An AI-Ready Generation:
Tips for Parents and Caregivers Navigating the World with AI Awareness

Let's face it: Artificial intelligence (AI) is now a constant in our kids' lives and will be even more present in their future. Whether they are aware or not, most kids now use it daily, from facial recognition to remarkably accurate YouTube recommendations to social media filters.
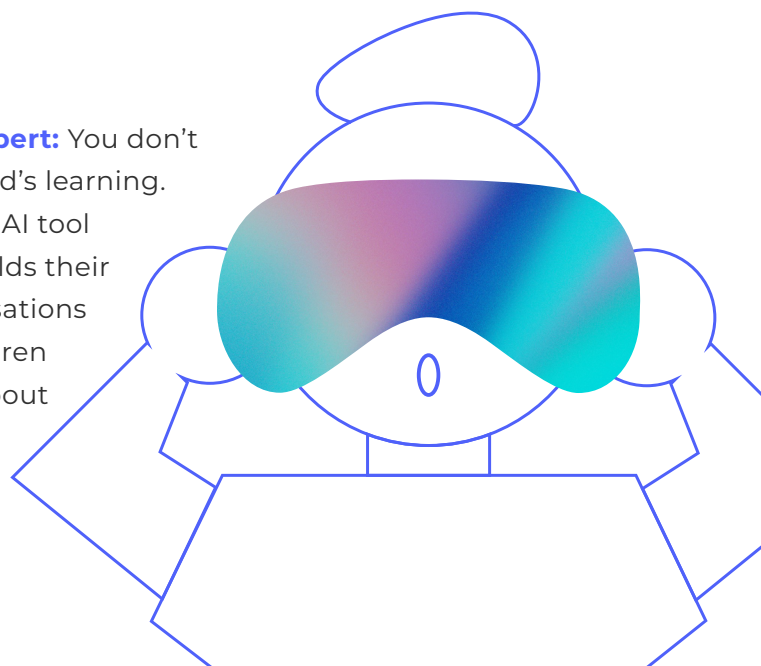
Many are also using it to help them at school often without any guidance or safeguards in place. Change is happening rapidly and we must support not only the use of AI tools among youth, but also provide them experiences where they understand the impacts of using AI and develop the skills needed to navigate an AI-driven world. After all, it's shaping their education, future careers and broader view of the world – a world where AI skills are essential. And yes, we need to discuss important topics like fairness, cheating and environmental impact. Ready to guide them into this AI-driven future? Here are some tips to spark meaningful AI conversations.

WHAT IS AI?

AI is a smart computer program that learns from information. It can do things like understand speech (voice assistants like Siri or Alexa), recognize images, or suggest videos your child might like. But AI is made by people, and it learns from the information we give it — so it can sometimes make mistakes or reflect human bias. That's why it's important for youth to learn how to use AI in safe, thoughtful and responsible ways.

TIPS FOR ALL AGE GROUPS

Explore AI tools together — even if you're not an expert: You don't need to know everything about AI to support your child's learning. Explore AI together—watch a short video or try out an AI tool like ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Quick Draw. This builds their confidence and opens the door to meaningful conversations about how technology shapes their world. If your children are already using AI, show interest in learning more about it from them and ask them to teach you - it's a great way to learn and connect. You might ask, "What do you think this tool is doing behind the scenes?"
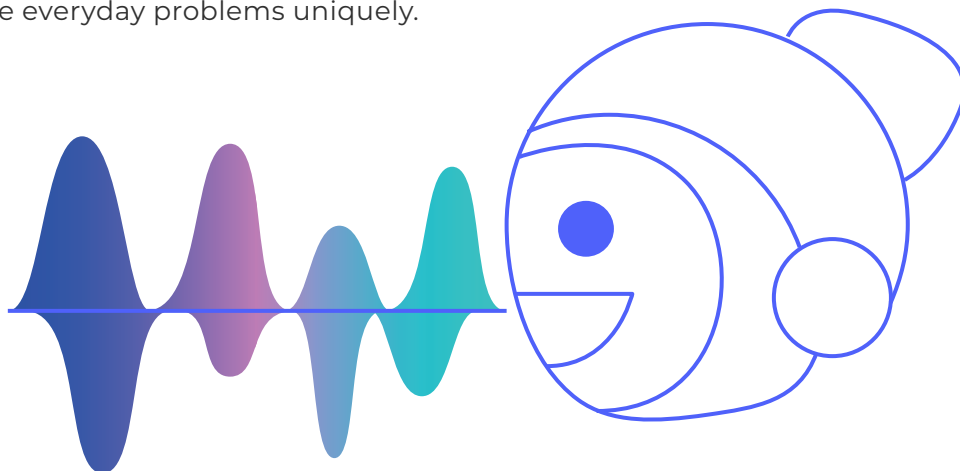
Explore how AI can spark creativity and learning: AI tools can help inspire new ideas and broaden learning experiences. Encourage them to use AI as a creative partner - whether it's creating story prompts, coming up with new ideas for art, or brainstorming ways to solve problems. For example, they could prompt ChatGPT to write a poem on a theme of their choice. Encourage them to think about how AI could help solve everyday problems uniquely.

