Safer Internet Day 2026

Smart tech, safe choices

Exploring the safe and responsible use of AI

UK Safer Internet Centre

Supported by Nominet

nominet

About Safer Internet Day

Safer Internet Day is the UK's largest celebration of online safety and is coordinated by the UK Safer Internet Centre. Each year the Safer Internet Day campaign reaches millions of young people, educators, parents and carers across the UK, giving them the vital information and support they need to keep safe online.

The UK Safer Internet Centre (UKSIC), established in 2011, is a leading global partnership helping to make the internet a great and safe place for everyone. We provide support and services to children and young people, adults facing online harms, and professionals working with children.

Formed of three charities, Childnet, Internet Watch Foundation and SWGfL, we work together to identify threats and harms online. By creating and delivering critical advice, resources, education and interventions, we help keep children, young people and adults safe online. We share our best practices across the UK and globally.

This year, Safer Internet Day has been supported with lead funding and additional resources by Nominet – guardians of the .UK registry.

About Nominet

Nominet has run the UK's national domain registry since 1996 – which is relied on by millions of individuals and businesses every day.

As a public benefit company, Nominet runs .UK for the greater good – working with its members to bring the benefits of the internet to all.

Nominet plays an essential role in operating the internet's infrastructure, helping to run the Domain Name System that supports government services in the UK, including the NHS. It also helps some of the world's biggest brands to have their own online home.

About this research

This research was commissioned and funded by Nominet to support Safer Internet Day 2026. Childnet led on devising the study, alongside input from Nominet which was carried out by Opinium in November 2025. Opinium conducted two surveys. One of them was of 2,018 children, aged 8-17, in the UK. The second survey was of 2,000 parents and carers of children, aged 8-17, in the UK. The data from both surveys has been weighted to be nationally representative.

Childnet also consulted its Digital Leaders, Digital Champions and its Youth Advisory Board, aged 8-18, in November-December 2025, and ran focus groups with young people in primary and secondary schools in May and June, 2025.
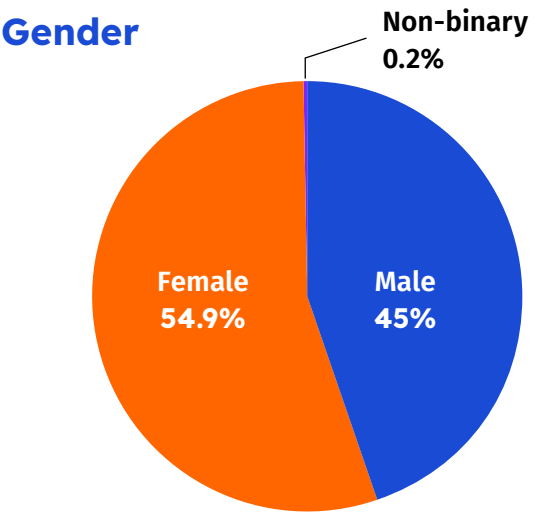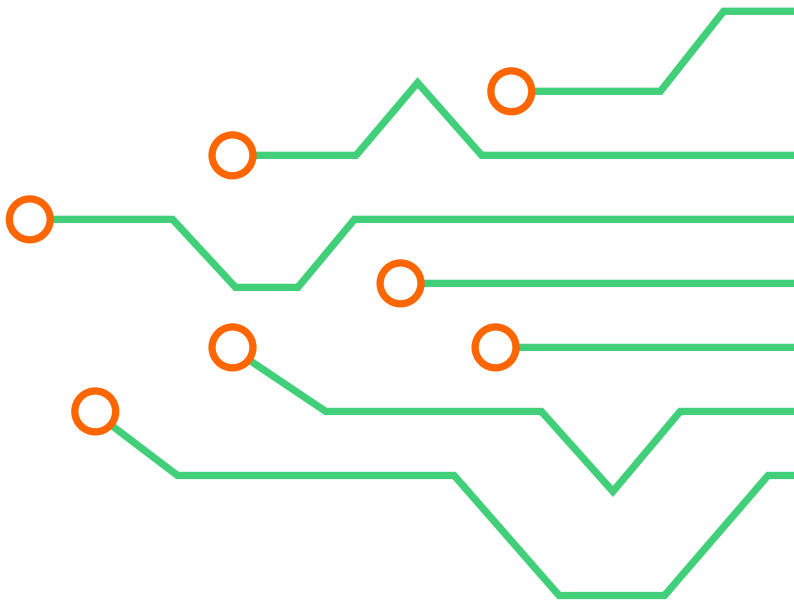
Survey respondents:

Young people aged 8-17

Gender

Non-binary 0.1%
Female 51.1%
Male 48.7%
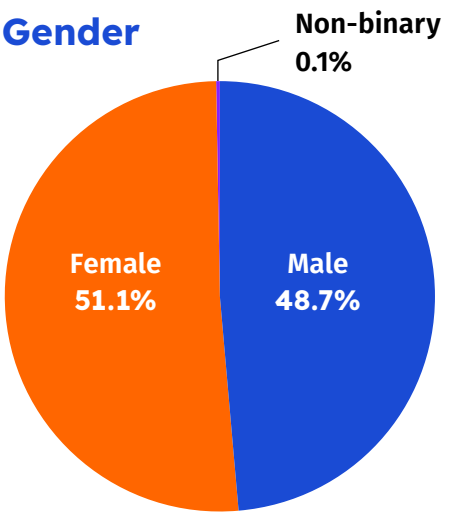
Male	983
Female	1,032
Non-binary	2
Prefer not to say	1
Total	**2,018**

Parents and carers of young people aged 8-17

Gender

Non-binary 0.2%
Female 54.9%
Male 45%

Male	899
Female	1,098
Non-binary	3
Total	**2,000**

Age

Age	
Age 8	196
Age 9	170
Age 10	226
Age 11	167
Age 12	166
Age 13	233
Age 14	254
Age 15	264
Age 16	157
Age 17	185
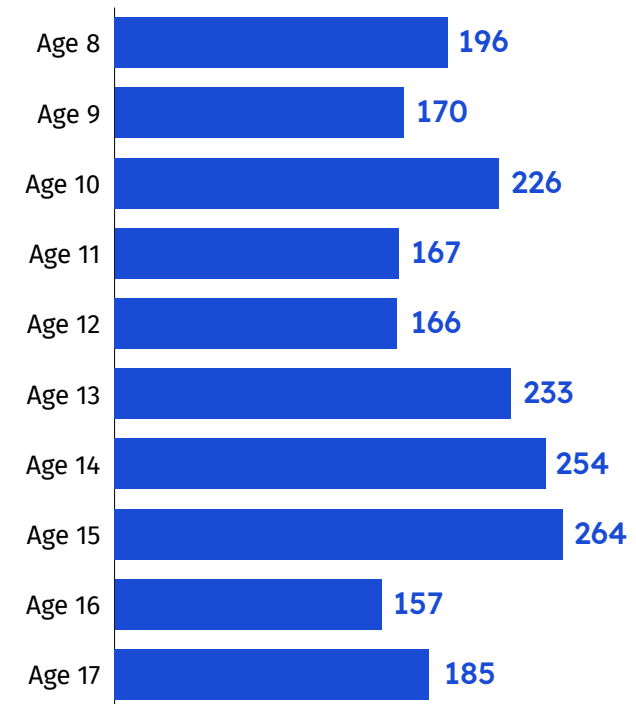
Young people are embracing AI and want to learn more about using it safely and responsibly. But they, and their parents and carers, urgently need more support.

Everyone's talking about AI and almost all (**97%**) of children and young people of all ages from 8 to 17 have used AI in some form. With many children and young people using AI online on a weekly, and even daily, basis, it's important they have the skills and confidence to make safe choices when they are using smart technology. This Safer Internet Day we are exploring the impact of AI on all of our lives, looking at how AI can be used for good, as well as the risks AI poses, and giving advice and guidance that empowers people to use AI safely and responsibly.

There is much enthusiasm among young people about AI. **80%** have seen AI used in positive ways and **58%** think AI makes their life better. They are positive about the future too, with **73%** of young people feeling that knowing how to use AI will help them in their future careers. But young people of all ages, and their parents and carers, also have real concerns. While **41%** of young people think AI can be a great source of emotional support, just as many **(45%)** are worried about people their age getting really close to AI, like it's a friend. Over half **(52%)** of parents and carers are also worried about their child relying heavily on AI for emotional support or help with personal issues.

When it comes to studying we know that **73%** of young people find AI useful. But we also know that **61%** of 8 to 12-year-olds and **73%** of 13 to 17-year-olds think that people their age rely heavily on AI for studying and homework, and **50%** of young people have even seen people their age using AI to do their school or homework for them. Our research suggests that this heavy use of AI in studying is giving rise to issues of trust between schools and pupils, with over half **(53%)** of young people worried that their school may think that they used AI for their work when they didn't.

Inappropriate and potentially harmful content made using AI is also a major source of concern for young people and their parents and carers. **60%** of young people are worried about someone using AI to make inappropriate pictures of them and **65%** of parents and carers are worried about this for their own children. **12%** of 13 to 17-year-olds have seen people their age using AI to make sexual pictures or videos of other people and, even among younger children, **14%** of 8 to 12-year-olds have seen people their age using AI to make rude or inappropriate pictures or videos of other people. This is an area that requires urgent attention. There is a clear need for the providers of this technology to address this risk, but we also need to look at how we can educate and support young people themselves to act safely and responsibly.

What is AI?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a kind of computer system that's made to try and think and learn like people do. AI can do a range of things, including writing messages or emails, helping with research or finding answers, or creating pictures or videos.

As they go about their online lives, young people have questions about AI and are keen to learn more and equip themselves to use AI safely and responsibly. They worry about transparency for example: **60%** worry about not being able to tell if something is real or made by AI, and **75%** think this it is getting harder to tell. But they also want to learn, with over half **(51%)** asking for more lessons at school about how to use AI safely and responsibly.

Our research shows loud and clear that parents and carers are playing a critical role as the primary source of advice and support for young people when it comes to AI. Families are willing to have important conversations: **74%** of young people would talk to a parent or carer if they were worried about AI and **72%** of parents and carers feel confident talking to their child about the safe and responsible use of AI. But parents and carers urgently need more support and resources too. Less than one in five **(19%)** have set rules or guidelines for how their child can use AI at home and only **13%** know where to go for advice or support if they are worried about their child's use of AI.

We hope Safer Internet Day can be a catalyst for important discussions both at home and among wider stakeholders about the full breadth of measures we can take to support and protect young people in the context of AI. This includes: continuing to improve and adequately resource online safety education; providing parents and carers with the information and resources they need to support their children; improving routes to report potentially harmful or illegal content made using AI; and building better protections into AI technology.

AI is part of everyday life for all of us, including young people, whether it be in their studying and schoolwork, tools for everyday living, online gaming, online interactions with each other, or seeking advice and emotional support. AI is also relevant for those young people that do not use it directly, as their peers will likely be using it, which in turn may affect them directly, and they will be seeing AI content or services proliferating around them. Young people's real-life experience of AI is invaluable and we must create opportunities to listen to and learn from their perspectives. This Safer Internet Day and going forward, we must champion their ideas about how we can best support them to make safe choices about this smart technology.

