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Parents' Ultimate Guide to Generative AI

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You've probably heard of generative AI, but what is it, and how does it affect your family? Whether it's helping with homework, creating art, or answering questions, gen AI is likely already a part of your kids' lives, both in school and at home. A lot of teens are using these tools, but many parents don't even realize it.

As AI evolves and becomes more common in our everyday lives, it's important to talk about it. Research shows that when families discuss generative AI, kids feel more confident in using it safely and responsibly. But we know it can be tough to start these conversations if you don't fully understand it yourself. That's why we created this guide—to help you and your family learn about and safely navigate gen AI together.

At the end of the day, you know your family best, and this guide is here to serve as a tool that you can adapt to fit your unique needs. You don't need to be an expert to help your kids use generative AI safely. It's about keeping the conversation open and informing yourself, and you're already taking an important step. Remember, you're doing the best you can, and that's more than enough.

What Is Generative AI and How Are Kids Using It?

There are several different types of AI. One of the first steps is understanding the difference between AI and generative AI:

Traditional AI (aka artificial intelligence) follows a set of rules to help with specific tasks like answering questions or giving recommendations, but it doesn't create anything new. It's what powers familiar voice assistants like Siri, recommendation systems on Netflix and Amazon, and even algorithms on social media.

Generative AI (gen AI) is a type of artificial intelligence that creates original content—like writing stories, generating artwork, or composing music—based on the data it's learned from. Popular gen AI tools that teens are already using include ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, and Snapchat's My AI, which produce text responses, while Midjourney and DALL-E create images based on your descriptions.

Teens are using generative AI for both educational and personal reasons:

For School: Teens use gen AI to help with assignments, whether it's writing essays, translating languages, brainstorming ideas, or drafting emails. These tools are used

Teens are using generative AI for school assignments,

but not always with teacher permission...



41% of teens who have used gen AI on schoolwork have had permission from a teacher.

46% have NOT had permission.

...**12%** were not sure.



to quickly find information or come up with creative

solutions for schoolwork.

Personally: Outside of school, teens use gen AI to pass time when bored, get advice on personal issues, or plan activities. They can even use it to create content as a joke or to tease others, which can cross the line into hurtful behavior like making deepfakes.

Most gen AI tools require users to be 13 or older, but they usually don't have a good way of confirming a user's age, and these tools generally lack specific parental controls.

Key Terms to Know

Here are some concepts to help you feel more confident discussing gen AI with your family:

- **Large language models (LLMs):** AI systems, like ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, and Claude, that can analyze and create human-like text based on patterns learned from huge amounts of data.
- **Prompt:** The instruction or question you give an AI to guide its response.
- **Chatbots:** AI tools that can chat with you, answer questions, and help find information. Teens often use them to get quick answers for schoolwork or solve problems.
- **Deepfake:** A fake video or image that looks real but has been digitally altered to mislead viewers.
- **Misinformation/Disinformation:** AI can sometimes generate convincing but untrue information or media, which can lead to the spread of misinformation (accidental) or disinformation (intentional).
- **Hallucinations:** A "hallucination" happens when the AI makes something up that isn't true but presents it as fact. For example, ChatGPT may respond with wrong dates for events or suggest a book that doesn't exist. This can happen because the AI doesn't have enough accurate information or misinterprets what it's learned. Some mistakes might be minor, but others can have greater consequences.

- **Bias:** A gen AI tool uses the information and data it's trained on, which often includes patterns that favor certain groups or viewpoints. This can lead to results that reinforce harmful stereotypes, exclude certain groups, and produce non-inclusive language and images, resulting in discriminatory content.

Common Concerns and Challenges

Generative AI can be useful, but it also comes with its own set of challenges. While some gen AI tools are more trustworthy than others, none are without issues. There are constantly new AI tools being created, and it can be hard to know which ones are reliable or what the intentions of the creators are. Here's what you need to know to help guide your child toward safe and responsible use:

Misinformation and Disinformation

Gen AI isn't always accurate. These tools have been trained on unreliable sources and user-generated content from across the internet, including forums like Reddit, which aren't fact-checked or made for kids. Teens often use these tools to get answers to personal questions, which is why it's important to teach them that AI can easily provide wrong answers, biased info, or even inappropriate content. Kids need to double-check what AI generates and to not trust everything at face value. While companies have built in some protections, generative AI is far from perfect and can still make mistakes. Also, it's helpful to remind them that AI isn't a replacement for a trusted adult,

**Teens know
AI can give
inaccurate
results,**
& they're checking
their work...



49% have checked other sources
to verify the accuracy of
AI-generated results used for school
assignments.

especially when it comes to things like health advice.



