

Reigniting curiosity in the age of AI

How to tell if your kids are excited about learning

Tips for parents



Did you know?

Kids experience and move between four different modes of engagement in school. Passenger mode: when kids coast along, do the bare minimum, and feel that school is pointless. Resister mode: when kids struggle silently, feel inadequate, and resist school by skipping class, acting out, or ignoring homework. Achiever mode: when kids show up and do the work, but tie their self-worth to high performance. Explorer mode: when kids are driven by curiosity, investigate questions that interest them, and persist in reaching their goals. These modes are laid out in depth in the book “The Disengaged Teen.”

Kids don't spend enough time in Explorer mode. Only 1 in 10 kids in the U.S. (grades 3-12) say they regularly experience Explorer mode in school.*

Being an “explorer” can boost learning and life outcomes in an AI world.

Research shows that when students spend more time in Explorer mode, they have better attendance, stronger academic performance, greater life satisfaction, higher college completion rates, and lower rates of depression and risky behaviors. Explorer mode also helps children navigate an AI world.

Overuse of AI can push kids into

Passenger mode. When AI tools take over brainstorming, writing, or problem-solving, kids miss the challenge and satisfaction of figuring things out themselves. Over time, this can erode curiosity, persistence, and purpose—pushing more kids into Passenger mode.

*The disengagement gap: Why student engagement isn't what parents expect, by Rebecca Winthrop, Youssef Shoukry, and David Nitkin, 2025.

What to notice

If your kids are disengaged in learning.

If your kids never do more than the minimum school requirements, say everything is “boring,” love going to school to see their friends but dislike classes, or spend more time finding shortcuts for their schoolwork than actually learning, they might be in Passenger mode.

If your kids use AI as a shortcut. Watch for signs that your kids are using AI to avoid effort. Do they produce high-quality schoolwork, but can’t explain their reasoning?

Have they stopped taking notes or doing required readings, but are still turning in assignments that look complete? These kids could be in Achiever or Passenger mode.

If your kids have found their spark. If your kids excitedly share what they’re learning about, view failure as an opportunity to try again, or lose track of time when they’re absorbed in learning something new, they might be in Explorer mode.

What you can do: Conversations to support Explorer mode

With your kids:

We recommend these activities for kids ages 10-14. But you know your kid best! If these are relevant to you, use them!

- **Ask your kid:** About what they’re learning in school, not just their grades. For example, “What did you learn in science today? Can you tell me about how that works?”
- **Healthy habits:** Make sure your kids have screen-free time each day.
- **Model curiosity:** Share your own passions and interests. At mealtimes, share something you learned or found interesting. Curiosity is contagious!
- **Support their interests:** Ask your kid what excites them, notice what they focus on and talk about (even if you think it’s boring), and find small ways to connect school topics to those interests.
- **Use AI to deepen interests:** If your kid is fascinated by marine biology, graphic design, or basketball statistics, help them use AI to explore advanced questions, simulate debates, explore virtual realities, or test their ideas. Talk to them about what they learn and how they might apply it in the real world!



Find more in our Parent Tip Sheet Library! For more detailed information, including data sources, check out the full report: A new direction for students in an AI world: Prosper, Prepare, Protect.