Will Gardner OBE,
Director of the UK Safer Internet Centre

Why Nominet supports Safer Internet Day

We have been longstanding supporters of Safer Internet Day. At the start of 2026, a day does not go by without many conversations about Artificial Intelligence – our own discussions about how its roll-out could transform Nominet – or with our members about how their businesses are changing. AI is everywhere – and we are working through what its roll-out means to the millions of people who rely on our services daily, and the resolute team that keeps our services running.

As we all attempt to get to grips with both the limitless possibilities and incredible challenges that come with AI – it is important that we ensure young people are front and centre of our thinking. No matter how quickly AI changes today's normal, we should all be taking steps to enable young people to benefit and improve their opportunities, while protecting them from risks like misinformation and the proliferation of harmful deepfakes.

We have been proud supporters of the UK Safer Internet Centre and Safer Internet Day for 5 years. Protecting and improving the lives of young people online is one of our aims, so being part of this most important date in the awareness calendar helps make this possible.

While we all work together to understand and adapt to the impact of AI on young people, we felt strongly that funding deeper research into the attitudes of young people and their parents would be a starting point for discussions at home and with wider stakeholders. By asking valuable questions about AI usage and how people feel about its adoption we can all better understand a level of transformation that has not been experienced since the industrial revolution.

There is much to consider in this report – we are now at a stage where almost all young people (97%) are using AI tools on a regular basis and over half of them feel positive about the possibilities that AI offers. At the same time though – they are worried about the impact on their generation's creativity (49%), as well as their own (35%). Throughout the report there are several interesting gaps in perception between young people's adoption of AI and their parents understanding of it, as (54%) of young people admit to using AI for their homework, while only (31%) think their children are using it for that purpose.

While it is hard to predict where AI will take us – it is especially important we all do what we can to understand the seismic change and do all we can to guide those who will not have experienced life without it. By funding this research and report, I hope we have played our part in sparking valuable conversations.

Paul Fletcher,
CEO, Nominet

Contents

AI and young people's everyday lives, learning and emotional wellbeing

How are young people using AI?

Almost all (97%) of children and young people of all ages from 8 to 17 have used AI, and many use a wide range of AI tools on a weekly, and even daily, basis.

Voice assistants (e.g. Alexa, Siri) and AI in search engines (e.g. AI summaries on Google) are the two types of AI tools most frequently used by young people, with over two thirds **(69%)** using voice assistants at least once a week and over a third **(39%)** using them at least once a day. Even **88%** of 8-year-olds have used voice assistants, with over a quarter **(28%)** of children this age using them every day. Stand-alone AI apps or services (e.g. ChatGPT) are also used by around a third of young people **(30%)** aged 8 to 17 at least once per week, including by around a quarter **(24%)** of younger children, aged 8 to 12, weekly. Relatively few young people say they have never used AI tools (see table on the next page).

"AI is in almost everything we use like social media, search, games and school apps. It helps us get quick answers, stay organised and find things we like. It just makes life easier."

(Boy, aged 17)

"I think it's just becoming the norm to use AI for quick tasks for which maybe people in the past would have used, like Google or Safari."

(Boy, aged 17)

"I think that AI is an important part of young people's everyday lives due to how accessible and on demand it is...AI responds immediately, can give you responses at the touch of a button, and once young people have started using it can become hard to stop, as it can answer any question immediately."

(Girl, aged 18)

Frequency of use of various types of AI tools by 8 to 17-year-olds

Type of AI tool	Use daily (At least once per day)		Use weekly (At least 1-3 times per week)		Have never used this	
	8-12 years	13-17 years	8-12 years	13-17 years	8-12 years	13-17 years
Voice assistants (e.g. Alexa, Siri)	**40%**	**39%**	**30%**	29%	10%	8%
AI in search engines (e.g. AI summaries on Google)	26%	27%	**32%**	**32%**	13%	8%
AI in social media or messaging apps (e.g. MyAI on Snapchat, Meta AI)	18%	25%	20%	26%	**39%**	20%
Stand-alone AI apps or services (e.g. ChatGPT)	16%	24%	24%	**35%**	29%	14%
AI on a device's operating system (e.g. Gemini, CoPilot)	16%	24%	24%	**29%**	27%	18%
AI in gaming (e.g. NPCs – non-player characters)	19%	16%	25%	26%	25%	27%
AI that has an avatar or human-like form (e.g. Character AI)	13%	12%	24%	24%	**30%**	29%
AI in photo editing apps or services	9%	12%	27%	28%	**30%**	22%
AI video creation apps or services (e.g. SORA)	7%	7%	16%	18%	**48%**	**39%**

Given that voice assistants (e.g. Alexa, Siri), is the type of AI tool that children and teens of all ages are most likely to use, and that around a quarter **(24%)** of young people are using AI that has an avatar or human-like form at least once per week , it would be helpful to explore the potential significance and the impact of anthropomorphising AI. Does relatively frequent use of these tools make the voice and form of AI appear more human, rather than the technology that it is? And how does this impact children and young people's interaction with it? These questions are equally relevant to young children as well as teens, with **62%** of 8-year- olds saying they have used AI that has an avatar or human-like form, compared to almost the same proportion among 17-year-olds **(60%)**.

> "I think that parents and carers need to know how easy it can be for young people to anthropomorphise and humanise AI and begin seeing it as more of a person you are talking to online rather than a computer algorithm. I feel like this is further exemplified due to AI being used on services…where it appears alongside messages with real people, making the distinction between what is human and what is AI blurrier."
>
> **(Girl, aged 18)**

> "On Snapchat for instance, everyone is basically given access to AI and it's framed as if it's a sort of character you can interact with. It even has its own Bitmoji that you can customise to have its own face…Maybe without people really realising…I guess that's boosted their use of AI…because it's framed as something a bit less - I don't know - they've done it in a different way."
>
> **(Boy, aged 18)**

> "Sometimes you can't even tell you are speaking to AI, because AI is evolving so quickly. So it's almost kind of scary that, if it evolves more, we might not be able to tell the difference online between humans and what's AI."
>
> **(Secondary school pupil)**

Young people use AI tools for a wide range of things in their everyday life, including for studying, fun, gaming, creativity, or as practical tools for daily living.

Some are using AI tools for emotional support. The two things young people are most likely to say they use AI tools for are to help with their homework or studying **(54%)** or for fun or to play **(50%)**. Use of AI for homework or studying increases with age, with **60%** of 13 to 17-year-olds citing this, compared to just under half **(47%)** of 8 to 12-year-olds. Over a third of young people also use AI tools for help in online games **(35%)**, though boys **(45%)** are significantly more likely to do this than girls **(26%)**. Over a third of young people also AI tools creatively – to make or edit music, videos or pictures **(34%)**; or to help with everyday things **(34%)** such as setting timers, turning off lights, or checking the weather. A smaller but significant number of young people say they use AI tools for emotional support. Almost one in six young people **(17%)** use AI tools for advice or support with personal issues; almost one in seven **(14%)** use AI tools to talk about things they don't feel they can talk to anyone else about; and more than one in ten **(12%)** use AI tools for friendship or companionship.

54% of 8 to 17-year-olds use AI for studying.

Almost 1 in 6 8 to 17-year-olds **(17%)** use AI tools for advice or support with personal issues.

For many young people, their use of AI tools is increasing.

Over half **(52%)** of young people say they are using AI more than they were six months ago, though over a third **(38%)** say they are using them about the same amount. Given this increasing use, it is especially important to further understand young people's perspectives on the ubiquity of AI. Our qualitative research indicates that many young people have questions or concerns about this topic, which is relevant not only for those young people that use AI directly, but for all young people, as AI becomes increasingly integrated and even seemingly unavoidable.

52%

of 8 to 17-year-olds say they are using AI more than they were six months ago.

"
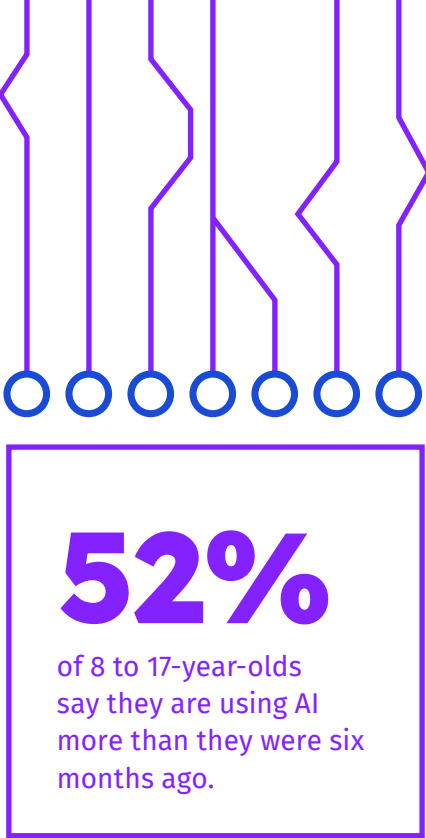
"I'm not sure if I use AI or not. Maybe I do and do not know that I am."

(Girl, aged 10)

"AI is a large part of social media, online platforms and apps as we know it...(it's) inescapable and inevitable to interact with."

(Girl, aged 16)

"Because it's being used in more and more apps, like Instagram, Facebook for example...it's kind of hard not to be in it, or to take yourself out of it."

(Girl, aged 17)

"

What do 8 to 17-year-olds use AI tools for?

To help with everyday things (like setting timers, turning off lights, checking the weather)
34%

Something else
3%

To do my homework or schoolwork for me
31%

To make or edit music, videos or pictures
34%

I don't know
4%

To talk about things I don't feel I can talk to anyone else about
14%

To help with my homework or studying
54%

For fun or to play
50%

For advice or support with personal issues
17%

For help in online games
35%

To get ideas (like what to wear or what to eat)
29%

To help write messages or texts
32%

For friendship or companionship
12%

Responses from 8 to 17-year-olds when asked: "What do you use AI tools for?"

"To help answer questions I have about life."

"Being creative."

"To answer questions I am curious about."

"I will occasionally skim the AI overview."

"NPCs in games."

"To belong."

"When typing formal things."

"To call someone."

"To generate story ideas."

"Instead of typing."

"Creating AI images for fun."

"To practise a new language."

"There are AI players in FIFA, so I have to use them."

"To listen to music and jokes."

"For ideas for designs."

"I'm autistic, so it helps where I need it."

"I don't like AI. I only use Alexa to turn off my alarm."

"To help with the TV control."

"To write jokes for class picnics."

How do young people view the opportunities and risks presented by AI?

Most young people believe that AI can have a positive impact – that it can be used for good; make their everyday life easier; help them learn; and be a tool for social interaction and even emotional support.

The overwhelming majority of young people (80%) have seen AI used in positive ways and over half **(54%)** think AI can help make the world a better place. **58%** of young people say that AI makes their life better and, in fact, only **12%** disagree with this statement. Almost half **(48%)** say that AI is an important part of their everyday life. That said, around a quarter have mixed feelings, with **26%** saying they neither agree nor disagree that AI makes their life better, and **25%** saying they neither agree nor disagree that AI is an important part of their everyday life. This potentially highlights the range of perspectives young people have around AI technology.

What is clear, however, is that most young people see AI tools as useful. **71%** of young people say AI saves them lots of time, and **64%** of young people say AI is the best way to get advice quickly. Most are also positive about AI as a tool for knowledge, with almost three quarters **(74%)** saying they have learnt something new from AI. Interestingly, by comparison, only **30%** of parents and carers say they think AI has helped their child learn something new, indicating that some may not be aware that their children are using AI tools in this way, or that they are less likely to perceive AI tools as useful to their children in this way.