Privacy and Data Security

Tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, and My AI collect data, and kids might not always know what's safe to share. Make sure kids avoid submitting any personal information, like names, addresses, or photos, as this info can become a permanent part of the system's data. As a parent, set any available privacy controls on AI tools, and monitor your child's usage. With so many new tools emerging, it's

important to be cautious about how they collect and use data, especially since many usually aren't built with safety or privacy in mind.

Bias and Non-Inclusive Content

Gen AI has been trained on data from all over the internet, which can include harmful, racist, or biased information. Because of this, these tools can give results that reinforce stereotypes or spread discrimination. This can impact kids' self-image, especially if they don't see themselves reflected accurately in the content.

Bullying and Harmful Behavior

Kids can misuse gen AI to create fake or harmful content, like deepfakes or mean-spirited messages, and to tease or bully others. This can spread quickly and cause real harm.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

Generative AI can create essays, solve math problems, or help with creative writing, which raises concerns about plagiarism. Kids may rely on gen AI to complete projects without fully understanding the material. Talk to your child about using AI responsibly, and check with their school to understand any policies on AI use in schoolwork.

Inappropriate Content

Even with safeguards, AI tools can still produce inappropriate or harmful content. This can be especially concerning if kids are using these tools to specifically find this type of information. It's a good idea to keep an eye on what tools your child is using and talk to them about what they're asking these tools for and how they're prompting them.

Benefits of Generative AI for Teens

While generative AI comes with challenges, it also offers great benefits for kids when used responsibly. Here are some of the positive ways it can support learning, creativity, and productivity:

- **Boosting Learning:**
Generative AI can make learning more accessible for teens by offering quick explanations, language translations, and brainstorming ideas when they need extra help. These tools can be especially useful for kids who may not have access to one-on-one tutoring or additional resources. The key is to help guide them to choose the right questions and prompts that

explain difficult topics, rather than just doing the work for them. This way it becomes a tool for understanding rather than a shortcut.

- **Enhancing Creativity:**

Generative AI can be a great tool for fueling creativity. Kids can use it to inspire new ideas, outline projects, or ask creative questions to spark their imagination and help them refine their own work. For example, they can ask AI to suggest plot ideas for a story or ways to improve their artwork, which can get the creative juices flowing. It's helpful when kids use AI to kick-start an activity, rather than handling it all for them.

- **Improving Efficiency:**

Teens can use generative AI to be more productive and organized. It can help them analyze information, plan projects, or even handle routine tasks like drafting emails or reports. This can free up time for deeper learning or creative projects.

Tips for Talking with Kids About Gen AI

Take AI Test-Drives Together

Think of it like practicing driving before getting a license—explore AI together to understand how it works and what it's used for. Help your kids safely navigate the roads of these tools by learning how generative AI can be used for things like homework, creative projects, or just for fun.

- **Activity:** Work alongside your child to try a gen AI tool for something they'd actually use it for, like a school-related task, a fun creative project, or to find information about a hobby or something they're interested in. This helps you both see the different ways AI can be useful in school and home life.

Build Critical Thinking in Digital Spaces

**Most parents don't know
their teens are using AI,**

& many aren't having conversations about it...

37% of parents whose teens have
used generative AI actually
knew that their child was using these tools.



Just like we teach kids to question what they see on social media or in the news, it's important that we help them think critically about generative AI. Not all gen AI tools are created equal. Some are more trustworthy than others.

Activities:

- **Check the creator:** Research who developed the AI tool that your child is using. Discuss why it's important to understand who made it and what that means when it comes to trusting the information it's giving.
- **Fact-check together:** Have your child ask the gen AI tool about a topic they know really well (like a favorite sport or subject). Compare the AI's response with what they know to be true and discuss any mistakes or gaps. This helps build a habit of fact-checking online and identifying when answers may be more surface-level than detailed.

Help Kids Understand Prompts and Wording

Generative AI tools aren't human. They don't have all the rich context that a real person has. So how you phrase things makes a big difference. Teaching our kids how to construct their prompts is key to getting better, more accurate responses. It also helps them build skills in communicating clearly and thinking about how they give instructions.

- **Activity:** Ask your child to write a simple prompt for AI and then slightly change the wording. For example, they might start with, "Explain climate change," and then try, "Explain how climate change affects animals." Compare the responses and discuss why the tool gave different answers. Talk about how important your wording and clearness are in getting useful results.



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