Talk to your children about AI, how it works and why it matters: Make space for open and ongoing conversations about technology and AI, including how they feel about it - curious, excited, unsure, or even a little nervous. Help them understand that AI doesn't "think" like a person - it learns by spotting patterns in data. Talking about AI helps children become more thoughtful and informed tech users.

Highlight the real-world impact of AI: Have conversations about the potential challenges of AI, such as misinformation, bias, ethical dilemmas and environmental effects. Share examples from everyday life, like how AI decides what videos or posts show up on your social media. Encourage them to think about how AI affects individuals and society and discuss the consequences of its use. Help them consider how they might help solve these problems in the future.
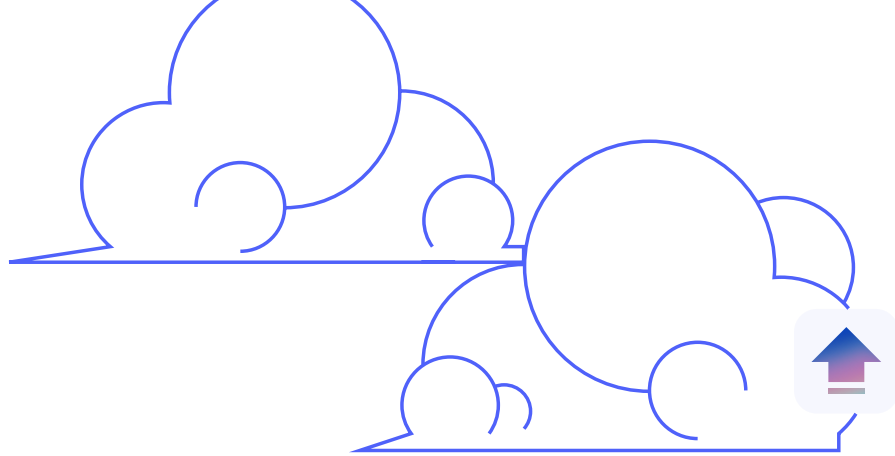
Encourage curiosity and critical thinking about AI: AI constantly learns and evolves, just like we do! Remind youth that learning about AI isn't just for experts. Encourage them to ask questions about how these tools work, what data they collect and use and what their results mean before accepting them as the truth. Curiosity will help them move away from being passive users of AI to active, informed digital citizens.

TIPS FOR YOUNG KIDS (AGES 7-12)

Point out the difference between AI and human thinking: Help them understand where AI might be helpful and its limitations. Explain that AI can help with tasks like finding information or suggesting new things to watch, but it can't understand how people feel and might miss important information about a situation when it offers advice. Remind them that AI doesn't replace their teachers, friends, doctors or family and it doesn't replace essential skills like critical thinking and collaboration. Most importantly, remind them they can always come to you if they aren't sure about something an AI tool tells them or does.

Teach them how to spot AI in everyday life:
Encourage your child to notice where AI appears around them, like movie/tv show recommendations, video games or smart devices. You could ask, "Why do you think it suggested that?" or "Do you think it always gets it right?" This builds their awareness and curiosity about how AI works behind the scenes.

Empower your children to ask questions about AI: Encourage your children to ask you about any AI tools or features they encounter online. For example, "Is this tool keeping track of what I say or do?", "Is it okay to use this for my homework/art/chatting?", or "Could it be copying someone else's work?" By keeping communication open, you can help them build the skills and confidence to understand and interact with AI responsibly and safely.