Many young people are also using AI tools to help them with social interaction. Almost half **(45%)** of young people agree with the idea that AI is a good way to practice communicating with people their age, for example drafting tricky messages. By comparison, only **17%** disagree with this and a quarter **(25%)** are unsure – neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Around a third **(32%)** of young people use AI to help write messages or texts.

"We don't want AI to go away, but we want it to be in good use, not bad use."

(Primary school pupil)

80%
of 8 to 17-year-olds have seen AI used in positive ways.

"People use it when they need advice on stuff - like if they don't know how to write a message back to their friends if they've had conflict in a friend group. Lots of people use it to help them word things or approach difficult situations where people are arguing."

(Girl, aged 18)

74%
of 8 to 17-year-olds say they have learnt something new from AI.

Over a third of young people hold positive opinions about AI as a tool for emotional support. More than two in five **(41%)** think that AI can be a great source of emotional support and over a third **(34%)** say AI can help with mental health and feelings. This important topic is explored further later in the report.

As well as feeling AI can have a positive impact, many young people, and their parents and carers, have concerns and questions about AI, including around young people's learning, creativity, and future careers.

A third (33%) of parents and carers say they are worried about the impact of AI on their child's learning and thinking development. An even higher number of young people – almost half **(49%)** – think AI makes people their age less creative. Older children are more likely to think this is the case, with **42%** of 8 to 10-year-olds stating this, increasing to almost half **(48%)** of 11 to 14-year-olds, and over half **(56%)** of 15 to 17-year-olds. Over a third of young people **(35%)** think AI makes them less creative, personally. This data highlights how important it is to talk with young people and their parents and carers to better understand the impact that ready access to knowledge and creative ideas through AI tools may be having on the independent thinking and creativity of young people.

Almost half (49%)

of 8 to 17-year-olds think AI makes people their age less creative.

"I think at first a lot of people started using it for the convenience of it – as you can get answers pretty instantly and they thought it was kind of like a one-off thing – like, I'll just use AI one time and I won't use it again…It's easy for students to get a hold of it, and they think that they're also saving time. But it's also, like, stopping them from extending their own knowledge and, like the wealth of knowledge - by using this instead."

(Girl, aged 17)

One third (33%)

of parents and carers are worried about the impact of AI on their child's learning and thinking development.

Young people have mixed feelings on the impact of AI on their future job prospects, and many parents and carers are concerned. Almost three quarters of young people **(73%)** think knowing how to use AI will help them with jobs when they are an adult. However, over half **(52%)** are also worried about AI changing what jobs they can do. This said, over one in five young people **(21%)** neither agree nor disagree that they are worried about this – an uncertainty which perhaps comes from the rapidly changing nature of AI technology. Parents and carers are more concerned about this issue than their children. **60%** are worried about how AI may affect their child's future job prospects, including almost a quarter **(23%)** who are "very worried".

52%

of young people are worried about AI changing what jobs they can do when they are an adult.

"I think that, like, in terms of people saying that it's gonna take jobs away from people, especially in industries such as the film industry or…art based industries…I think that while people will use it…there's a human touch to things that people want to see, and they'd rather, like, look at something that's made by a person than that's made by AI."

(Secondary school pupil)

A significant number of young people are worried about the negative impact of AI on the environment. Over a third **(35%)** of 13 to 17-year-olds are worried about AI being bad for the environment, and an even higher **40%** of 8 to 12-year-olds are worried about this. In both cases, over a quarter (**26%** of 8 to 12-year-olds and **27%** of 13 to 17-year-olds), neither agree nor disagree that they are worried. However, the picture is complicated, as the number of young people who think that AI is bad for the environment is lower: just over one fifth **(22%)** of teens (aged 13-17) think that AI is bad for the environment, compared to **21%** of 8 to 12-year-olds. A slightly higher number – **24%** of 8 to 12-year-olds and **26%** of 13 to 17-year-olds – are unsure. This data suggests scope for further exploration of young people's awareness and understanding of the environmental impact of AI, and how this may affect them and their peers now, and in the future.

73%

of 8 to 17-year-olds think knowing how to use AI will help them with jobs when they are an adult.

The impact of AI on studying and schoolwork

Use of AI is a significant part of studying and schoolwork for most young people of all ages, but especially for teens.

Almost three quarters **(73%)** of young people say that AI is helpful when they are revising and studying, with over two thirds **(65%)** of 8 to 12-year-olds saying this is the case compared to an even higher **80%** of 13 to 17-year-olds. Added to this, over two thirds of 13 to 17-year-olds **(69%)** feel like people their age "rely heavily" on AI for studying and homework, with only **10%** disagreeing that this is the case. Similarly, almost two thirds of 8 to 12-year-olds **(61%)**, feel like people their age "use AI a lot" for studying and homework, with only **12%** disagreeing. Interestingly, while so many young people say that AI is an important part of studying and schoolwork for themselves and their peers, only around one third **(31%)** of parents and carers think their child has used AI to help with homework. This suggests that there is scope for opening up more conversations at home and between schools and families about how young people are using AI for studying and schoolwork.

73% of 8 to 17-year-olds say that AI is helpful when they are revising and studying.

50% of 8 to 17-year-olds have seen people their age using AI to do their school or homework for them.

Some young people are relying completely on AI to do schoolwork for them and many are worried about their peers doing this. Almost a third **(31%)** of young people say they use AI to do their homework or schoolwork for them and half **(50%)** of young people have seen people their age using AI to do this. The likelihood of young people having seen this increases steadily with age, from **39%** among 8 to 10-year-olds, to just over half **(51%)** of 11 to 14-year-olds, and well over half **(59%)** of 15 to 17-year-olds. Over a third **(39%)** of young people are worried about people their age using AI to do their school or homework for them and parents and carers are even more concerned, with over half **(51%)** saying they are worried about their child using AI to do their homework for them. Parents and carers have mixed views over the extent to which they are concerned about extensive use of AI for studying. While over half **(56%)** say they are worried about their child relying heavily on AI for studying and schoolwork, around one in five **(21%)** are unsure, again suggesting more scope for conversations between parents and their children to better understand how they use AI for studying and homework.

Our research indicates that AI is having an impact on trust between pupils and schools. Over half of young people **(53%)** are worried that their school may think that they used AI for their work when they didn't. Both younger and older children are almost equally likely to be worried about this, with **51%** of 8 to 12-year-olds saying it worries them, compared to **54%** of 13 to 17-year-olds. Added to this, **40%** of 8 to 17-year-olds say they want clearer rules at school about when it's OK to use AI for schoolwork. Together this data highlights a positive opportunity for schools to open up dialogue with their students about appropriate and responsible use of AI for studying and homework, so that they can work together to agree on guidance and practices that work in their settings.

53% of 8 to 17-year-olds are worried that their school may think that they used AI for their work when they didn't.

"I think it's used a lot for not just doing schoolwork but for getting schoolwork marked. I know that it's personal statement season right now, for university, and a lot of people send theirs into Google Gemini or something to get some feedback on it."

(Girl, aged 16)

"Some teachers kind of encourage the use of AI because they want us to try using it. You're doing coursework – they want you to get the best mark you can."

(Girl, aged 17)

"We use it when our teachers can't properly explain something...they put in "explain it to me like I'm 5" to oversimplify a lot of hard terms, which makes it a lot easier for us to understand. And even when you need more clarification, they can give it to you on demand – when teachers also can't after work hours and stuff like that."

(Girl, aged 17)
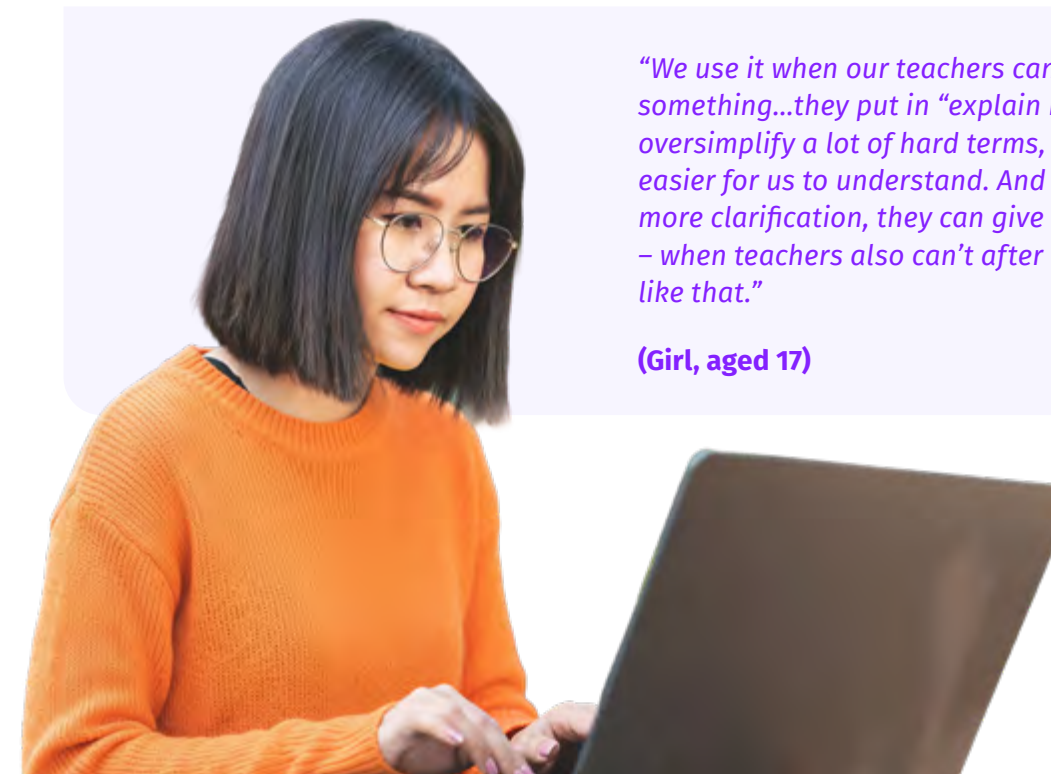
AI as a source of emotional support

Our research suggests that a significant number of young people of all ages are turning to AI as a source of emotional support or for help with personal issues. Many feel that this can have a positive impact, but young people, and their parents and carers, also have some worries about the potential for relying too heavily on AI for emotional support.

41% of teens (13 to 17-year-olds) feel like people their age rely heavily on AI for emotional support or help with personal issues, compared to a much lower **23%** who disagree that this is the case. Similarly, among younger children, over a third **(39%)** of 8 to 12-year-olds feel like people their age use AI a lot when they feel sad or need help. Over a quarter **(27%)** of young people have actually seen people their age using AI to get advice, instead of talking to their friends or family. The likelihood of this increases slightly with age, from **23%** of 8 to 10-year-olds compared to **31%** of 15 to 17-year-olds.

Many young people hold positive opinions about AI as a tool for emotional support. More than two in five **(41%)** think that AI can be a great source of emotional support and over a third **(34%)** say AI can help with mental health and feelings. However, a smaller but significant number are unsure, with almost a quarter **(24%)** neither agreeing nor disagreeing that AI can be a great source of emotional support and over a quarter **(28%)** neither agreeing nor disagreeing that AI can help with mental health and feelings. Reflecting on their personal experience, over a third **(39%)** say that AI can make them feel better when they are sad or worried – notably higher than the **29%** who disagree that this is the case, though again, a significant number **(22%)** neither agree nor disagree on this. Almost a third **(31%)** of young people go further to say they use an AI companion or chatbot that they think of as a friend.

