



Raising Kids in the Age of AI

Parent Guide to Safe, Healthy, and Human-Centered AI
Use

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PARENTING CULTURE



Artificial intelligence is quickly becoming part of everyday childhood. Children may use AI to answer questions, write stories, create images, complete homework, practice languages, play games, talk to chatbots, or seek emotional support.

For many parents, this can feel overwhelming. Some families are excited about the possibilities. Others feel unsure, worried, or completely left behind.

This guide is designed to help parents and caregivers support children's AI use in ways that are: **safe, developmentally appropriate, emotionally protective, culturally responsive, privacy-conscious, and rooted in real relationships.**

1. *What Parents Need to Know About AI*

What is AI?

Artificial intelligence, or AI, refers to technology that can respond to prompts, generate text, answer questions, create images, summarize information, mimic conversation, or make predictions based on information available on the internet.

Children may interact with AI through:

chatbots, homework tools, search engines, image generators, AI toys, gaming platforms, social media filters, writing assistants, mental health or wellness apps, or "companion" bots that simulate friendships or emotional support.

AI can feel human, but it is not human. It does not truly know your child. It does not have feelings, judgment, wisdom, cultural understanding, or a real relationship with them.

2. *The Big Parenting Reframe*

The question is not: “Should my child use AI or not?”

The better question is: “How do I help my child use AI in a way that protects their mind, privacy, creativity, relationships, and sense of self?”

AI is not going away. Children who understand it will be better prepared to use it wisely. But children who use it without guidance may be more vulnerable to misinformation, emotional dependency, privacy risks, academic shortcuts, bias, and harmful content.

The ParentingCulture approach should be:

Connection before correction.

Curiosity before panic.

Guidance before surveillance.

Values before technology.

Parent language: “You can use AI as a tool, but not as your truth-teller, therapist, best friend, or decision-maker.”

3. *Benefits of AI for Children*

AI can support children when used with boundaries.

Potential benefits include:

- Helping children brainstorm ideas
- Supporting writing, reading, and language learning
- Explaining difficult concepts in different ways
- Helping neurodivergent children organize thoughts or routines
- Supporting creativity through storytelling, art, and music prompts
- Helping children practice questions before a test or presentation
- Making learning more accessible for children with different learning needs
- Supporting translation or communication for multilingual families

Parent reminder: AI is most helpful when it helps children **think more deeply**, not when it does the thinking for them.

4 *Mental Health Risks Parents Should Watch For*

Emotional Over-reliance

Some children may begin using AI chatbots as a friend, therapist, or emotional support system. This can be especially concerning for children who are lonely, anxious, neurodivergent, socially isolated, or struggling with identity development.

AI may respond in ways that feel validating, but it cannot provide real attunement, safety planning, mandated reporting, cultural nuance, or relational care.

The APA has warned that generative AI chatbots and wellness apps require safeguards, especially when people use them for mental health needs. There are also increasing legal and safety concerns about AI tools presenting themselves as medical or therapeutic supports without being licensed providers.

Parent script:

"I'm glad you found something that helps you express your feelings. I also want you to know that big feelings deserve real people. AI can help you find words, but it cannot replace talking to someone who loves you or someone trained to help."

Misinformation

AI can sound confident even when it is wrong. Children may not yet have the developmental skills to evaluate accuracy, bias, or missing context.

Parent script:

“AI can give answers, but it can also make mistakes. Let’s treat it like a starting point, not the final answer.”

Reduced Creativity and Confidence

If children rely on AI to write, draw, solve, or think for them, they may start to believe their own ideas are not good enough.

Parent script:

“Your first idea matters. Let’s start with your thinking, then use AI to help you expand it.”

Privacy and Oversharing

Children may share names, school information, family details, photos, worries, secrets, or private experiences with AI tools without realizing that these systems may store or process information.



Family rule: **Never share...**

Full name

Address

School name

Phone number

Passwords

Private Family
Information

Photos Without
Permission

Medical or Mental
Health Details

Secrets about
yourself or others

Bias and Identity Harm

AI systems are trained on large amounts of existing data. That means they can repeat stereotypes, cultural bias, racism, sexism, ableism, and other harmful assumptions.

For children from minoritized communities, this matters deeply. AI may misunderstand names, cultural practices, dialects, family structures, religious traditions, or lived experiences.

Parent Script:

“AI learns from the world, and the world has bias. If something feels unfair, stereotyped, or wrong, we can question it.”

5. *Age-Based Guidance*

Ages 0-5: Protect play, relationships, and real-world learning

Early development is built on sensory exploration, caregiver bonding, unstructured play, and real-world interaction. AI has no developmental role at this stage.

Caution:

Avoid AI toys and companion devices that simulate conversation, emotional bonding, or responsiveness. These products may interfere with attachment development and replace the human interaction children need most at this stage.

Best Practice:

Keep screens and AI out of play spaces. Prioritize face-to-face language, outdoor exploration, and hands-on creativity. If older siblings use AI tools nearby, ensure the youngest children are not passively absorbing content meant for older users.

alt text:

Ages 6-9: Co-Use only

Children in this age range need adults nearby when using AI.

AI can be used for:

- Explaining a science concept
- Creating a silly story together
- Practicing spelling words
- Generating family activity ideas
- Learning about animals, planets, or history

Parent rule:

We use AI together, not alone.

Ages 10-12: Teach Critical Thinking

Older children can begin to learn how AI works, where it makes mistakes, and how to check information.

