying areas of tension, naming them and thinking about how they can be resolved. Ingrid Stapf sees the possibility of taking various children's rights into account at the same time:

*“And that's why, because very different rights are involved, especially in the area of security issues, a combination of measures is needed to empower children so that they can participate in digital worlds WITHOUT being exposed to too many risks that endanger their security.”*

But child media ethics goes even further. The research field is not only concerned with tensions over children's rights in the here and now. Ingrid Stapf raises the concept of an “open future.” This concept describes the need to protect and empower children in such a way that they still have many opportunities to realize their goals in the future.

*“[Children] also have the right to an “open future.” On the one hand, there is concern about children's present, what they are experiencing now, what they can and may do now, how they must be protected now. But on the other hand, there is also concern about their future as later adults, as later citizens in a society. And that is another area of tension that is important from an ethical perspective, because we might have to restrict children's rights in the present to a certain extent in order to safeguard their rights as future adults. And this has to do with the fact that children are still particularly vulnerable, particularly vulnerable because they are still developing, because they have less experience, because they are also heavily dependent on other people, especially adults. It is precisely this idea of protection, that children should be able to develop and unfold freely into personalities, learn and exercise self-determination, but that THIS in turn often requires care and protection so that they do not experience any disturbances that could permanently restrict or disturb or even traumatize them.”*

Child media ethics thus deals with very wide-ranging and complex issues that always involve reconciling children's freedom, protection, safety, empowerment and participation. This is not always easy and there are no quick and clear answers. In this sense, children's media ethics primarily raises questions and aims to stimulate a social discourse in which children are not only the focus, but also have a say.