41%
of 8 to 17-year-olds think that AI can be a great source of emotional support.

This range of perspectives among young people on AI as a tool for emotional support could be related to the fact that a significant number of young people are worried about their peers getting too close to AI. Almost half **(45%)** of young people are worried about people their age getting really close to AI, like it's a friend. Around the same number of parents and carers are worried about this too. **49%** say they are worried about their child forming emotional connections with AI, and **52%** are worried about their child relying heavily on AI for emotional support or help with personal issues, including over one in five **(21%)** who are "very worried" about this.

"I know people who get quite attached to them, not in like, a romantic way, but in a friendship way. They'll talk to them quite often."

(Secondary school pupil)

It is important to recognise that the majority of young people do still prefer talking to a real person, with **61%** disagreeing that they would rather talk to AI about a personal problem than talk to a real person. However, over one in five **(21%)** do say they would rather talk to AI in this scenario. This number, as well as the high level of concern among both young people and parents and carers about young people potentially relying too heavily on AI for emotional support, highlight that we need to understand this area better so that we can offer young people, and their parents and carers, the right guidance and support. How does a helpful tool or sounding board turn into an unhealthy dependency? What signs should parents and carers look for and how can they start a productive conversation with their children about it? What can AI service providers do here? These, and other questions, need deeper exploration to inform how we support young people and their parents and carers.

45%
of 8 to 17-year-olds are worried about people their age getting really close to AI, like it's a friend.

49%
49% of parents and carers say they are worried about their child forming emotional connections with AI.

Young people's views on AI as a source of emotional support

"People my age use AI when they want advice without asking someone in person. It can be about stress, friendships, school problems, or just how they are feeling. It is fast, private and always there."

(Boy, aged 17)

"Emotionally, I think a lot of people find that it will tell them what they want to hear…and give them a lot of comfort, even if sometimes it's not as realistic. But they still think that it's a good source of, like, therapy instead of burdening it – or they feel like they're burdening it – on a friend of theirs."

(Girl, aged 17)

"As young people may be afraid to approach the topic of mental health with peers, parents and teachers AI gives young people the opportunity to share how they feel freely and anonymously, which…can be beneficial, (but) can also prove dangerous if young people are experiencing emotions/feelings which could put their own safety, both physically and mentally, at risk."

(Girl, aged 18)

"I think it's important to stress that AI isn't a substitute for talking to a real person about worries, as it could make people want to keep that to themselves (and the AI) more."

(Girl, aged 17)

"When I was doing my GCSEs quite a lot of people used it just to give them some reassurance…things like asking for some affirmations before they go into the exams - small things that can just give somebody confidence. I feel like it's a big part of what my friends and people I know have been using it for."

(Boy, aged 17)

"I feel like more parents/carers need to know about how regularly young people use AI as a confidante as, through knowing this, parents and carers can work to better support their children by letting them know that they can speak to them or other adults, such as teachers, about any worries…rather than having to rely on AI as a source of advice."

(Girl, aged 18)

"People tend to use ChatGPT or other AI as a therapist almost, since receiving actual mental health help is quite hard to acquire."

(Girl, aged 15)

"AI plays a role as almost a confidante…for many young people as young people can ask it any question at any time, without the need for a physical person responding to them, as well as without the worry of facing judgement."

(Girl, aged 18)

Understanding risks and staying safe

"Where did you learn how to use AI safely?"

Responses of 8 to 17-year-olds:

37%
From my parents or carers

36%
At school

22%
I looked it up and taught myself

20%
From my friends

19%
I have never learned about using AI safely

18%
On social media

17%
An AI tool itself (such as asking ChatGPT)

How are young people learning to use AI safely?

Parents and carers or school are the two places where young people are most likely to learn how to use AI safely, though a significant number are learning from friends or teaching themselves.

Over a third of young people **(37%)** say they learn how to use AI safely from their parents or carers. Younger children are significantly more likely to say they learn this from parents and carers, with almost half **(48%)** of 8 to 10-year-olds citing this; decreasing to **38%** of 11 to 14-year-olds; and **24%** of 15 to 17-year-olds. While comparatively low, this is still almost a quarter of older teens (aged 15 to 17) and reinforces yet again how important it is to equip parents and carers of children of all ages with the knowledge and resources they need to support their children with how to use AI safely and responsibly. Young people are just as likely to say they learned about using AI safely at school **(36%)** as from their parents or carers. Interestingly, almost as many young people **(35%)** feel they know more about AI than their teachers, highlighting the usefulness of conversations and knowledge exchange in both directions between teachers and their students about the fast-changing topic of AI in the context of young people's own experiences.

Over one in five young people **(22%)** say they looked up how to use AI safely and taught themselves, though again, older children, especially older teens, are more likely to do this, with just **14%** of 8 to 10-year-olds saying they have done this compared to **20%** of 11 to 14-year-olds and almost a third **(31%)** of 15 to 17-year-olds. One in five young people **(20%)** say they learn about using AI safely from friends, with relatively minor variation across age groups, reminding us of the need to ensure that young people have access to good information and guidance to inform their conversations with each other about AI. **Of concern is the fact that almost one in five young people (19%) say they have never learned about using AI safely,** highlighting a need to make every effort to reach all young people and their families with information, education, and support to use AI safely and responsibly – something we hope Safer Internet Day can help with.

Our research also reveals that many young people are keen to learn more about using AI safely. Specifically, when asked what help or information they would most like to have about using AI safely and responsibly, over half **(51%)** said they want more lessons at school on how to use AI safely and responsibly, and more than two in five **(42%)** said they would like more information about how AI can be risky or cause problems. This illustrates that there is scope to reach more young people with the information and education they need.

How safe do young people feel using AI?

While most young people believe AI can have a positive impact and prove useful in their everyday lives, many do have concerns about using AI, including AI companions and chatbots, safely.

Only just under half **(46%)** of young people agree with the statement that AI is safe for children and young people to use, compared to around 1 in 6 **(18%)** who disagree with this statement. Interestingly, over a quarter **(29%)** have a mixed view on this, neither agreeing nor disagreeing that AI is safe for children and young people to use. A significant number of young people are worried about AI companions and chatbots in particular. Over a third **(38%)** of young people think people under the age of 16 should not be allowed to use AI companions or chatbots but almost as many **(31%)** disagree with this and think under-16s should be allowed to use them. Almost a quarter **(24%)** are unsure about this and neither agree nor disagree. Looking at the opinions of 11-14s on this, it is split down the middle, with **34%** agreeing and **34%** disagreeing. This is significant, as this age group are among those who would be most affected by such an age-restriction.

46%
of 8 to 17-year-olds agree with the statement that AI is safe for children and young people to use.

38%
of 8 to 17-year-olds think people under the age of 16 should not be allowed to use AI companions or chatbots. **31%** think they should be allowed to use them.
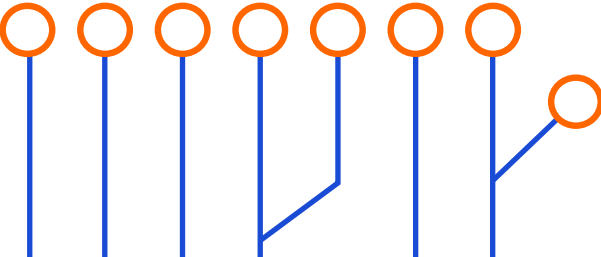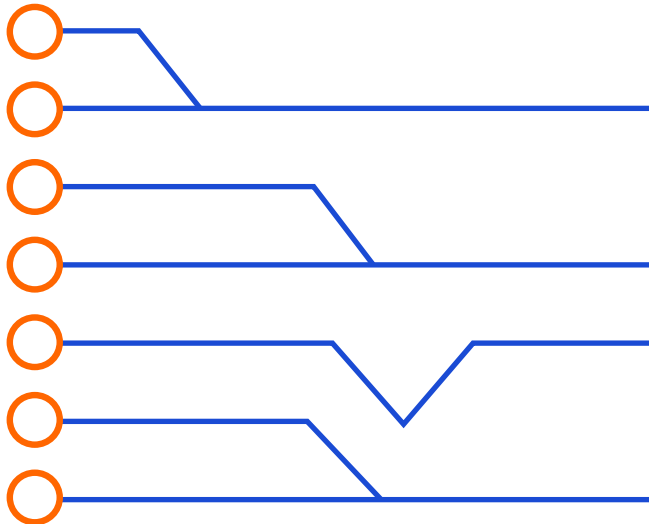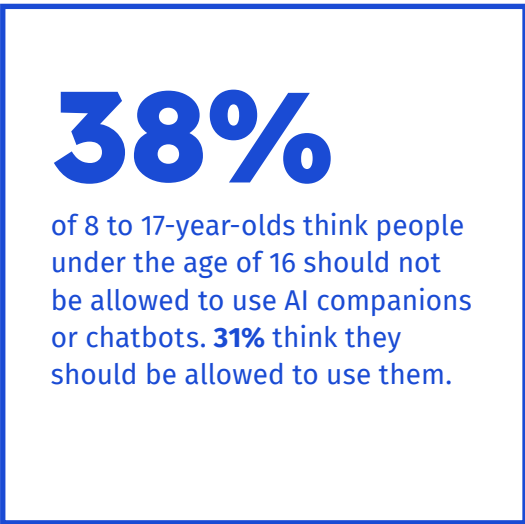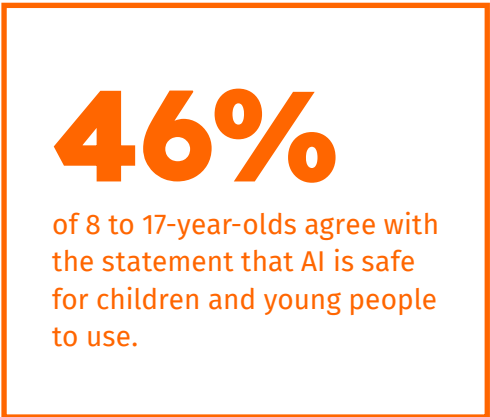
A significant number of young people and parents and carers have concerns about what questions young people are asking of AI. Almost half **(49%)** of young people are worried about people their age asking AI "inappropriate" questions. This said, almost a quarter **(24%)** neither agree nor disagree that they are worried about this. Parents and carers show a similar level of concern to their children, with just over half **(51%)** saying they are worried about their child asking AI inappropriate questions, including over one in five **(21%)** who are "very worried" about this. This data, presenting mixed views among young people and their parents and carers, suggests scope for further discussion to better understand exactly which aspects of using AI, including companions or chatbots, they have the most pressing safety concerns about.

