

# When AI helps learning, and when it gets in the way

Understanding how AI can strengthen your kids' education or quietly weaken it

Tips for parents



## Did you know?

**AI can strengthen or harm your kids' learning.**

AI is not inherently good or bad for learning. It depends on how it is designed and used by kids, families, and teachers.

**To benefit learning, AI must be designed for kids' education.** AI tools that can be used narrowly, contain only educational content, and are designed to align with how kids learn are more likely to support deeper learning. In contrast, general-purpose AI chatbots that are trained on content from across the internet (which may include inaccurate or inappropriate material) are more likely to undermine learning.

**Good educational AI tools teach, not tell.** AI that simply gives kids the answer can diminish learning. Effective educational AI should be intentionally designed to provide hints, ask guiding questions, require kids to attempt an answer, and prompt them to explain their reasoning before moving forward.

**Without effective safety features, AI tools can undermine learning.** Many AI tools, especially those not designed for educational purposes, talk to kids in highly personal ways and encourage frequent interaction. This "wide" AI use can lead to dependence on AI tools and weaken kids' relationships with parents and teachers, disrupting the learning environment. Good educational AI tools have guardrails that limit overuse and do not act like a friend.



## What to notice

### When AI tools help your kids learn.

Some examples might look like:

- Your kid uses AI to help them study for a history or science test by generating flash cards, practice quiz questions, or converting their notes into a podcast.
- Your kid uses AI to get organized by using it to create schedules, school calendars, homework trackers, or study plans.
- Teachers use AI to portray unique experiences, like interactively exploring an ocean habitat or another country.
- Your kid uses AI to bring their ideas to life by creating a video, image, or audio file.

In these situations, AI can strengthen your kids' understanding, organization, skills, participation, and interest in a subject or topic rather than replacing them.

### When AI tools are harming your kids' learning.

Some examples might look like:

- Your kid lets AI do the hard thinking for them by having it write an essay, complete a math

worksheet, or summarize an assigned chapter. As a result, they get less practice thinking through problems themselves, and their knowledge and cognitive skills are weakened over time.

- Your kid forms a close attachment to an AI chatbot that always agrees and responds instantly. Compared to teachers who help students see their mistakes or classmates who sometimes disagree or take time to respond, the chatbot feels easier. Over time, your kid struggles to receive feedback from teachers or collaborate with peers during group work and misses learning opportunities and chances to build real-world social skills.
- Your kid suspects their teacher is using AI to grade essays but isn't sure. They begin to question the feedback they receive, which can make it harder to trust their teacher and learn from the comments.

In these cases, AI limits participation in learning, reduces skill development, and weakens the connection between your kid, their teacher, and the material they are meant to master.

## What you can do: Conversations to prevent AI from harming learning

### 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:** How do you think AI can help you learn and grow? How might it hurt your learning? Hear what they have to say, but also be sure to explain that learning happens when the brain works hard. You can say: "AI can be a tool, like spell check. It helps after you've tried. But your brain grows when you think first." Reinforce that effort, not speed, is what builds skill.
- **New rule:** Try a "think first" rule at home. Before anyone in the house uses technology to look something up or get an answer, they must think first.

- **Reflect on your own values about effort and independence.** Schools are actively navigating how to integrate AI responsibly. Rather than positioning AI as "good" or "bad," help your kid see it as a powerful tool that must be used carefully, just like nuclear energy or fire. The goal is not to reject technology or to accept it without caution, but to ensure it strengthens thinking rather than replaces it.

### In your school or community:

- Ask your school or district how they evaluate whether an AI tool is designed for education and will benefit students and expand or grow their learning, rather than simply giving them answers.
- Spend time using the AI tools your kids may be using in school or at home to understand if they are helping kids think more deeply or are doing the thinking for them.



### 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.