



Raising Children in the Age of AI

YaeBin Kim, Parenting Education Specialist
Heidi Petermeier, Program Officer

What is AI?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems designed to simulate processes such as thinking and learning in ways that appear human-like.



Everyday tools such as virtual assistants (e.g., Amazon Alexa, Apple Siri), streaming recommendations or even smart toys use AI to make decisions or offer personalized experiences. AI is not just programs like ChatGPT, Gemini or Grok. In fact, we have been living with AI in different forms since the mid-2000s or even earlier.

For younger children, AI often shows up in subtle ways through voice-activated speakers, educational apps or video suggestions (e.g., YouTube, Netflix). Parents may not always notice how these systems shape what their children see, hear or interact with¹. While this guide focuses on young children, many of the ideas also apply as children grow into grade school, the tween years and adolescence. As kids become more independent, AI tools often play a bigger role in their daily lives, so ongoing guidance and conversation are important at every age.

Why Does Understanding AI Matter for Parenting Children?

AI can be helpful for families, but it also raises new challenges. By understanding both the benefits and the challenges, parents can make informed decisions about how their children use technology.

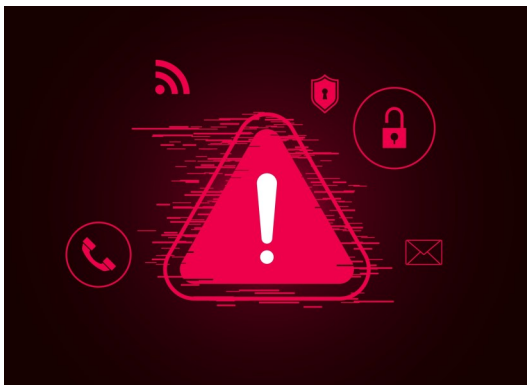
Benefits of AI for Families

- **Learning Opportunities:** AI-powered learning apps can enrich early education through interactive reading, language practice and math games². Educational thought leaders such as Sal Khan (founder of Khan Academy) highlight how AI can personalize learning, adapting to each child's pace, recognizing strengths and gaps, and providing tailored support while enhancing, not replacing, human interaction³.
- **Convenience:** AI can be a practical helper for families. Voice assistants such as Alexa or Siri manage reminders, alarms and schedules, easing daily routines⁴. Generative tools such as ChatGPT provide quick parenting support, such as offering recipe ideas, activity suggestions or simple answers with about 71% of parents reporting use⁵. AI can also personalize routines, such as homework or meal planning, to fit each family's needs.

- **Engagement:** AI can be interactive and fun, opening new ways for families to explore together. For example, families can co-create a story, design digital art or compose music using AI tools. These activities can be creative and playful when done together, encouraging curiosity and imagination.

Challenges of AI for Families

- **Exposure Risks:** Many apps and platforms use algorithms to suggest “what to watch next.” While convenient, these systems don’t always filter for age-appropriate material. A child who starts with a safe cartoon, for example, may quickly be directed to videos with advertising, violence or other unsuitable themes⁶. Children may also encounter AI-generated “deepfakes” and misleading content, which can make it difficult for them to distinguish between what is real and what is not.



- **Privacy Concerns:** Some AI tools collect personal data, such as voice recordings, search histories or viewing habits. This information may be stored or shared with third parties, raising questions about how children’s digital footprints could be used in the future. Parents should regularly check privacy settings, limit permissions, and turn off microphones or cameras when not in use¹.
- **Social-Emotional Growth:** Reliance on AI tools may lead to less human interaction, which is crucial for developing social skills, receiving support and guidance, and forming meaningful connections with others. Early

childhood experts emphasize that children build empathy, communication skills and self-control through face-to-face interaction. Relying too much on AI devices for entertainment or learning can take away valuable time for play, conversation and problem-solving with peers or adults. These experiences are essential for healthy development⁷.

Actions Parents/Caregivers Can Take

Supervise Learning

AI is a tool to support and enhance learning; it’s not a teacher. Children learn best from interaction with caring adults. Children should use AI tools or devices under adult guidance, or together as a family, and they should not be used to substitute for playtime or conversations with real people.



For example, if your child asks a smart device a question, talk together about the answer and ask follow-up questions to keep the conversation going. For younger children, if an AI game suggests a word or number activity, play along or connect it to real play such as naming objects or counting toys.

Choose Age-Appropriate Tools

Select AI-powered tools (e.g., smart learning assistants or coding platforms with AI features) based on your child’s age, interests and learning needs. Look for products that encourage active participation, such as asking questions or solving puzzles, rather than those that only involve watching or swiping. Also, choose ones that have academic value, such as writing support or tutoring. Review ratings and read privacy and data-use policies to ensure they are designed for children and are safe. Once an AI tool is selected, continue guiding children to ensure they are enjoying and benefiting from it.