> *"Young people can say anything to AI without AI notifying anyone if it's a safeguard(ing)...risk that could pose a harm to the child or young person. AI doesn't really do anything about it. But I feel like it could make it safe...like an AI tool that's made for children where they could have an emergency contact detail, where if anything dangerous is flagged then it could alert the emergency contact that, you know, manages additional help or support."*
>
> **(Girl, aged 18)**

> *"I think talking to AI is a mix of both good and bad...because...if it's like, a good AI, then you talk about general stuff, and it won't be inappropriate. But...sometimes AI would think you're (an) adult, and would talk about adult topics that children aren't allowed to know about."*
>
> **(Primary school pupil)**

> *"I wouldn't say AI itself is inherently harmful as it is currently just a tool and doesn't apply itself on its own. It has potential to spread false information and be used to hurt others through false image creation etc."*
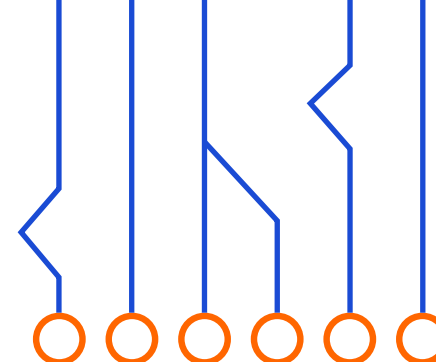>
> **(Girl, aged 15)**

> *"I think when you say "misuse of AI", what first pops into my head is people using it to, like, embarrass each other by creating fake images to try and embarrass or possibly blackmail someone else."*
>
> **(Secondary school pupil)**

Other concerns around safe and responsible use of AI raised by young people and their parents and carers include bullying or mean behaviour, as well as the creation of misleading posts. Just over one in ten young people **(11%)** have seen someone their age using AI to bully or be mean to other young people. While this is not a high number in absolute terms, it is still cause for concern. On a separate note, over half **(51%)** of parents and carers are worried about the possibility of their child using AI to create misleading posts, including over one in five **(22%)** who are "very worried" about this. These topics represent further important areas of conversation when talking with young people about the safe and responsible use of AI.
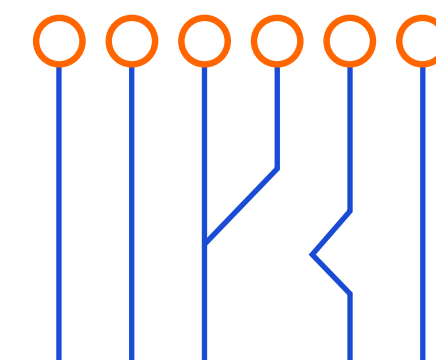
51%
of parents and carers are worried about their child asking AI inappropriate questions.

**In the context of these various concerns about safety and AI, many young people are unsure that they know what to do if they see something online made by AI that worries them.** While **57%** of young people say they do know what to do in this scenario, almost one in five **(18%)** say they don't know and almost two in five **(19%)** are uncertain, neither agreeing nor disagreeing that they know what to do. There is little variation in this data across age groups, with similar percentages seen for both younger and older children. While it is reassuring to some extent that over half of young people know what to do, these figures highlight a need for stronger guidance and signposting for children and young people of all ages about what to do if they see something online made by AI that worries them.

Parents and carers are the main source of support for young people if they are worried about the way they use AI or about something made by AI. Almost three quarters **(74%)** say they would talk to a parent or carer and they are far more likely to do this than talk to anyone else. While younger children are more likely to talk to a parent of carer, with **80%** of 8 to 10-year-olds saying this is the case, the proportions are still very high for older children, at **74%** of 11 to 14-year-olds, and **68%** for 15 to 17-year-olds. This data highlights the absolutely vital role that parents and carers play in supporting their children to use AI safely and responsibly, and how important it is to ensure they have the information, tools and resources they need. A much lower but still significant number of young people – more than two in five **(41%)** – say they would talk to a teacher or another adult they trust, and over a third **(35%)** would talk to their friends. The likelihood of young people talking with friends increases with age, from **25%** of 8 to 10-year-olds, rising to **39%** of 11 to 14-year-olds and rising again to over two in five **(41%)** of 15 to 17-year-olds.

Almost 1 in 5
8 to 17-year-olds don't know what to do if they see something online made by AI that worries them.

74%
of 8 to 17-year-olds would talk to a parent or carer if they were worried about the way they use AI or about something made by AI.
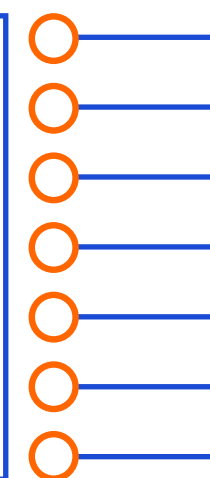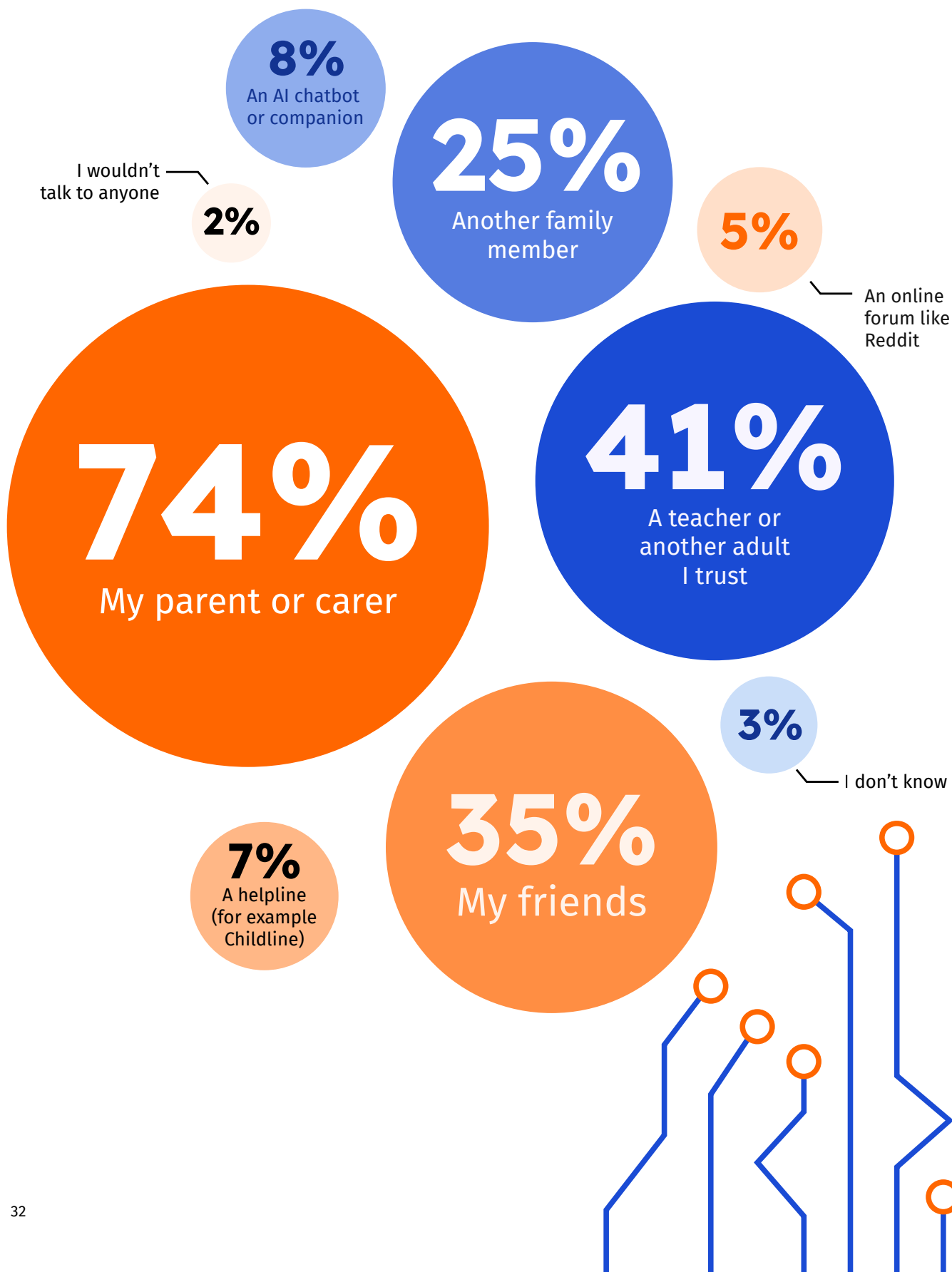
> *"Young people go to parents or carers because they trust them and feel safe talking to them. Parents need to know that AI is used a lot in our daily lives for school, advice and information, even if they are not experts."*
>
> **(Boy, aged 17)**

"Who would you talk to if you were worried about the way you use AI or about something made by AI?"

Responses from young people aged 8 to 17:

8%
An AI chatbot or companion

I wouldn't talk to anyone
2%

25%
Another family member

5%
An online forum like Reddit

74%
My parent or carer

41%
A teacher or another adult I trust

3%
I don't know

7%
A helpline (for example Childline)

35%
My friends

Parents and carers: Supporting their children to use AI safely

Overall, our research indicates that while most parents and carers feel ready to have conversations with their children about AI, they are also less confident than their children about the topic of AI, are often not setting rules or guidance for their children around its use, and want better support and resources.

The majority of parents and carers feel ready to talk with their children about AI. In fact, almost three quarters **(72%)** feel confident talking to their child about the safe and responsible use of AI, including just over one third **(34%)** who feel "very confident". This said, a much lower **37%** of young people say they learn how to use AI safely from their parents or carers. This potentially suggests that, while parents and carers are the first port of call for young people if they are worried about AI, many may not feel that parents and carers can offer more general knowledge or guidance on this rapidly developing technology.

Most parents and carers are entering into conversations with their children at least familiar with AI tools and content made using AI, though many do lack confidence that they will recognise it. Over two thirds **(64%)** of parents and carers say they have used AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Siri, or Alexa) and almost two thirds **(61%)** say they have seen AI-generated content online. However, many are not confident about always recognising such content, with over two thirds **(67%)** saying they can sometimes recognise AI content, but not always and less than a quarter **(21%)** believing they can easily spot content created by AI. Over two thirds **(67%)** also say they feel AI-generated content is becoming harder to recognise online compared to a year ago, and a quarter **(25%)** think it is getting "much harder".
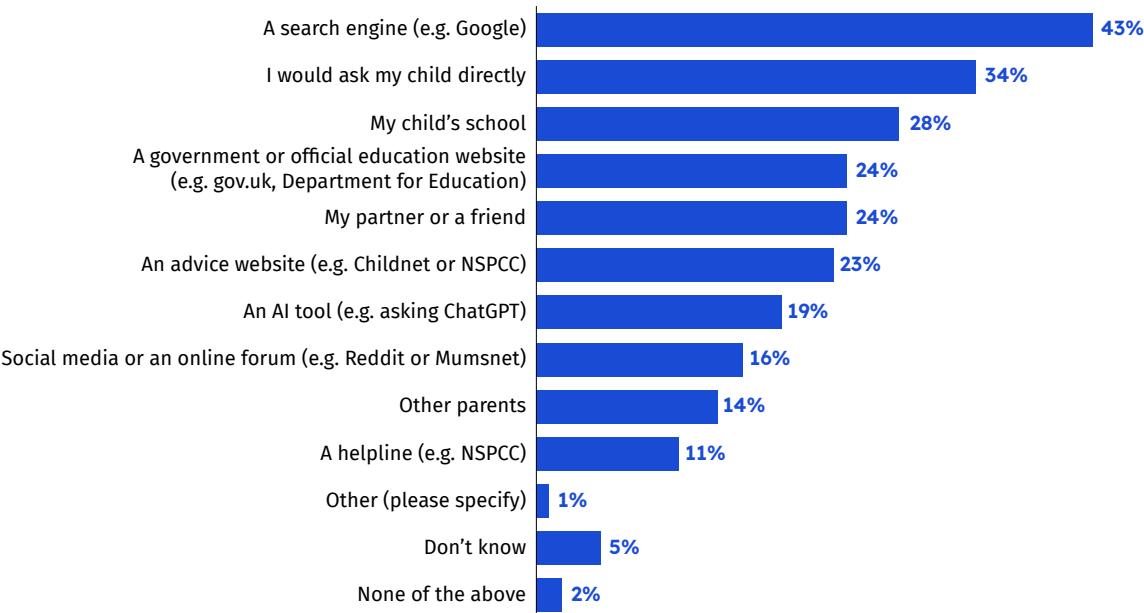
In the context of these moderate levels of knowledge and confidence about AI, parents and carers are getting help and information about making sure their child is using AI safely and responsibly from a range of sources. Most either say they likely to use a search engine (e.g. Google) **(43%)** or ask their child directly **(34%)**, highlighting again the importance of conversations at home for young people and their parents and carers to inform and educate each other.

