

ISPCAN Digital Safety and Child Wellbeing Working Group

Concept Note by Warren Binford

Purpose

The purpose of the ISPCAN Digital Safety and Child Wellbeing Working Group is to strengthen international collaboration, knowledge exchange, research, and multidisciplinary action to promote children's safety, wellbeing, participation, and healthy development within digital ecosystems.

The Working Group will support child-centered, trauma-informed, rights-based, culturally responsive, and evidence-informed approaches that recognize both the opportunities and risks associated with digital environments.

Background and Rationale

Digital environments are now deeply embedded in children's everyday lives and development. Children and adolescents learn, socialize, play, seek support, express identity, participate in civic life, and build relationships through digital technologies and connected platforms. These digital ecosystems increasingly shape children's wellbeing, safety, development, mental health, education, relationships, and opportunities.

Alongside these opportunities, digital environments may also expose children to risks including online child sexual exploitation and abuse, cyberbullying, harmful content exposure, exploitation, harassment, privacy violations, technology-facilitated abuse, and emerging harms associated with artificial intelligence and rapidly evolving technologies.

At the same time, digital spaces can also serve as protective and supportive environments that foster learning, social connection, help-seeking, creativity, participation, resilience, and access to services and information. Child protection efforts must therefore move beyond solely risk-based approaches toward more balanced frameworks that support children not only to be safe online, but also to thrive in digital environments.

Professionals working across child protection, healthcare, mental health, education, research, technology, policy, and justice systems increasingly encounter digital dimensions within their work. However, responses often remain fragmented across sectors and regions, and there is growing recognition of the need for multidisciplinary collaboration, shared learning, and globally informed approaches.

ISPCAN is uniquely positioned to convene an international working group that brings together diverse disciplines, regions, and perspectives to strengthen child wellbeing and protection in digital ecosystems.

The ISPCAN Digital Safety and Child Wellbeing Working Group will provide a collaborative platform for advancing prevention, research, policy dialogue, professional education, and practical guidance related to children’s experiences in digital environments.

Why Now?

The need for global collaboration on digital safety and child wellbeing has become increasingly urgent as digital technologies rapidly reshape childhood, family life, education, social relationships, and systems of care.

Digital Environments Are Now Central to Childhood

Digital engagement is no longer separate from children’s “offline” lives. Online and offline experiences are interconnected, influencing children’s relationships, identity formation, learning, emotional wellbeing, social participation, and exposure to risk and support.

Emerging Technologies Are Rapidly Changing the Landscape

Artificial intelligence, generative AI, immersive platforms, gaming ecosystems, encrypted communication, algorithm-driven content systems, and synthetic media are transforming both opportunities and risks for children. Child-serving systems are working to keep pace with these developments.

Child Protection Systems Need New Frameworks

Traditional child protection models were not designed for technology-mediated environments. There is growing need for updated multidisciplinary frameworks that integrate digital wellbeing, prevention, trauma-informed practice, online safeguarding, youth participation, and ethical technology engagement.

Growing Recognition of Digital Wellbeing

There is increasing global recognition that digital safety is not only about preventing harm, but also about supporting healthy development, inclusion, participation, resilience, and positive digital engagement for children and adolescents.

Need for International and Cross-Sector Collaboration

Challenges within digital ecosystems cross borders and disciplines. Effective responses require collaboration among child protection professionals, educators, healthcare providers, researchers, policymakers, technology sectors, civil society, caregivers, and young people themselves.

Opportunity for Prevention, Innovation, and Child Participation

Digital technologies also create opportunities for prevention, support, education, participation, and innovation. The Working Group can help promote strengths-based, child-rights-based, and

evidence-informed approaches that amplify children’s voices and foster safe, supportive, and inclusive digital environments.

Scope and Areas of Focus

The Working Group may address topics such as:

- Child wellbeing in digital environments
- Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA)
- Technology-facilitated abuse and exploitation
- Cyberbullying and online harassment
- AI and emerging technologies impacting children
- Digital wellbeing and mental health
- Prevention education and digital literacy
- Healthy online relationships and peer engagement
- Child participation and youth voice in digital spaces
- Child rights in digital ecosystems
- Privacy, consent, and image-based abuse
- Trauma-informed responses to digital harms
- Parenting and caregiver support in digital contexts
- Online safeguarding in schools and organizations
- Equity, inclusion, and access in digital environments
- Ethical technology design and policy
- Cross-sector collaboration with technology and industry partners

Proposed Global Research Agenda

The Working Group will support the development of a multidisciplinary and internationally relevant research agenda focused on children’s safety, wellbeing, participation, and development within digital ecosystems.

