

Talking to Kids About AI: Privacy, Fairness, and Responsibility

This section is designed to accompany Video 2 in the "What is AI for Parents" series from the Day of AI and Common Sense Media partnership.

This video and toolkit enable families to discuss AI and its implications: Talking to Kids About AI: Privacy, Fairness, and Responsibility.



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Prior to Watching the Video

Privacy, Fairness, and Responsibility in AI

Before discussing the specific challenges of AI, it's helpful to establish a basic understanding of the meaning of **ethics**.



Ethics can be defined as *principles that help people decide what is right and wrong*. Since AI is created by humans, it can reflect human biases and values, which is why it's so important to consider the ethical implications of how AI is developed and used.

Next Steps

1. Watch the [video](#).
2. Use the cards to engage your child in discussions.
3. Try the activities.
4. Keep the AI conversation going!



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Conversation Starters for Talking to Kids About AI: Privacy, Fairness, and Responsibility

Algorithms & Transparency

Question: Why do you think your music app keeps suggesting certain songs or playlists?

For Younger Kids: ask about favorite cartoons or songs.

For Older Kids/Teens: extend to “Who benefits from me seeing this?”

Possible Responses:

- “Because I listened to a song like it before.”
 - “It remembers my favorite singer.”
 - “I guess the app is deciding for me, not just me choosing.”
 - “Maybe the app wants me to stay on it longer, so it keeps feeding me songs.”
 - “They probably get money if I listen to certain artists or ads.”
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Data Privacy

Question: What kinds of information should you never share with a chatbot or app?

For Younger Kids: review never sharing their full name, birthday, or school.

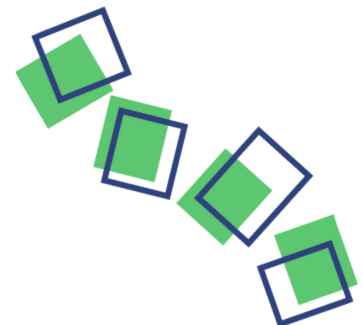
For Older Kids/Teens: discuss never sharing passwords, private family info, and long-term digital footprint. Share information on data rights: many websites, apps, and even schools collect data (like your location, what you click, what you search). Emphasize that once they post or share something, it can be copied, sold, or stored, even if you delete it later.

Possible Responses:

“My full name, birthday, or where I live.”

“Passwords or where I go to school.”

“Things I wouldn’t want a stranger to know.”



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Misinformation

Question: How can you tell if something online might be fake or misleading?

For Younger Kids: keep it simple by having kids spot silly/unrealistic photos.

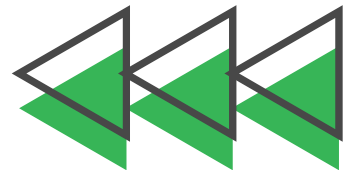
For Older Kids/Teens: Use this as a starting point to identify altered images and videos, including deepfakes, and understand the importance of cross-referencing information from multiple reliable sources.

Possible Responses:

"If it sounds too good to be true."

"If I can't find it on a trusted website, too."

"If it looks edited or unrealistic."



Bias & Fairness

Question: Do you think AI always treats everyone equally? Why or why not?

For Younger Kids: remind kids of the cat bias example.

For Older Kids/Teens: discuss how this may apply to jobs, hobbies, admissions, and law enforcement. For example, AI tools are being used to screen candidates for job interviews and may exclude certain groups based on built-in biases.

Possible Responses:

"No, because it learns from people who aren't always fair."

"If it's trained mostly on one type of person, it could get others wrong."

"It depends on who makes it and what data they use."



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Environment

Question: How does using AI affect the planet?

For Younger Kids: reiterate that AI uses massive amounts of energy. You can compare AI's energy use to the power that keeps many homes running. Unlike the lights at home that you can turn off, AI's energy use never shuts off.

For Older Kids/Teens: explain that to keep the computers from overheating, data centers use huge amounts of water for cooling. If the electricity comes from non-renewable sources (like coal or gas), it creates more greenhouse gases. The energy use of AI is always on, unlike a light you can turn off at home.

Possible Responses:

"It uses electricity and water."

"It's like when we leave lights on, it adds up."

"We should be thoughtful, not wasteful."



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Activity Ideas for Talking to Kids About AI: Privacy, Fairness, and Responsibility

Algorithm Offline Sorting Challenge

This activity helps children understand the concept of algorithms by doing a hands-on sorting exercise.

