

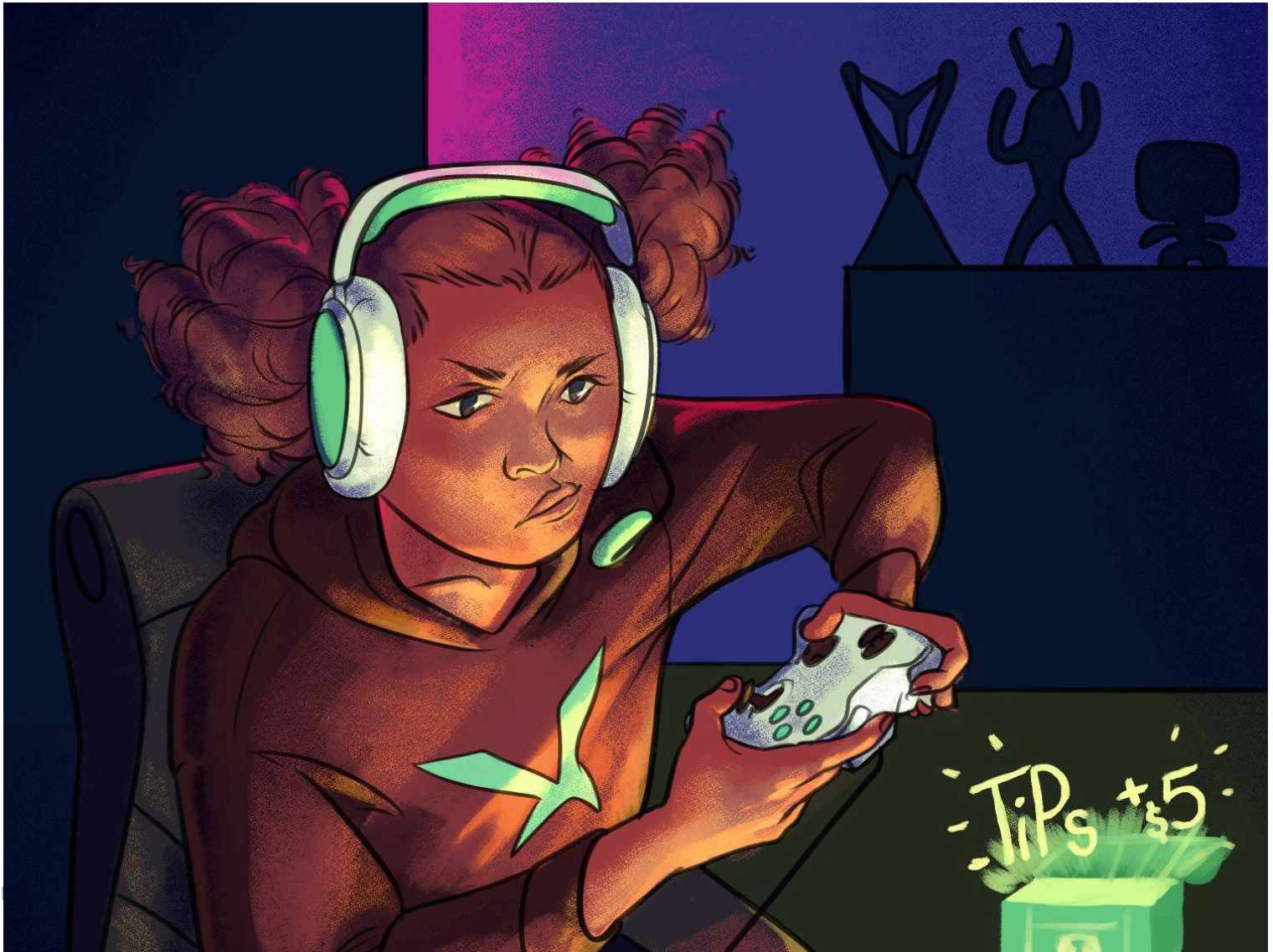


Frontiers in Digital Child Safety

Frequently Asked Questions

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Image: Rebecca Smith, Youth and Media



What are the main objectives of the digital child safety initiative?

The initiative seeks to facilitate a collaborative effort among international researchers from different disciplines and backgrounds to inform various aspects of digital child and youth safety decision-making while respecting privacy. Through a series of working meetings, researchers will (1) map the knowledge base in selected areas at the intersection of children and youth, digital safety, and digital technologies, (2) contribute to capacity building by facilitating information sharing and supporting collaboration among participating researchers and their organizations, and (3) strengthen in the defined areas the evidence base for effective advancement of digital child and youth safety.

This new initiative seeks to advance digital child and youth safety. Is that really a new problem?