Teach them to ask:

- Who made this tool?
- Why might this answer be wrong?
- What information is missing?
- Does this include bias?
- Can I verify this somewhere else?
- Am I using this to learn or to avoid learning?

Teens: Focus on Autonomy with Guardrails

Teens may use AI for school, identity exploration, creativity, planning, social advice, or emotional support. The biggest risks are not just screen time. They include secrecy, emotional dependency, misinformation, academic integrity issues, and using AI instead of real support during distress.

Family agreement:

"You can use AI to help you learn, study, problem solve etc., but not for crisis support, self-harm advice, eating/body concerns, medical decisions, sexual conversations with bots, or private emotional dependency."

6. *The Parenting Culture AI Safety Rules*

AI is a tool, not a trusted adult.

Children should not use AI as a therapist, doctors, secret keeper, or best friend.

Check before you trust.

AI can be wrong, biased, outdated, or made up.

Use AI with people, not instead of people.

AI should not replace friendships, family conversations, teachers, mentors, or mental health care.

Grown-ups stay involved.

Parents do not need to know everything about AI, but they do need to stay curious, connected, and aware.

Keep private information private.

No names, addresses, schools, passwords, photos, or personal family details.

Start with your own brain.

Children should try first, then use AI to brainstorm, revise, or learn more.

Watch how it makes you feel.

If AI use leaves a child feeling anxious, dependent, ashamed, numb, confused, or more isolated, pause and talk.

7. *Green and Red Flags*

Green Flag AI Use:

Your child is using AI to:

- ✓ Brainstorm ideas
- ✓ Learn a hard concept
- ✓ Practice a skill
- ✓ Create something original
- ✓ Ask curiosity-based questions
- ✓ Compare perspectives
- ✓ Get organized
- ✓ Improve something they already started

Red Flag AI Use:

Your child is using AI to:

- ✗ Hide distress
- ✗ Avoid talking to real people
- ✗ Seek advice about self-harm, dieting, body image, sex, or medical concerns
- ✗ Replace friendships
- ✗ Complete schoolwork dishonestly
- ✗ Share private information
- ✗ Talk to companion bots for long periods
- ✗ Become upset when access is limited
- ✗ Believe the AI "understands them better than anyone"

8. *Conversation Starters for Parents*

Parents should lead with curiosity rather than concern/panic. Young people will be more honest about their use if you approach it as a team with the goal of connection and curiosity.

Try asking:

- "What have you heard about AI?"
- "Have you used it at school or with friends?"
- "What do you think AI is good at?"
- "What do you think AI gets wrong?"
- "Have you ever seen AI say something weird, biased, or untrue?"
- "Would you feel comfortable telling me if an AI conversation made you uncomfortable?"
- "What should our family rules be?"
- "How can we use AI in a way that still protects your creativity?"

9. *Scripts for Common Situations*

When your child uses AI for homework:

"I want you to learn how to use tools, but I also want you to protect your confidence. Show me what part was your thinking and what part AI helped with."

When your child says AI is their friend:

"I understand why it feels comforting. Sometimes it is easier to talk when something does not judge you. But real relationships matter. AI can respond, but it cannot truly know you, love you, or keep you safe."

When your child asks AI for mental health advice:

"I'm really glad you were trying to find support. That tells me something important is going on. AI is not the safest place for big feelings, so let's talk together and decide who else can support you."

When your child gets misinformation from AI:

"That answer sounded confident, but confident does not always mean correct. Let's fact-check it together."

When your child uses AI to avoid writing:

"I know getting started is hard. Let's have AI give us three possible outlines, but your voice and ideas need to lead."

10. *Our Family AI Agreement*

1. In our family, AI can be used for:

2. In our family, AI cannot be used for:

3. Private information we never share:

4. If AI gives scary, unsafe, biased, sexual, violent, or confusing responses, I will:

5. If I feel emotionally attached to an AI tool or want to talk to AI instead of people, I can go to:

Our family check in plan:

Daily / Weekly / As Needed

Parent/Caregiver signature:

Child signature:

Date:

11. *AI and Mental Health Safety Plan*





**IF A CHILD IS USING AI TO
DISCUSS CRISIS-LEVEL FEELINGS,
TREAT IT AS A SIGNAL THAT THEY
NEED REAL HUMAN SUPPORT.**

**STAY CALM, THANK THEM FOR TELLING YOU, AND
CONNECT WITH A PEDIATRICIAN, THERAPIST,
SCHOOL COUNSELOR, CRISIS LINE, OR EMERGENCY
SUPPORT DEPENDING ON THE LEVEL OF RISK.**



12 *Parent Reflection* *Page*

Before reacting to my child's AI use, I can ask myself:

- ☐ Am I responding from fear, curiosity, or connection?
- ☐ Do I understand what my child is actually using?
- ☐ Have I asked them what they like about it?
- ☐ Have I explained the risks without shaming them?
- ☐ Are my rules clear and realistic?
- ☐ Am I modeling healthy technology use?
- ☐ Does my child know they can come to me if something online feels unsafe?

Closing Message

AI will continue to change. Parenting through this moment does not require perfection. It requires presence.

Children need adults who can help them **slow down, question what they see, protect their privacy, honor their own thinking, and remember that technology should support their humanity, not replace it.**

The most protective factor is not the perfect parental control setting. It is a child knowing:

“I can come to my caregiver with questions, mistakes, worries, and confusion, and they will help me think it through.”

That is what keeps children safer.