For Younger Kids: Start with simple sorting tasks. For example, lay out a pile of LEGOs and ask them to sort by color. You can say, **"The rule (or algorithm) is to put all the red ones in this pile, all the blue ones in that pile, and all the yellow ones over there."** Once they get the hang of it, you can change the rule to sort by size, then shape. This teaches them that algorithms are just a set of instructions for solving a problem.

For Older Kids/Teens: Introduce more complex rules. For instance, **"First, sort all the books by size, from smallest to largest. Then, within each size group, sort them by the author's last name."** This demonstrates how algorithms can have nested or multi-step rules. To connect it to the real world, discuss how a streaming service recommends movies. Instead of just one condition (or rule or criteria), the algorithm often uses several together:

"Show me movies my friends like and that are dramas and set in the future."

This shows how algorithms don't stop after one rule; they keep adding rules together. Each condition narrows the choices and makes recommendations more specific. Over time, the system layers many data points (like what you've watched, what your friends like, or what's popular nearby) to build a profile and suggest things that feel personal.



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Safe Sharing Sort

This activity uses a simple card-sorting game to teach online safety and privacy.

For Younger Kids: Create cards with simple pieces of information on them, such as "my name," "my address," "my favorite color," and "my pet's name." Have them sort the cards into two piles: "**Safe to Share**" and "**Never Share Online.**" You can then role-play a situation where a friend asks for information online. This helps them practice responding and reinforces the importance of not sharing personal details.

For Older Kids/Teens: Introduce "gray area" information. This could include things like their favorite food, their hobbies, or the name of their school. Discuss why this information can be a risk, and talk about how scams and phishing work. **Phishing** scams try to trick you into giving away personal information by pretending to be someone you trust, like a friend, a company, or even a school. They often use clever tricks to make their requests seem real and urgent. Explain how everything we do online, from posting photos to liking a post, creates a "**digital footprint**" that can be used to learn about us.



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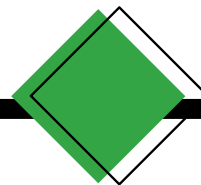
Activity Ideas for Talking to Kids About AI: Privacy, Fairness, and Responsibility

Fact-Check Challenge

This activity encourages critical thinking and media literacy by having kids **evaluate information**.

For Younger Kids: Use headlines that are clearly fake or funny alongside real ones. For example, "A dog has been elected mayor of a town in Alaska," and "A new playground is opening at the local park." Have them check the facts using a trusted source like [Britannica Kids](#), [National Geographic Kids](#), [Kiddle](#), or another reliable online site. This helps them understand the difference between a real news story and something that is made up.

For Older Kids/Teens: Introduce the concept of "lateral reading," which is the practice of opening multiple tabs to cross-reference information from different sources. For example, if you see a news story, open another tab and search for the same story from a different news organization. Teach them to look for credibility markers, such as URLs ending in .gov or .edu, or the reputation of a news outlet.



Bias Test

This activity helps children understand the concept of bias, particularly as it relates to technology and AI.

For Younger Kids: Show your child several pictures of only one type of cat (ex., all orange cats). Ask: "If AI only saw these, what would it think all cats look like?" Then, show pictures of many different cats. This shows how AI can develop a bias if it only learns from limited examples. Ask them, "Why is it a problem if AI only learns from a small group?"

For Older Kids/Teens: Try asking an AI to generate an image of a man and a woman performing a specific job. The picture might only show people of one gender or a specific race. Why? Because in the data it was trained on, those patterns appeared more often. Discuss how data used to train AI systems can be biased and how that can have an impact on the real world, such as in hiring decisions, or college applications.



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Activity Ideas for Talking to Kids About AI: Privacy, Fairness, and Responsibility

AI vs. Human Role-Play

This activity helps children understand the difference between how a chatbot and a human communicate and respond.

For Younger Kids:

When talking with younger children about AI and emotions, remind them that people use their senses, like sight and hearing, to understand how someone feels. You might say a simple phrase like **"I'm fine"** or **"That was fun"** in three different tones –happy, sad, and neutral- and have your child close their eyes to guess the real emotion based only on your voice.

Then explain that, unlike people, AI doesn't have senses or feelings. To show this, your child can ask a question that shows emotion: **"I'm excited to see my friend today. What should we play together?"** and you can respond in a way that doesn't make emotional sense, such as **"Green is a great color and can be found throughout nature."** Try it a few times and then talk about why the answers sound funny. This helps kids see that while AI can speak, it doesn't actually feel anything; it just predicts words.



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For Older Kids/Teens:

Present your child with the following statistics directly from the report, [Hand in Hand: Schools' Embrace of AI Connected to Increased Risks to Students](#) (October 2025, by Elizabeth Laird, Maddy Dwyer, and Hannah Quay-de la Vallee). You can also use a more recent news article that you feel is appropriate. These numbers show how common it is for students to turn to AI for personal, non-academic reasons.