No, but it is an ongoing and evolving problem that has yet to be solved. Child and youth safety in the digital environment has been a major concern ever since the early days of the Web. Back then, the debate primarily focused on contact risks and the stranger-danger problem. Over time, research has shown that safety issues such as peer-to-peer cyberbullying require much more attention. In 2021, a widely recognized [risk typology by the OECD](#) showed a variety of child and youth safety risks in the [digital environment](#), ranging from exposure to harmful content to commercial profiling risks. One of the ongoing challenges from a research perspective is to have an empirical understanding of the risk landscape at any given moment in time – and come up with effective approaches on how to address these risks in a complex ecosystem.

If the problem is important, but not new, why hasn't it been solved?

The risks that children and young people experience when engaging with digital technologies are continuously evolving as technologies, business models, and people's behaviors and attitudes change. The enormous popularity of smartphones, the advent of social media, and the emergence of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, for instance, have altered both the risk landscape as well as the available approaches to address these risks. As an evolving challenge, advancing child and youth safety in the digital realm requires the collaboration of different actors across sectors and also internationally, with different values, incentives, and even diverging notions of safety at play. While people generally agree on the importance of child and youth safety, recent history shows that it's hard to agree on the best ways forward across a broad spectrum of safety risks.

What's the role of researchers when it comes to child safety?

Researchers can play a crucial role in improving decision-making around digital child safety issues, whether in the realm of public policy, education, technical design, or guidance for parents and caregivers. Researchers can track emerging child safety risks, collect and review the evidence available at a given moment about the various types of risks, and explore, map, and benchmark different approaches and interventions available to address these risks. Taken together, these insights can support evidence-based decision-making on a highly-charged issue. This initiative aims to examine these important questions within an academic environment with the aim of identifying points of consensus and evidence-based solutions, with a focus on technical, behavioral, and educational interventions, that offer a way forward.

What age range will the digital child safety initiative be focused on?

This initiative primarily focuses on children and young people ages 13 to 17 – an age group that in most countries is considered minors in legal terms, yet engages with the digital environment extensively. Past research informs the initiative's framing of these concepts, for instance by highlighting that children and youth in the respective age range are not a homogenous group.

Why is the TUM Think Tank leading this initiative?

The TUM Think Tank is ideally suited to lead this initiative because it is an independent multi-stakeholder platform with a focus on technology and society issues that regularly convenes experts from academia, civil society, policy, and industry. For the digital child safety initiative, TUM seeks to bring together researchers from different fields, sectors, and geographies to take a fresh look at the ways in which child and youth safety can be advanced.

Research institutions such as the TUM Think Tank and its collaborators share a commitment to the public interest. As spaces for open exploration, research collaboration, and knowledge dissemination, they serve as venues to bring different perspectives together and facilitate multi-stakeholder dialog to identify areas of convergence and divergence as well as concrete steps for future action.

How is this initiative different from others?

This interdisciplinary and academically anchored initiative aims to explore technical, social, and educational approaches to advance child and youth safety in the digital environment. With a focus on novel ideas and approaches, it is intended to make

contributions that are complementary to existing and emerging efforts by a broad range of other organizations, including governments, international organizations, NGOs, and industry-led networks. Participating researchers will bring expertise in the social sciences, computer science, engineering, and law to the effort, as well as relevant experience both in participatory and translational research.

What is the motivation behind the collaboration with Apple?

The TUM Think Tank is committed to addressing a broad range of real-world challenges, including some of the hardest problems of our time, from an interdisciplinary perspective. It does so through a variety of interactive formats and open collaboration among diverse communities and stakeholders, including academia, civil society, government, international organizations, and industry.

The support of Apple, one of the world's leading technology companies, enables the TUM Think Tank to leverage existing capacities and partnerships to launch a transatlantic collaboration by bringing together a diverse group of researchers united in their commitment to advance child and youth safety in the digital environment. Apple's engagement in an open, collaborative, and research-driven process offers a unique learning opportunity concerning selected frontier issues in child and youth safety.

What safeguards do you put in place to ensure the objectivity of your findings, given the involvement of companies and other stakeholders?

The initiative invites and enables the participation of researchers with a diversity of opinions, disciplinary backgrounds, and professional experiences. Rather than a single outcome or deliverable, the collective investigation will result in a series of open-source materials, such as research briefs, issue spotters, technical descriptions, and the like, authored by individual contributors affiliated with different research or professional organizations. The contributions are subject to peer review and will be made available for comments.

The overall initiative hosted at the TUM Think Tank, including the financial contribution by Apple, is governed by German and Bavarian laws and regulations and subject to the [codes of conduct and oversight mechanisms](#) of the Technical University of Munich.

How can one get involved?

The TUM Think Tank offers various ways to get involved. Please visit the [social media sites](#) to receive up to date information. With respect to the Frontiers in Digital Child Safety initiative specifically, the TUM Think Tank team is pleased to receive statements of interest from researchers and digital child safety experts from diverse backgrounds.

Please let us know about your area of expertise and possible contributions in [this survey](#).

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