

Using AI Wisely for School Success

Purpose of This Toolkit

This toolkit and video help families guide their children in using AI responsibly for schoolwork. It builds on the first two toolkits created by Day of AI and Common Sense Media by focusing on how AI can support learning while still making space for active thinking, creativity, and critical reasoning.

**Understand AI's
role in learning**

**Set clear rules and
healthy habits**

**Help kids strengthen thinking
through reflection**



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Understanding AI's Role in Learning

- AI tools can explain complex ideas, generate examples, create practice questions, and help organize information.
- When overused, AI tools can make learning shallower by doing too much of the thinking for students.

Research shows that learning sticks when students actively think through ideas, make mistakes, revise their work, and explain concepts in their own words. AI should support this process, not replace it.

AI Cannot Replace:



**Human
Reasoning**



**Problem-Solving
Skills**



**Critical and
Creative Thinking**



**Working Through
Challenges**



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What Families Should Know About AI Tools

- **AI tools can** provide incorrect or incomplete information, even when answers sound confident
- They may reflect **bias or stereotypes** from the data they were trained on
- Raise **privacy concerns** related to data collection and sharing
- Create academic integrity issues if they replace student thinking or work
- **Offer limited age protections**, which can expose students to inappropriate or unsafe content

This is why AI should support learning, not replace it, and why students need adult guidance, clear school rules, and regular conversations about responsible use. Because AI often sounds confident, even when it's wrong, students need to learn how AI works, as well as how to question, verify, and reflect on AI outputs. This understanding is known as **AI Literacy**.



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Why Active Learning Matters

Research from the MIT Media Lab shows that students learn best when they actively work through ideas, make mistakes, and reflect, especially through writing. The study found stronger brain engagement when learners explained concepts themselves rather than relying on AI to do the work.

Large-scale studies, including research from the Brookings Institution, warn that over-reliance on AI can weaken critical thinking skills when it replaces students' cognitive effort. This toolkit helps families use AI as a learning partner, not a shortcut. If schoolwork feels "too easy" with AI, it may be bypassing the mental effort that makes learning stick.

What does this look like?

Example 1

Instead of asking AI to "write an essay about the causes of World War I," ask: "Does my argument about nationalism make sense? What am I missing?"

Example 2

Rather than having AI solve the problem, work through it yourself, then ask: "I got a weird answer using the quadratic formula, where did my logic go wrong?"

Help Your Child Notice the Difference:

- Did AI do the thinking for me?
- Did I understand the problem better after using AI?
- Could I explain my answer without AI's help?
- Did this make the work too easy?



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AI Is Not Safe for Mental Health Support

Recent research by Common Sense Media with the Stanford Lab for Mental Health Innovation found that chatbots are fundamentally unsafe for teen mental health support. This includes support for anxiety, depression, OCD, eating disorders, ADHD, PTSD, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts. Read the full report [here](#).

Why:

- They miss warning signs when distress builds over several messages.
- They are designed for engagement, not safety. Which means they might try to keep the user talking to the Chatbot instead of directing the young person to seek help.
- Teens can develop dangerous “automation bias”—the assumption that chatbots are as helpful for emotions as they are for homework.

Experts caution that AI chatbots are not designed to recognize emotional distress or provide real support. Kids and teens still need trusted humans when feelings get big. If your child expresses emotional distress, seek professional help.

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Before–During–After AI Homework Check

Use this simple routine to guide healthy AI use.

Before Using AI

- What am I trying to learn?
- What do I already know?
- What part feels hardest?

During AI Use

- Is AI explaining, or doing the work for me?
- Am I asking follow-up questions?
- Is this helping me think more deeply?

After AI Use

- Can I explain this without AI?
- Did I change or improve the work myself?
- What did I actually learn?

Why this routine helps:

Research suggests students learn more when they pause to reflect on what they understand before and after using AI, not just during. Being able to explain an answer without AI is a strong sign that real learning happened.



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Conversation Starters for Families

Use these questions during homework time, mealtime, or on the way to school.

1. When does AI actually help you learn?

Sample responses:

- “When it explains something in a different way than my teacher or textbook.”
- “When it helps me practice, I still have to think.”
- “When it gives me examples that I can study or compare.”
- “When it helps me check my understanding after I try on my own.”
- “When it helps me figure out what I should review more.”



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Conversation Starters for Families

Use these questions during homework time, mealtime, or on the way to school.

2. When should you not use AI for homework?

Sample responses:

- “When I need to show my thinking or explain my steps.”
- “When I haven’t tried the problem on my own yet.”
- “When it would replace my ideas or my voice.”
- “When it makes the work too easy, and I don’t learn anything.”
- “When I wouldn’t be able to explain my answer without AI”



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Conversation Starters for Families

Use these questions during homework time, mealtime, or on the way to school.

3. “Why should you double-check AI’s answers?”

Review these points:

- AI tools don’t always have access to current information. Some AI systems are trained on data that stops at a certain point in time, while others may use live internet searches, but even then, they can miss updates, misunderstand sources, or rely on unreliable information. As a result of this process, AI’s answers can be outdated or incorrect.
- AI can give incorrect or incomplete answers: AI does not truly understand the question the way humans do. It predicts what sounds like a good answer, which can lead to mistakes or missing important details.
- AI can make up fake people, events, or sources: Sometimes AI “fills in the gaps” by inventing information that looks real but isn’t. This is why students should always verify facts with trusted sources like class notes, textbooks, or teacher-approved websites.
- AI can reflect bias. AI systems are trained on large amounts of human-created data, which can include stereotypes, unfair viewpoints, or missing perspectives. This means AI’s answers may favor certain groups, ideas, or experiences over others, even when the information sounds neutral or factual.