When asked, 2 out of 5 students (about 42-43%) shared that they or a friend used AI chatbots in the following ways during the past school year:

- To get advice on relationships with others (friends, family, romantic partners)
- As a friend/companion
- To get mental health support
- To use as a way to escape from real life (e.g., pretending to be in a virtual world)
- Almost 20% (1 in 5 teens) said they've used AI to have a romantic relationship.

Then, have a conversation about these statistics. Ask questions such as:

- What's your first reaction to these numbers?
- Does anything here surprise you, or does it seem about right?
- Why do you think so many kids might be turning to AI for help or comfort?
- How do you think students might feel when they use AI for emotional support?
- Would you feel comfortable using AI in this manner?

Explain that this doesn't mean AI use is always bad, it just shows that students are turning to technology for emotional support more than ever before. End your conversation by reflecting and planning together. Remind them they can always come to you (or another trusted adult) if they need help. You might say:

"It's really helpful to talk about this. AI is a big part of life now, and it's important we keep thinking about how we use it."

To Continue the Conversation, Check Out:

[AI Chatbots: Who's Behind the Screen?](#)



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Activity Ideas for Talking to Kids About AI: Privacy, Fairness, and Responsibility

AI Footprint Tracker

This activity helps children think about the environmental impact of technology and AI.

For Younger Kids: Use simple icons like a lightning bolt for energy and a water drop for water. Brainstorm different ways AI is used in their daily lives, like with voice assistants or video games. For each one, they can draw a lightning bolt or a water drop to show that it uses energy and water. This helps them visualize the environmental impact.

For Older Kids/Teens: Start with a quick discussion about how data centers that power AI use massive amounts of electricity and water. Then, challenge students to research one aspect, such as the carbon emissions of training an AI model or the water needed to cool servers, and share their findings. Afterward, have them reflect on their own AI use and propose ways to reduce their “AI footprint,” such as limiting it to specific tasks, like text generation instead of image generation. Explain to them that AI image generation consumes significantly more energy than text generation because it requires greater computational power to create visual outputs. While a single image can consume energy equivalent to fully charging a smartphone, generating text uses substantially less, with 1,000 text outputs using only about 16% of a smartphone's charge.

For More Information:

- [AI's Carbon Footprint](#)
- [2025-The Impact of AI on the Environment](#)
- [The growing environmental impact of AI data centers' energy demands | PBS News Weekend](#)
- [Explained: Generative AI's environmental impact | MIT News | Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#)



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Glossary

AI Footprint: the effect your personal use of AI has on the environment, like the electricity and water it takes to run your apps and tools.

Bias: when an AI system makes unfair decisions because it learned from unbalanced or incomplete data.

Data Privacy: the idea that information you share online or with a chatbot may be stored, used, or shared, and needs protection.

Data Rights: your rights to control your own information, like deciding who can see it, use it, or share it, and being able to ask for it to be deleted.

Deepfake: a fake video, photo, or sound made with AI that looks or sounds real but isn't.

Digital Footprint: all the information you leave behind online (posts, likes, searches). Even small things add up over time. This trail of information you leave online can last a long time, even after you delete it.

Environmental Impact: the energy and water AI systems use to run, and how that affects the planet.

Ethics: principles that help people decide what is right and wrong.

Fairness: making sure everyone is treated equally and not left out because of unfair rules or data.

Lateral Reading: a way to check if something online is true by opening other websites to see if they say the same thing.

Misinformation: false or misleading information, sometimes created on purpose, that can spread quickly through AI-generated content.

Phishing: a trick where someone pretends to be a friend, company, or school to steal personal information like passwords.

Transparency: how openly companies share (or don't share) how their algorithms work and why certain content appears.

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About Day of AI

Day of AI is an MIT-founded initiative dedicated to helping K-12 students and educators thrive in the era of artificial intelligence. It has since evolved into a standalone not-for-profit entity that collaborates with MIT researchers to provide curricula and professional development programs, enabling students and teachers to deepen their understanding of how AI works and its ethical implications. Our mission is to equip educators with the knowledge and tools to integrate AI responsibly into their classrooms, fostering critical thinking skills and AI literacy among students.

dayofai.org

About Common Sense Media

Common Sense Media is a trusted nonprofit that provides research-backed reviews, resources, and guidance to help families navigate media and technology. Their work empowers parents, caregivers, and educators to make informed decisions about digital tools and platforms, promoting safe, ethical, and inclusive use of technology for children of all ages.

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