Potential research priorities may include:

- 1) Child Wellbeing and Development in Digital Contexts**
 - a. Digital wellbeing and developmental outcomes
 - b. Online identity, belonging, and social connection
 - c. Protective factors and resilience in digital environments
 - d. Youth help-seeking and peer support online
- 2) Emerging Technologies and Child Protection**
 - a. AI-generated exploitation material and synthetic media
 - b. Risks and opportunities associated with generative AI
 - c. Gaming, immersive environments, and virtual spaces
 - d. Algorithmic amplification and exposure to harmful content
- 3) Prevention and Early Intervention**
 - a. Evidence-informed digital literacy and prevention education
 - b. Family and school-based approaches to digital wellbeing
 - c. Effective safeguarding approaches across settings
 - d. Public health approaches to online safety

- 4) **Mental Health and Trauma**
 - a. Psychological impacts of technology-facilitated abuse
 - b. Trauma-informed responses to online exploitation
 - c. Digital stressors, self-harm, and emotional wellbeing
 - d. Recovery and resilience following digital harms
- 5) **Equity and Global Perspectives**
 - a. Experiences of children in low- and middle-income settings
 - b. Gender and intersectional vulnerabilities
 - c. Disability inclusion and accessibility
 - d. Culturally responsive and Indigenous approaches
- 6) **Systems, Policy, and Professional Practice**
 - a. Workforce development and professional competencies
 - b. Cross-sector collaboration models
 - c. Ethical and rights-based policy frameworks
 - d. Child-centered regulation and platform accountability
- 7) **Youth Participation and Co-Design**
 - a. Youth perspectives on digital wellbeing and safety
 - b. Co-design methodologies with children and adolescents
 - c. Child participation in digital policy and prevention initiatives

Other Potential Inaugural Projects

ISPCAN Congress Programming

Development of a dedicated digital safety and child wellbeing track, symposium, or pre-conference institute at future ISPCAN congresses.

Global Digital Ecosystems and Child Wellbeing Mapping Project

An international environmental scan examining:

- emerging trends,
- child wellbeing frameworks,
- prevention initiatives,
- policy responses,
- professional training needs,
- and regional priorities related to digital child wellbeing and safety.

International Practitioner Capacity and Needs Assessment

A multidisciplinary survey exploring:

- workforce preparedness,
- confidence responding to digital harms,
- prevention needs,
- digital wellbeing competencies,

- and training priorities.

ISPCAN Webinar and Learning Series

A recurring webinar series addressing topics such as:

- children’s wellbeing in digital ecosystems,
- AI and child protection,
- youth participation,
- trauma-informed digital practice,
- online exploitation,
- digital resilience,
- and ethical technology approaches.

Youth Advisory and Participation Initiative

Development of mechanisms to meaningfully engage children and adolescents in informing:

- priorities,
- prevention strategies,
- research questions,
- and policy recommendations.

International Practice Guidance

Development of multidisciplinary guidance and practical resources supporting professionals working with children and families in digital contexts.

Global Consensus Statement on Digital Safety and Child Wellbeing

An international consensus statement articulating:

- guiding principles,
- shared terminology,
- child-rights-based approaches,
- and priorities for action across sectors.
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Thematic Special Issue

The Working Group could support development of a special issue in one of ISPCAN’s journals focused on: “Children, Digital Ecosystems, and Wellbeing: Global Perspectives on Protection, Participation, and Prevention.” Potential themes could include:

- AI and emerging technologies,
- online exploitation and safeguarding,
- digital wellbeing,
- youth participation,
- prevention science,

- trauma-informed responses,
- platform accountability,
- and global equity perspectives.

Guiding Principles

The Working Group will be guided by:

- Child rights and child wellbeing
- Prevention and early intervention
- Trauma-informed and survivor-informed practice
- Equity and global inclusion
- Multidisciplinary collaboration
- Cultural responsiveness
- Evidence-informed approaches
- Ethical and responsible technology engagement
- Meaningful child and youth participation
- Strengths-based and resilience-oriented practice

Alignment with ISPCAN Mission

The Digital Safety and Child Wellbeing Working Group aligns closely with the mission of ISPCAN to advance the prevention of child abuse and neglect globally through multidisciplinary collaboration, research, education, advocacy, and professional exchange.

As digital ecosystems increasingly shape children’s experiences of safety, wellbeing, learning, relationships, participation, and vulnerability, there is a critical opportunity to strengthen coordinated global responses that both protect children from harm and support them to thrive in digital environments.