



AI & Kids: What Parents Need to Know

A growing body of evidence suggests many generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools pose a danger to vulnerable users, especially kids. This powerful technology mimics the human capacity to think and generate original content ideas or conversation — but lacks the human judgment to recognize what type of content is appropriate or could put users at risk. That’s why MAMA recommends these products remain off-limits to children and adolescents until they are designed with adequate safeguards and properly regulated.

1 Your kids might be using AI – even if you don’t know it.

Chatbots that mimic real human conversation are becoming increasingly common for even younger children to use. More than half of teens and ten percent of 5 to 8 year-olds have used a chatbot. Yet only about a third of parents whose kids use these tools know about it. That’s largely because social media companies are embedding it into familiar platforms.

2 AI is no replacement for real teacher and peer interaction.

Research from the Institute of Education Sciences shows that strong teacher-student relationships significantly improve attendance, academic success and emotional well-being. Replacing educators with AI deprives students of mentorship, care and stability — experiences that are fundamental for healthy cognitive development and educational achievement.

3 Chatbots can be prompted to engage in explicit sexual conversations with kids.

There are a disturbing number of cases of teens falling in love with, being manipulated by, and even engaging in sexual interactions with chatbots. *The Wall Street Journal* recently uncovered how Meta’s chatbots may roleplay risky grooming behaviors and sexual scenarios with young users, even mimicking voices of popular celebrities and characters from children’s media.

4 Chatbots can encourage harmful behaviors.

Despite claims that chatbots can ease loneliness as make-believe “friends,” there is mounting evidence that emotional relationships with inanimate computer code poses mental health risks and encourages emotional detachment from real humans. At least two high-profile lawsuits allege teens have been encouraged to harm themselves or others following intensive usage.

5 Algorithms are biased by design, which often leads to harmful and discriminatory output.

Because AI models are trained on data that may contain biases, they often “hallucinate” or provide inaccurate information — and may be biased against students of color and those with disabilities, the U.S. Department of Education has warned. Without stringent safeguards, algorithms can discriminate, misdirect, misassess and underserve vulnerable populations.

6 When AI enters schools, rural and low-income students face greater risk of falling behind.

The rising use of technology in classrooms has resulted in significant declines in student reading and math performance. Roughly 17 million children in the U.S. lack adequate internet access or digital devices at home. An AI-centered educational model risks further widening the digital divide, entrenching inequity and denying them equal learning opportunities.

7 There is currently almost NO regulation of this powerful new technology.

AI tools are now reaching millions of kids and teens through familiar platforms like Whatsapp, Instagram and Facebook. While legislation is pending in several states, federal law lags behind on implementing basic safety mechanisms — which has prompted numerous prominent figures in AI development to publicly call for halting its deployment until we can ensure its safe use.

8 Guardrails are easy to circumvent – if they exist at all.

While some AI companies say they are running internal safety tests, allowing third party audits, and working to create oversight systems, currently there are zero widely-accepted standards. A recent study by Common Sense Media and Stanford found that supposed internal safeguards on companion chatbot sites can easily be circumvented.

9 AI could strain teacher capacity and compromise classroom safety.

Most educators lack formal training to properly manage or safely supervise AI technologies. After a recent Executive Order aimed at incorporating AI more into classrooms, one of the nation's largest teachers' unions warned it was "a transparent attempt to open up schools to unaccountable tech companies, with wholly inadequate safeguards to protect our kids."

10 You should talk to your kids about AI and set limits.

Until proper safeguards are in place, MAMA recommends that no one under 18 utilizes these technologies. Parents should discuss the potential risks with their teens—and with educators— so they understand why generative AI, like the internet, contains a world of ideas and imagery best encountered, not as a child or adolescent, but at a later stage of maturity when the brain is more fully developed — and after basic safeguards are in place.

Sources:

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