I look after the global digital child safety agenda at LEGO Group, helping to develop the best and safest online and digital experiences for children.

Meet Dieter Carstensen, head of digital child safety, the LEGO Group

Our company mission is to provide fun, creative and safe LEGO experiences, both physical and digital, and it is my role to look after our digital child safety agenda globally. I define the policies and assist my LEGO colleagues to ensure that we always develop the best and safest possible online and digital experiences for children. Together with UNICEF, we have recently assessed our approach and efforts concerning digital child safety. The purpose is to see where and how we can improve across the digital platforms where children engage with LEGO. Collaborating with a trusted partner is essential, simply to ensure we do not rest on our laurels, and UNICEF’s expertise and critical eye helps sharpen our work.

What success looks like for me

Success in my work is when children and parents trust our online experiences and they can safely engage in fun and creative play. For us internally, it is when we perceive online child safety as an opportunity to innovate our experiences towards the better and not see it as a restriction.

What my profession will look like in 10 years’ time

I see children being able to access, produce and experience more digital content year after year, thus creating new ways of engaging with likeminded people or brands like the LEGO Group. Technological tools and platforms will enable users to personalise such engagements, including the rules, thereby becoming owners of their own destiny. Catering for different needs and preferences when developing digital experiences on such scale will be challenging, so it is important to define and apply a basic safety framework that works regardless of end-user choices. I see it as the responsibility of companies to ensure that children have a safe and rewarding experience, which will not diminish with time. Unfortunately, the opposite is probably more likely the case today.

My views on collaboration

I am happy to say that protecting children online is an area where companies and other stakeholders really come together to identify risks or challenges and discuss the best approaches to solve these. We all work towards the same goal of digital child safety and with such a mindset we are able to progress. No single company or stakeholder owns all problems nor is it able to provide all the solutions. The level of knowledge sharing on this topic between companies, that otherwise compete, is quite impressive.
The leading change makers

When we discuss public policy, children are very often addressed as recipients and not always as a rightful source of input and inspiration. Luckily, a growing body of research which includes children’s voices exists, thus enabling discussions to include recommendations based on evidence of and from children. One major source of importance is the work undertaken by the multinational research network EU Kids Online. Their purpose is to enhance knowledge of European children’s online opportunities, risks and safety. Although their focus is Europe, their global recognition and impact is beyond doubt. One can only hope such research efforts will continue and are replicated in other parts of the world.

The value of play

At the LEGO Group we believe that play is one of the most effective ways to engage children in learning, which I completely buy into. Adding playfulness in the way we approach curricula, or learn social emotional skills, can help both overcome interest and attention difficulties, as well as strengthen the bond between a parent and child. Everybody likes to play, we just don’t always create the space and time for it. So more than specific apps or programs, I think the application of them is what makes a difference. Teaching children to code has been a hot topic for several years, and the way it is done - in groups where you learn to collaborate - and how it requires the use of creativity, logic and to delegate and solve challenges, is a brilliant way to help children acquire critical digital citizenship skills. In the LEGO Group, for instance, we work together with other parties to host challenging building events such as the First LEGO League and World Robot Olympiad.