72%
of parents and carers feel confident talking to their child about the safe and responsible use of AI.

"Where would you go if you needed more help and information about making sure your child is using AI safely and responsibly?"

Responses from parents and carers of children aged 8 to 17:

Response	%
A search engine (e.g. Google)	43%
I would ask my child directly	34%
My child's school	28%
A government or official education website (e.g. gov.uk, Department for Education)	24%
My partner or a friend	24%
An advice website (e.g. Childnet or NSPCC)	23%
An AI tool (e.g. asking ChatGPT)	19%
Social media or an online forum (e.g. Reddit or Mumsnet)	16%
Other parents	14%
A helpline (e.g. NSPCC)	11%
Other (please specify)	1%
Don't know	5%
None of the above	2%

Parents and carers feel less confident than their children in their knowledge about and recognition of content made using AI, and very few set guidance for their children around AI.

Only a quarter **(25%)** of parents and carers believe they can spot AI-generated content more easily than their child and less than a quarter **(22%)** think they know more about AI than their child. By comparison, over half **(52%)** of young people think they know more about AI than their parents and carers. Older children are more likely to think this, with **40%** of 8 to 12-year-olds thinking they know more than their parents, compared to **62%** of 13 to 17-year-olds. This relatively low confidence in knowledge about AI among parents and carers, compared to their children, may go some way to explaining why so few parents and carers set guidance around its use; in fact, less than one in five parents and carers **(19%)** have set rules or guidelines for how their child can use AI at home.

Only 22% of parents and carers think they know more about AI than their child.

Only 19% of parents and carers have set rules or guidelines for how their child can use AI at home.

Also concerning is the fact that the majority of parents and carers do not know where to go for help or support if they are worried about their child's use of AI. In fact, only **13%** say they know where to go for advice or support in this scenario. The reasons behind this data need further exploration. It may be due to the fact that, given that AI is a part of so many different facets of young people's lives, it can be challenging for parents and carers to set rules or guidelines about its use. The lack of rules or guidance from parents and carers, and their lack of knowledge about where to go for help is a wakeup call for all stakeholders. We must ask what more we can do to help parents and carers both be more proactive to ensure safe and responsible use of AI by their children, and to help them access support if they are worried about their children and AI. We must provide information, tools and safety features that are relevant, practical and accessible to help them support and protect their children.

Only 13% of parents and carers know where to go for help or support if they are worried about their child's use of AI.

Young people, AI, and inappropriate or sexual content

Many young people, including children as young as 8, are worried that AI may be used to create inappropriate or sexual content of themselves or their peers.

60% of young people are worried about someone using AI to make inappropriate pictures of them and an even higher **65%** of parents and carers echo this concern, including over a third **(35%)** who are "very worried". For some parents and carers, this worry impacts their online behaviour. Over a quarter **(29%)** of parents and carers are more cautious about sharing images of their child online because of concerns about AI manipulation. As well as being alert to the possibility of harm from adults using AI in this way, many young people have concerns about this inappropriate use of AI among their peers. **61%** of 13 to 17-year-olds are worried about people their age using AI to make sexual pictures of other young people, and even **63%** of younger children, aged 8 to 12, are worried about people their age using AI to create inappropriate pictures of other young people. Similarly, over two thirds of parents and carers **(67%)** are worried about young people using AI to make inappropriate images of other young people and almost a third **(31%)** are "very worried".

These significant levels of worry could be connected to the fact that **a smaller, but still concerning, number of young people of all ages have actually seen people their age using AI image manipulation to make rude, inappropriate or sexual images of other people.** Around 1 in 8 **(12%)** of 13 to 17-year-olds have seen people their age using AI to make sexual pictures or videos of other people, and an even higher 1 in 7 **(14%)** of 8 to 12-year-olds have seen people their age using AI to make rude or inappropriate pictures or videos of other people. The reasons why this proportion is slightly higher among younger children need further exploration, but may be partly due to the fact that age-appropriate phrasing (i.e. "rude or inappropriate" versus "sexual") was used in the questions posed to 8 to 12-year-olds versus the question posed to survey respondents aged 13 to 17.

60%

of 8 to 17-year-olds are worried about someone using AI to make inappropriate pictures of them and **65%** of parents and carers are worried about this for their own children.

"I just put a random picture of a person. But it was like the person was not wearing any inappropriate stuff, but then the AI just made it really inappropriate."

(Primary school pupil)

Around 1 in 8

13 to 17-year-olds have seen people their age using AI to make sexual pictures or videos of other people.

"This is definitely a concern for young people at the moment- whether such (inappropriate) images are intended for harm or "banter" they are definitely becoming a prominent issue in the lives of young people."

(Boy, aged 17)

"I think it's a really big concern, especially because it's so widely available. There's no restrictions on who can access it and what they can generate…So it's quite worrying… especially for inappropriate images and stuff."

(Girl, aged 17)

Most young people understand the potentially serious implications of inappropriate content made using AI. Over two thirds **(67%)** of teens (13 to 17-year-olds) agree with the statement that pictures, images or writing created by AI can still break the law. While almost 1 in 6 **(17%)** were unsure, saying they neither agreed nor disagreed, only **7%** of young people disagreed completely that pictures, images or writing created by AI can break the law. Over two thirds **(64%)** of young people of all ages also agree with the statement that pictures made by AI can hurt or have a negative impact on people in real life. Teens are more likely to agree with the statement, at **69%** of 13 to 17-year-olds compared to **58%** of 8 to 12-year-olds. This said, in both cases, almost one in five young people **(18%)** are unsure, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. This level of recognition among over two thirds of young people that pictures or other content created by AI can still break the law or cause harm in real life reflects the similarly high proportions of young people mentioned earlier who are worried, either about someone using AI to make inappropriate pictures of them, or about people their age using AI to make inappropriate images of other young people. The level of concern among young people, and their parents and carers, about how their images, or images of other young people, may be appropriated and manipulated as they go about their online lives is very real. We must do all we can to help young people understand, prevent, and manage these risks; and seek advice and help when they need it.

67%

of 13 to 17-year-olds agree with the statement that pictures, images or writing created by AI can still break the law.
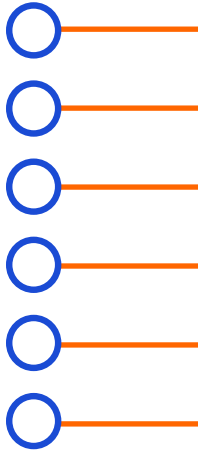
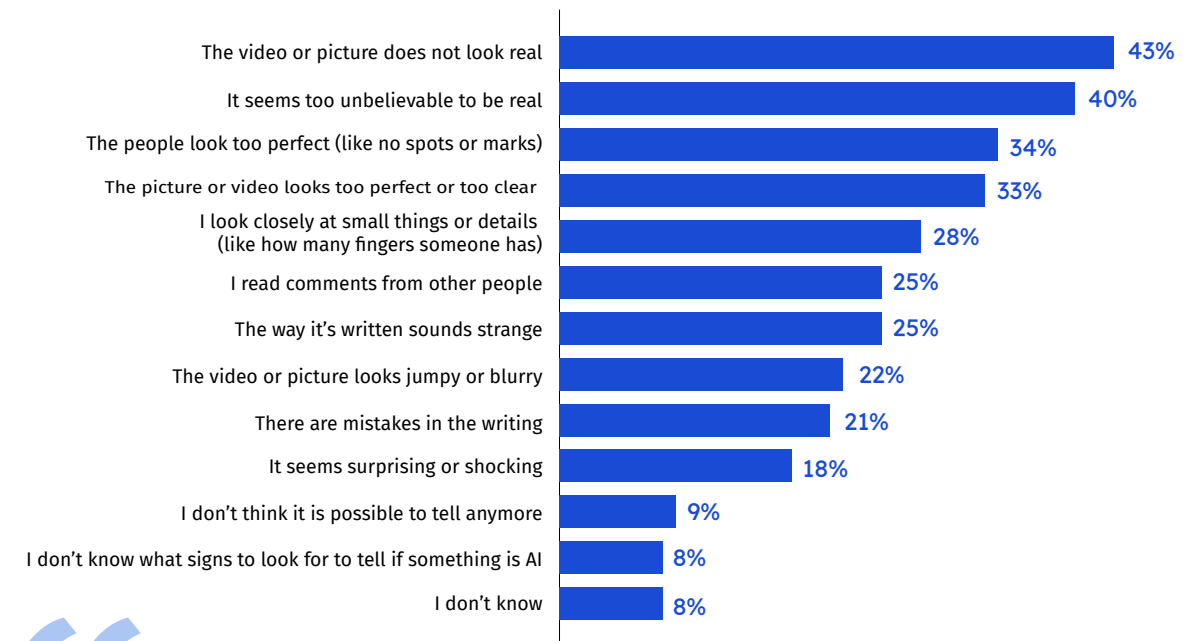# Awareness, transparency, and trust: Navigating content made with AI
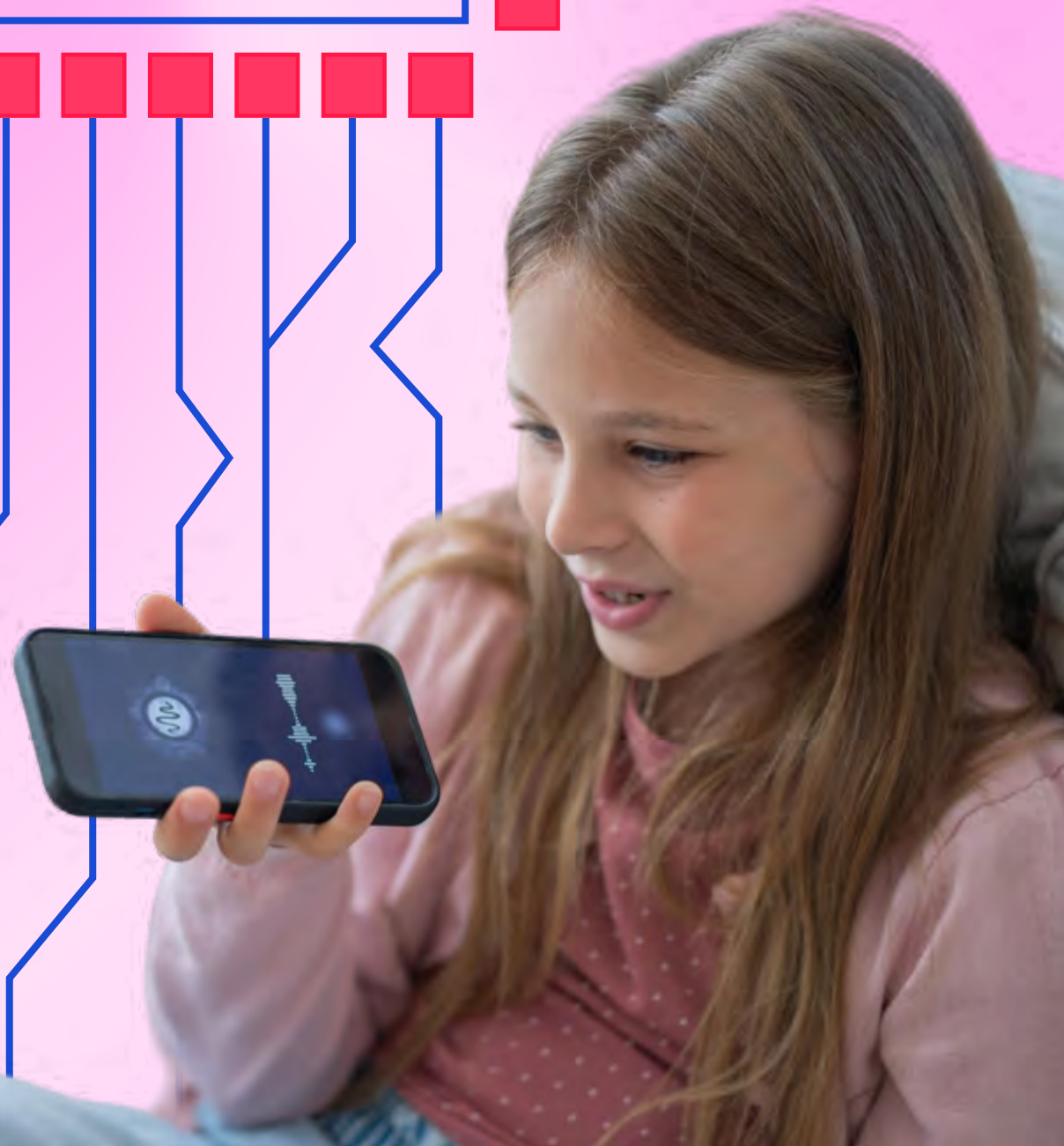
How do young people recognise and assess content made with AI?

