

TIME

Why Netflix's German Thriller *Dear Child* Is the Show of the Moment

By [Megan McCluskey](#)

September 14, 2023 3:34 PM EDT

When a severely-injured woman and an unhurt young girl are discovered in a German forest following a hit-and-run, a dark web of secrets surrounding their identities begins to unravel.

Based on [Romy Hausman](#)'s international best-selling novel of the same name, *Dear Child* (or *Liebes Kind* in its original German) explores the connection between the pair's harrowing escape from captivity and a 13-year-old missing persons case. The gripping six-part miniseries, adapted for the screen in German, interweaves investigators' desperate present-day search to solve the multiple mysteries at play with flashbacks to the years the woman (Kim Riedle), young girl (Naila Schuberth), and a young boy (Sammy Schrein) spent locked in a windowless house at the mercy of their male captor.

Since it began streaming on Netflix on September 7, *Dear Child* has garnered an 86% audience approval rating on [Rotten Tomatoes](#) and earned the No. 1 spot on [FlixPatrol's](#) list of the most popular Netflix shows globally. Some viewers have even taken to social media to encourage others to start watching the show, with one X user calling it "[one of the best binges I've had in years](#)" and another describing it as "[a must-watch if you're into psychological thrillers \[and\] murder mysteries.](#)"



(L-R): Sammy Schrein and Naila Schuberth in *Dear Child*
Netflix

The show opens with a chilling scene in which the woman and two children are joyfully playing a game before hearing the telltale signs of the man arriving home. The three rush to stand in front of the door with their open hands held out to show they're not hiding anything.

After the man inspects the children's hands, he gives them each a snack bar to eat. But when he looks at the hands of the woman, who is shaking in fear, there's a strange mark imprinted on her palm that he seems to disapprove of. "You shouldn't cry in front of the children, Lena," he ominously tells her. "You know the rules."

However, it's quickly established that the question of who Lena actually is is one of the series' central puzzles. As the series progresses and delves into the trauma at its center, the truth about Lena's past and her relationship to the two children is slowly revealed. It's a story that combines elements reminiscent of a variety of renowned thrillers, from 2014's *Gone Girl* to 2015's *Room* (both of which were also adapted from novels), but with its own unsettling twists and turns.

"These are all damaged characters: people who are severely scarred by a crime and deal with it very differently," co-writer and co-director Julian Pörksen told [Netflix's *Die Woche*](#). "The perpetrator is often the focus of such series and is glorified as a mysterious, dark force. That's not the case with us. And there is a main character who is extraordinary in every way. A girl who has a special view of the world, a special way of speaking, thinking and experiencing."

Dear Child is especially interested in exploring the internal pain that stems from traumatic experiences, according to co-producer Friederich Oetker. "I found the motif of the inner and outer prison particularly interesting: Even if you manage to escape, you take your inner prison with you," [he told Netflix](#). "You have to free yourself from it."