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Conversation Starters for Families

Use these questions during homework time, mealtime, or on the way to school.

4. “Do you ever talk to AI when you feel upset, stressed, or lonely?”

Sample follow-up prompts:

- “Who are the adults you can talk to when you feel anxious or sad?”
- “If you were really worried about something, who could help right away?”
- “What should you do if AI says something that doesn’t feel safe or helpful?”

Why this question matters:

Studies show that relying on AI for emotional support can undermine healthy coping skills and genuine human connections.



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Age-Based Suggestions for Families

Children's thinking, self-control, and judgment develop over time, which is why AI boundaries should change as kids grow, not disappear.

Elementary School (K-5)

- Use AI together with an adult (if used at all)
- Focus on explanations, not answers
- Avoid independent chatbot use

Middle School (6-8)

- Use AI for practice and revision (if used at all)
- Talk about mistakes and bias
- Begin being transparent about AI use

High School (9-12)

- Use AI strategically, not automatically (if used at all)
- Emphasize original voice and authorship
- Learn when not to use AI, especially for companionship, emotional support, or mental health advice



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Quick Family Activities

Activity 1: Cognitive Card Game

The Cognitive Card Game is a fast activity that teaches students the difference between using AI as a tool and overusing it. Students hear short scenarios and decide whether each shows “Effort!” (using brainpower) or “Debt!” (letting AI do the work). All materials can be found here: <https://dayofai.org/units/the-cognitive-card-game>



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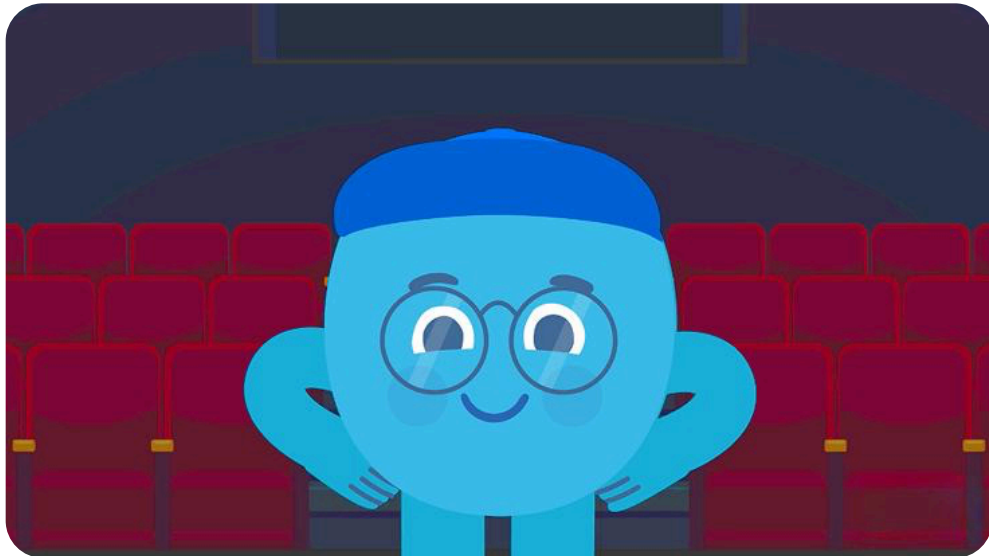
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Quick Family Activities

Activity 2: Two Truths & AI

Here's a fun challenge for your family: Can you tell the difference between a real movie poster and one created by AI? It's trickier than you might think.

Two Truths & AI is a fast-paced game where families work together to spot AI-generated images. In just 60 seconds, you'll look at three movie posters and figure out which one is fake. It's designed to be fun, but it's also helping your kids build a skill they'll use every day: knowing what's real online. <https://www.common sense media.org/two-truths-and-ai>



To see a full list of lessons from Common Sense's Information and Media Literacy topic area, visit [here](#). While all these lessons were designed for classroom teachers, you might find them helpful to see, and you can share them with your school!

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Quick Family Activities

Activity 3: Human vs. AI Explanation Challenge

1. Your child explains a concept in their own words.
2. Ask AI to explain the same concept.
3. Compare both explanations.

Ask:

- Which one is clearer?
- What did you add that AI didn't?
- What did AI add that helped?

This builds metacognition, thinking about your thinking.



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Quick Family Activities

Activity 4: Build Better Study Time with AI

Try one of these AI-supported learning strategies:

- Ask AI to create a short quiz
- Have AI make digital flashcards
- Request 3 different explanations of the same idea
- Ask for examples that your child can analyze or compare

Then discuss:

- Which AI strategy helped you think the hardest, and why?”
- “Which strategy made you slow down and really think?”
- “Which one helped you understand the topic better—not just finish faster?”
- “Did any strategy make you change or improve your answer?”
- “Which strategy would you use again, and which would you avoid?”

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Learn Your School's AI Policy

We encourage you to learn more about your school's AI policy. Common Sense Media, the [National Parents Union](#), and the [EDSAFE AI Alliance](#) created a helpful guide to having these conversations with your child's school: [A Parent's Guide to AI Advocacy in Education](#).

Write your notes here:



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Family AI Use Agreement

Sign together to build healthy habits.

We agree that:

- We will try our own thinking before asking AI for help.
- We will only use AI for tasks our school allows.
- We will double-check AI's information.
- We will acknowledge or cite AI use when required.
- We will talk openly about challenges, questions, or confusion.
- We will turn to trusted humans, not AI, for emotional support.
- We will use AI to support, not replace, learning

Child Signature: _____

Parent/Caregiver Signature: _____

Date: _____



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