

PRESS RELEASE 06/2022

## German Ethics Council: Children, adolescents and young adults must not be left alone in societal crises

Berlin, 28 November 2022

On 28 November 2022, the German Ethics Council publishes its Ad Hoc Recommendation “Pandemic and Mental Health. Attention, Assistance and Support for Children, Adolescents and Young Adults in and after Societal Crises”. In this publication, the Ethics Council recommends rapidly and sustainably improving the care for young people who develop mental health problems in crisis situations.

“Children, adolescents and young adults must not be left alone in societal crises”, emphasises Alena Buyx, Chair of the German Ethics Council. “During the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychological burden they endured as a result of both the pandemic itself as well as the measures taken to control it has not received enough recognition. Considerable solidarity was demanded from the young generation”, adds Buyx. “But those in distress themselves did not reliably get the attention and support they needed. As a society, we owe children, adolescents and young adults not only gratitude and respect, but concrete action. Therefore, support services must be expanded, gaps in care must be closed, and in current and future societal crises, it is imperative to avoid that young people are the first having to bear the burden, or a particularly large part of it.”

The German Ethics Council demands, among other things, low-threshold and widely available psychological offers at schools as well as psychosocial support services. Facilities that provide diagnostics, counselling, curative treatment and participatory support for children and youths, as well as assistance for parents and families, must have reliable funding. Concrete plans should be presented in a timely manner detailing how to remedy the poor availability of diagnosis and treatment by physicians and other professionals for children and adolescents with mental health problems. Information campaigns on mental health should raise awareness of counselling and other support services and show where such services can be found, including in recreational settings. Professionals in education, social services and health care should be specifically trained in the prevention of mental stress and disorders. Research on the effects of measures to manage societal crises (not only pandemics) should be encouraged. Overall, it must be ensured that all efforts are made to protect children, adolescents and young adults in societal crises. This also requires taking their concerns seriously, enabling age-appropriate participation in crisis management and consulting young people themselves.

The German Ethics Council makes these recommendations in the light of its autumn conference titled “Meet the German Ethics Council! Our Life in the Pandemic”, which took place in September 2022. About 350 pupils were invited to share their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through their creative and vivid statements and presentations, the young people gave their generation a voice and a face.

### Members

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The Ad Hoc Recommendation can be accessed (in German) on the Ethics Council's website at <https://www.ethikrat.org/fileadmin/Publikationen/Ad-hoc-Empfehlungen/deutsch/ad-hoc-empfehlung-pandemie-und-psychische-gesundheit.pdf>. An English translation will be available in due course. Documentation of the autumn conference can be found at <https://www.ethikrat.org/en/other-events/meet-the-german-ethics-council-our-life-in-the-pandemic>.