Young people often recognise content online that has been made by AI and use a range of cues to do this.

Almost half **(48%)** of young people say they have seen pictures or videos on social media made by AI and around two in five **(41%)** say they can easily tell when pictures, videos, or writing were made by AI. That said, over half of young people in total either disagree that they can easily tell **(30%)** or are not sure about this, neither agreeing nor disagreeing that they can easily tell **(25%)**. This illustrates how it may sometimes be challenging for young people to navigate online content with full understanding of what they are seeing, and the extent to which AI has been used in the creation of content. We need to explore further how this affects their online lives and how they feel about it. This said, young people do look for a range of signs to help them tell if something is made by AI, the most cited signs being unreal or unbelievable images or content, or images that look overly perfect.

"What signs do you look for to tell you if something is made by AI or not?"

Responses from young people aged 8 to 17:

Sign	%
The video or picture does not look real	43%
It seems too unbelievable to be real	40%
The people look too perfect (like no spots or marks)	34%
The picture or video looks too perfect or too clear	33%
I look closely at small things or details (like how many fingers someone has)	28%
I read comments from other people	25%
The way it's written sounds strange	25%
The video or picture looks jumpy or blurry	22%
There are mistakes in the writing	21%
It seems surprising or shocking	18%
I don't think it is possible to tell anymore	9%
I don't know what signs to look for to tell if something is AI	8%
I don't know	8%

> *"When people in the background of the video – they don't do any reaction to what is happening."*
>
> **(Boy, aged 11)**

> *"I check the background. If I see a lot of nonsensical things in the background, then it's AI."*
>
> **(Boy, aged 13)**

How do young people feel about content made with AI?

While young people use many signs or cues to understand when something online may have been made using AI, most have some concerns about their capacity to recognise AI content and about the volume of this kind of content online.

More than two in five young people **(44%)** say they have seen something they thought was real, that they later found out was made by AI and over a third **(36%)** say they have seen something where they were unsure if it was made by AI or not. Most young people have some concerns or worries about their capacity to recognise AI content, and many think this is getting harder. **60%** are worried about not being able to tell if something is real or made by AI, and three quarters **(75%)** of young people feel it is getting harder to tell if something online was made by AI. As well as being concerned that content made with AI is getting harder to recognise, many young people and their parents and carers are worried about the volume of this kind of content online. Over half **(56%)** of young people are worried that too many things online are being made by AI and an even higher **66%** of parents and carers are worried about this. Given this degree of concern, it is perhaps not surprising that more than two in five young people **(42%)** would like more labels on pictures or videos to say they were made by AI.

As well as some concerns around how readily they can recognise content made with AI, young people have mixed views about how much trust they can put in information provided by AI. While almost one third **(31%)** of young people agree that they believe everything that AI tells them, a notably higher **43%** disagree with this and almost a quarter **(23%)** say they neither agree nor disagree with this. Added to this, many young people take steps to verify the information AI gives them, with over half **(54%)** saying they often check if the things AI tells them are correct. That said, only around 1 in 6 young people **(17%)** say they have seen AI giving information that is not true, or making things up (e.g. AI hallucination).

60%
of 8 to 17-year-olds are worried about not being able to tell if something is real or made by AI.

"At this point, it feels like photo evidence can't be used anymore because of how indistinguishable it is from actual images."

(Girl, aged 17)

75%
of 8 to 17-year-olds feel it is getting harder to tell if something online was made by AI.

"There are so many more AI videos online recently and people are believing they are real more often as the quality of AI heightens."

(Girl, aged 15)

54%
of 8 to 17-year-olds often check if the things AI tells them are correct.

Despite not having a very high level of trust in the information provided by AI, it remains an important source of information for most young people. Almost three quarters of 13 to 17-year-olds **(72%)** feel like people their age rely heavily on AI as a source of information. Over two thirds of younger children **(68%)**, aged 8 to 12, also agree that people their age use AI a lot to find information. This heavy reliance on AI for information is giving rise to concern among parents and carers. Over half **(58%)** are worried about their child relying heavily on AI as a source of information, including over one in five **(21%)** who are "very worried" about this. This data, and that which reveals the high levels of concern among young people about their capacity to recognise online content made using AI, should alert us to the importance of helping young people develop their knowledge, skills, and critical thinking around AI. As AI continues to be part of every area of their online lives, we need to equip them to assess what they see, be curious about the content that AI provides, and apply their own knowledge and critical thinking to validate the answers that AI gives them.

72%
of 13 to 17-year-olds feel like people their age rely heavily on AI as a source of information.

68%
of 8 to 12-year-olds agree that people their age use AI a lot to find information.

"Younger kids might believe everything it says. To make it safer, AI needs better checking of information, clear warnings and stronger protection for younger users."

(Boy, aged 17)

What do young people need to use AI safely and responsibly?

Both young people and their parents and carers are calling on the government as well as the technology industry, including AI, social media, and gaming companies, to do more to help keep young people safe and support them to use AI responsibly. Many are also asking for better support for parents and carers, as well as asking for schools, who are already playing a vital role, to offer young people even stronger education and guidance on using AI.

75%
of 8 to 17-year-olds think the government should make more rules so that AI companies keep children safe.

What changes do young people want to see?

Young people and parents and carers agree that **the government** could do more on this important issue. The majority of young people **(75%)** think the government should make more rules so that AI companies keep children safe. Most parents agree with this, with around two thirds **(65%)** stating that the government is not doing enough to keep children and young people safe when using AI, and should be doing more.

65%
of parents and carers think the government is not doing enough to keep children and young people safe when using AI, and should be doing more.

Our research clearly demonstrates that **parents and carers** are the most important source of information and support for young people when it comes to safe and responsible use of AI. They are also the first place young people will go if they are worried about their use of AI or content they have seen, made using AI. This said, when asked what help they would most like to have about using AI safely and responsibly, many young people answered that they would welcome even more conversations at home, with almost a third **(30%)** of young people saying they would like more chats with their parents or carers about AI. This is especially so among younger children, with **35%** of 8 to 12-year-olds saying this compared to **25%** of 13 to 17-year-olds. A similar proportion **(31%)** of young people would also like help or information for their parents or carers about AI, highlighting that many young people recognise that their parents and carers need more support to navigate this challenging area.

Our research shows too that **schools** have a vital role to play, both to help young people learn about staying safe and to set clear parameters for use of AI in studying and schoolwork. Over half **(51%)** of young people want more lessons at school about how to use AI safely and responsibly. Parents and carers largely agree that schools are playing an important role already, but that there is scope to do more. While just over a third **(35%)** of parents and carers think schools are "doing about the right amount" to keep children and young people safe when using AI, almost half **(49%)** think they should be doing more. These calls to action from young people and their parents and carers present an enormous opportunity for schools to continue and extend the valuable work they are already doing through online safety education. And we hope the resources offered by the UK Safer Internet Centre for Safer Internet Day will help schools respond.

Finally, many young people are asking for clearer guidance from **schools** on using AI. Two in five young people **(40%)** want clearer or easy-to-understand rules at school about when it's OK to use AI for schoolwork. This is likely closely connected to the fact that, as highlighted earlier, over half **(53%)** of young people are worried that their school may think that they used AI for their work when they didn't. We hope this demand for guidance from young people can serve to ignite productive conversations among teachers and pupils about appropriate and responsible use of AI, which supports learning and creativity, in their settings.

51%

of 8 to 17-year-olds want more lessons at school about how to use AI safely and responsibly.

40%

of 8 to 17-year-olds want clearer or easy-to-understand rules at school about when it's OK to use AI for schoolwork.

What changes do parents and carers want to see?

Parents and carers would like to see the **technology industry, including AI, social media, and gaming companies**, doing more to help keep young people safe and to protect their children's privacy. **60%** of parents and carers – similar to the proportion that feel the government should be doing more – think the technology industry is not doing enough to keep children and young people safe when using AI and should be doing more. **61%** of parents and carers think AI companies, specifically, should be doing more. An equally high number of parents and carers are worried about their children's privacy. **62%** of parents and carers are worried about the information that AI companies are collecting about their child when they are using their services, including a quarter **(25%)** who are "very worried". Young people too are asking AI companies to do more, with over a third **(34%)** wanting clearer information from companies about how to keep safe whilst using their AI service.

61%

of parents and carers think AI companies should be doing more to keep children and young people safe when using AI.

62%

of parents and carers are worried about the information that AI companies are collecting about their child when they are using their services.

"AI is currently unsafe for young people as young people can tell anything to AI without it being flagged or passed on to relevant bodies, which could help. To make AI safer, young people could have to have an account which verifies their age and an emergency contact number/email of a parent/guardian or school that the AI company could send an alert to if a child brought up something troubling to AI."