Examples of AI-powered tools designed for children include: Khan Academy Kids, Duolingo for Kids, Scratch, Epic! and SplashLearn.

Set Limits

Balance screen time with other important activities, such as play, reading, family time, sleep and exercise. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends⁸:

- Ages 2-5: Limit to one hour per day, choose high-quality media, view and play together.
- Grade school (5 years and older): Balance screen use with other activities, check content for safety.
- Tweens/Teens: Encourage independence but have ongoing conversations about media and AI use.

Creating a simple family media plan with rules about when and how technology is used (such as no screens at mealtimes) is helpful. This includes establishing clear guidelines about appropriate use of AI for homework and school projects. These rules may be challenging to follow consistently, but even small steps toward balance can make a big difference.



Protect Privacy

Check device settings regularly to limit data collection. Turn off microphones, cameras or location tracking when not in use, and avoid sharing personal information such as names, addresses or birthdays with AI tools¹. Teach children to ask for help before signing into apps or sharing information online. For younger children, it's best that they do not use devices on their own, and an adult should always be nearby to guide and supervise.

Talk About Technology

Many children use AI tools daily, but only about one in four parents know their child (age 12-18) is using them⁹. One study even found that children ages 3-6 believed smart speakers had

thoughts and feelings⁹. These findings show why it's important to keep conversations open and consistent, no matter a child's age. For example: *"When you ask Alexa a question, it's like a library that finds answers for us, but it doesn't always know everything."* Encourage children to think critically by asking: *"Do you think that's the best answer?"* or *"How could we check if that's true?"* This helps children learn that technology is helpful, but not always right, which also promotes digital literacy.

Model Healthy Use

Children often mimic what they see around them. It's important parents show how they mindfully and responsibly use technology, such as turning devices off during meals or putting phones away when talking to others. "Phubbing" (phone-snubbing) happens when someone looks at their phone instead of paying attention to the people around them. Research shows this can make children feel ignored and less connected. Parents and caregivers who model healthy digital media use help children feel valued and learn that relationships come before screens. Show balance by choosing activities such as reading, cooking or outdoor play without technology.

Conclusion

AI is becoming part of daily life, even for the youngest children. While AI-powered tools can offer learning opportunities and convenience, they cannot replace quality human interaction.

Parents and caregivers play the most important role in guiding children's experiences with technology and digital citizenship. By staying involved, setting limits and making informed choices, families can work together to build healthy relationships with AI from the start. Technology is ever changing, but the most important constant is your relationship with your child. With your guidance, children can grow into respectful, responsible and safe digital citizens.



References

- ¹Dignum, V., Penagos, M., & Vosloo, S. (2021). UNICEF. Policy guidance on AI for children. <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/policy-guidance-ai-children>
- ²National Association for the Education of Young Children & Fred Rogers Center (2012). Technology and interactive media as tools in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8. http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PS_technology_WEB2.pdf
- ³Khan, S. (2024). *Brave new words: How AI will revolutionize education (and why that's a good thing)*. Viking. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228053.2024.2439191>
- ⁴The Chicago Journal Staff (2025, July 16). The growing role of AI in parenting: What parents need to know. <https://thechicajournal.com/the-growing-role-of-ai-in-parenting-what-parents-need-to-know/>
- ⁵Silverman, H. (2025, June 11). I'm a mom who uses ChatGPT for help: Here's what I'm learning. Parents. <https://www.parents.com/parents-using-ai-11750945>
- ⁶Livingstone, S., & Blum-Ross, A. (2020). *Parenting for a digital future: How hopes and fears about technology shape children's lives*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190874698.001.0001>
- ⁷American Academy of Pediatrics (2016, reaffirmed, 2022). Media and young minds. *Pediatrics*, 138(5), e20162591. <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/138/5/e20162591/60503/Media-and-Young-Minds?autologincheck=redirected>
- ⁸American Academy of Pediatrics (2022, July 20). Beyond screen time: Help your kids build healthy media use habits. *Healthy Children*. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Healthy-Digital-Media-Use-Habits-for-Babies-Toddlers-Preschoolers.aspx>
- ⁹Munzer, T. (2024, April 30). *How will artificial intelligence (AI) affect children*. *Healthy Children*. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/how-will-artificial-intelligence-AI-affect-children.aspx>

Questions about this fact sheet?
Contact YaeBin Kim, yaek@unr.edu or
Heidi Petermeier, heidip@unr.edu.