(Girl, aged 18)

"There should be more monitoring... about its development, to make sure that it's developed safely and for good purposes"

(Secondary school pupil)

"AI is unsafe as it wasn't built with children in mind, and it can include misinformation or discuss sensitive topics. It should potentially have a further, locked-down 'Child Mode' to remind every time to check the source to ensure accuracy, and stricter filters."

(Boy, aged 17)

Our Recommendations

For the technology industry (including AI, social media, and gaming companies)

We urge **the technology industry (including AI, social media, and gaming companies)** to:

Go further to educate young people about safe and responsible use of AI and build protection into AI tools

Most young people feel AI is useful and can have a positive impact in their lives. However, less than half believe that AI is safe for children and young people to use. It is vital that technology companies explore what more they can do to inform and educate young users, help them understand risks, build safety into the design of their service, as well as provide easy-to-use safety features, and facilitate safe and responsible AI use.
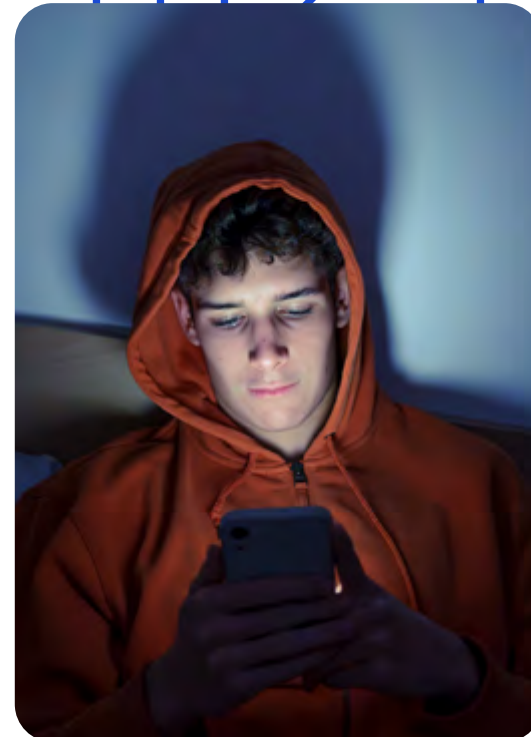
Make it easier for young people to report something they are worried about, and to get help

Over a third of young people either don't know or are unsure about what to do if they see something online made by AI that worries them. Technology companies can help by making it easier to report issues within their platforms and by signposting young people to further help when they need it.

Take appropriate steps to ensure transparency, as young people navigate an increasing amount of online content made using AI

Most young people are worried about not being able to tell if something is real or made by AI, and three quarters feel this is getting harder. Many would like more labels on pictures or videos to say they were made by AI. Online service providers could explore what more can be done to increase transparency and help young people readily identify content made using AI.

Listen to the experiences and ideas of young people and their parents and carers

Our research clearly shows that AI is a feature across many areas of young people's lives, and that parents and carers of young people from 8 to 17 are the primary source of advice and support for young people on the topic of AI. It is essential to listen to young people and their parents and carers, to better understand their challenges and learn from their valuable insights and ideas. These should inform effective strategies to support and protect young people as AI services are developed.

Focus efforts to protect young people of all ages from online sexual harassment and sexual harm using AI

We know that most young people, including children as young as 8, are worried about someone using AI to make inappropriate pictures of them or their peers, and that most parents and carers are concerned about this too. Online service providers can help by exploring what more can be put in place to both prevent their technology being used in this way, as well as reducing exposure to this risk, and helping protect young people from harm.

On support for parents and carers

We must support **parents and carers** to:

Access the information and resources they need to have productive conversations at home and support their children with safe and responsible AI use

We know that parents and carers are the most important source of advice and support for young people on the topic of AI. We also know that most parents and carers feel they know less about it than their child. We must ensure they feel better-informed and prepared to fulfil their important role now, and in the future. We hope that the resources for parents and carers provided by Safer Internet Day will help families have productive conversations at home and learn from each other.

Safer Internet Day 2026 | Tuesday 10 February

Coordinated by the UK Safer Internet Centre

saferinternetday.org.uk

Know how to get help if they are worried about their child's use of AI, or the impact of content made using AI on their child

Parents and carers are the first port of call if a young person is worried, yet our research also shows that only a minority of parents and carers know where to go for help or support if they are worried about their child's use of AI. We must make it as straightforward as possible for them to find the right course of action and get help when they need it.

On the vital role of schools

Our research highlights how **schools** can continue to play a vital role by:

Continuing to help young people develop their knowledge and understanding of AI

We know that over half of young people want more lessons at school about how to use AI safely and responsibly. Schools have a vital role to play by continuing to deliver online safety education that strengthens young people's knowledge and understanding of AI. Our data shows this needs to begin early, with children as young as 8 using AI tools and seeing content made using AI, regularly.
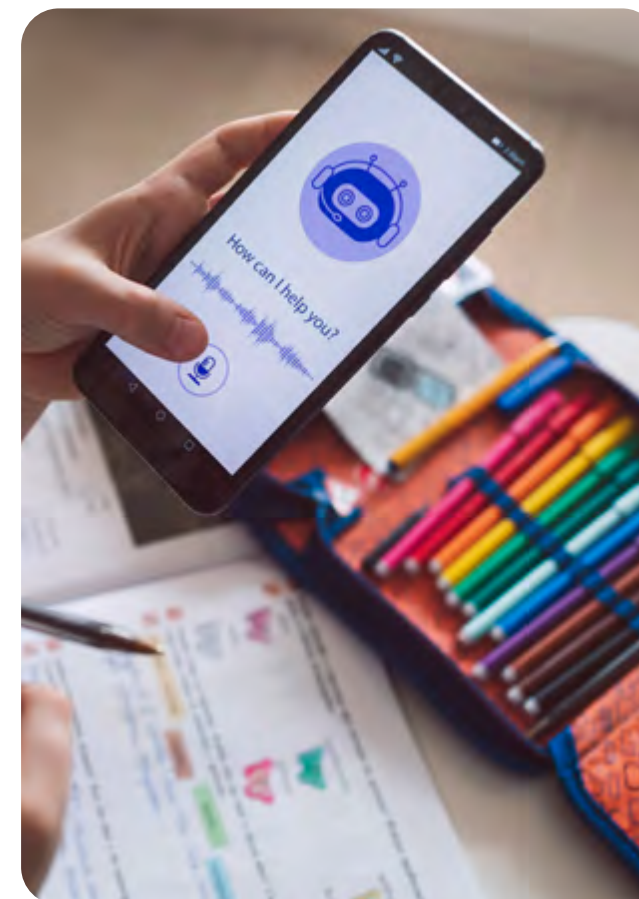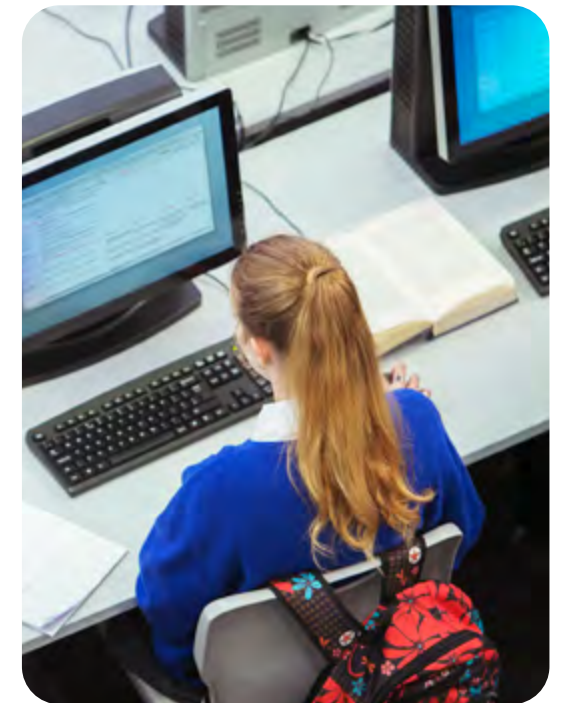
Setting even clearer guidance for young people about the appropriate use of AI for studying and homework

We know that AI is an important part of learning for young people of all ages, with around three quarters of 8 to 17-year-olds finding it helpful for revising and studying. But over half are also worried that their school may think that they used AI for their work when they didn't and many want clearer rules at school about when it's OK to use AI. We encourage schools to talk about these issues with their students and develop guidance that works in their setting.

Continuing to support young people when they come to teachers and educators for advice about AI

Our research shows that, after parents and carers, a teacher or other trusted adult is the place young people are most likely to go for help and support if they are worried about AI. We must equip teachers to offer appropriate advice and help young people get further support when needed.

Facilitating discussion on key topics, such as inappropriate or sexual content made using AI

By creating opportunities to talk, especially on sensitive but critical issues like inappropriate or sexual content made using AI, schools can help young people use AI safely and have informed conversations with each other. These conversations can also raise awareness of vital services that can help, such as Report Remove as well as Take it Down, in cases of inappropriate or sexual images, including those created with AI. Helping young people to be ready to help each other is essential, as we know that many are learning about how to use AI safely and responsibly from each other, and would talk to a friend if they had a concern about AI.

REPORT REMOVE
Nude image of you online?
We can help take it down.

Take It Down

For the Government

Three quarters of young people and over two thirds of parents and carers think the government should be doing more to keep children and young people safe when using AI.

We urge the **Government** to:

Ensure schools have adequate support for online safety education, which can keep pace with the changing nature of AI technology and young people's use of it

This includes practical resources that teachers can use in the classroom. As AI technology becomes increasingly sophisticated and widespread, education policies and support must be firmly geared towards ensuring that online safety education remains relevant and up-to-date.

Ensure that providers of AI services, which are likely to be accessed by children, make these services safe for children

Identify gaps in current legislation and take measures to address these. The Online Safety Act puts a legal duty of care on certain providers of online services, including developing risk assessments and taking appropriate steps to protect users, including young people, from online harms, and removing illegal content when it is identified. We must ensure that the legislative approach is taken to the provision of AI services, taking into account the nature of this technology and the variety of services it performs, so that companies that provide AI services that are likely to be accessed by children carry this same duty of care, and that companies take appropriate steps to make services safe for their users.

Closing Statement

Although young people are excited by AI, see the benefits that this technology can bring them, and have been quick adopters of this technology, they have also told us that they want more support to help them use AI safely and responsibly, and better protection to keep them safe in the context of AI. Given the rapid pace of change in AI technology, we must respond to these calls urgently.

With AI now woven into so many areas of young people's online lives, and with direct implications for their future, their questions and concerns are far-reaching, and demand a collaborative effort from all stakeholders across industry, government, education and beyond. It is imperative that we do more to keep young people safe from online harms related to AI, and listen to the safety concerns they have shared through our research. These include how AI may be used to manipulate their images inappropriately; using chatbots and AI companions safely; and the potential for unhealthy emotional dependency on AI.

Protecting young people from online harms related to AI is vital, but their concerns and questions about AI extend beyond safety, with our research also showing that many young people are worried about how AI is affecting their creativity; how they should be using AI in their schoolwork; and the impact of AI on their future careers. Our research also shows clearly that parents and carers are playing a vital role in supporting their children with AI, but urgently need more support themselves as they try and guide their children through this fast-evolving area of their online lives.

We hope that this research and Safer Internet Day will provide a catalyst for the conversations and action-planning needed to keep young people safe in the context of AI, and help them build the skills and confidence they need to make safe choices when they are using smart technology.

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