TIPS FOR TEENS (AGES 13-17)

Analyze AI's impact on social media:
Help your teen understand how AI algorithms curate their social media feeds. Explain that AI learns their preferences and shows them content it thinks they'll like. Discuss the concept of "echo chambers" and how AI can limit exposure to diverse viewpoints by asking them, "What happens when you only see one type of opinion online?" This will encourage a more critical evaluation of social media content and how AI impacts it.
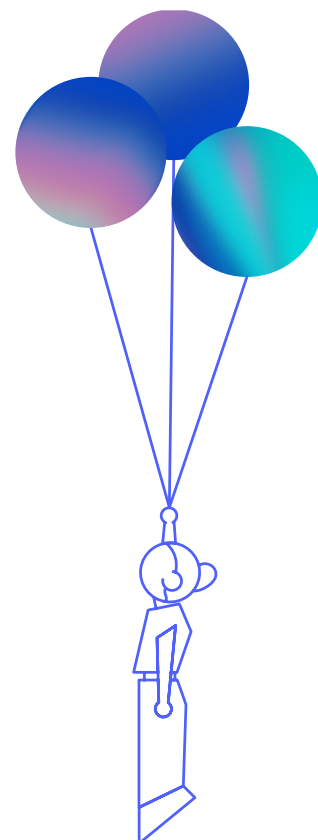
Show them how to spot misinformation and deepfakes: Explain to your teen that AI tools can generate fake images, videos and content that looks and sounds real. Show them examples and encourage them to ask questions like "Where did this come from?" or "Is this from a trustworthy source?" Teach and encourage them to use tools such as a reverse image search on Google to verify where the original image came from and whether it is being used in the proper context. Building this habit of thinking critically before believing or sharing content will empower them to recognize misinformation independently.

Discuss the impact AI can have on digital well-being: Social media algorithms, powered by AI, can affect digital well-being. Encourage your teen to take breaks from screens, be mindful of their emotional health and discuss the importance of managing privacy.

Discuss AI and data privacy:
Explain how AI collects and uses personal data through apps and websites. Talk about "digital footprint" and why it matters - what they post, click, or share online can be tracked and stored. Emphasize the importance of protecting their privacy, being careful about what they share online and adjusting settings to limit personal data collection. This will encourage them to be mindful of what information they share online and how AI might store and use it.
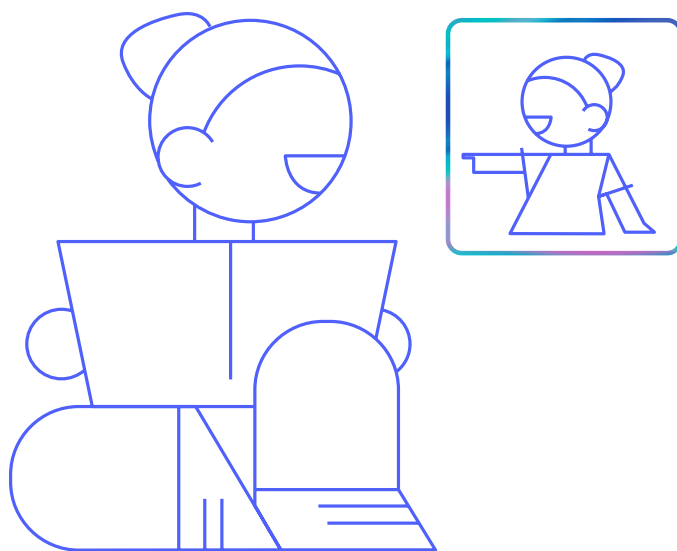
Encourage open discussion about school guidelines and responsible AI use:
Talk to your teen about any rules their school might have regarding using AI for assignments or projects. Explain how AI can be a useful tool to support their studies, like for research or brainstorming, but emphasize that it shouldn't replace their own learning and critical thinking. Discuss the importance of academic integrity and the serious consequences of plagiarism or cheating when using AI. Finally, help them think critically about the difference between using AI to enhance their learning and doing the work for them. You can also talk about how AI is used in creative spaces, like writing, music, or visual art and the debates around originality and ownership. Help them think critically about when AI is a helpful tool for creativity and when it might be unfairly using or copying someone else's work without permission. These conversations help build their understanding of ethical and responsible use not just in school, but in the wider world too.

Talk about AI's role in the future — and their place in it: AI is shaping the future of work, creativity and everyday life. Help your teen understand how AI is being used in healthcare, music and climate research and how developing skills such as coding, critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration and digital literacy can open doors to future opportunities. Encourage them to think not just about how to use AI, but about how they might help shape AI in ways that are ethical, creative and meaningful to them.

Recognizing that a responsible and equitable AI future demands more than technical skills, Actua and its network deliver comprehensive AI training that emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving and ethical understanding through hands-on workshops, camps and programs nationwide.

Learn more by visiting actua.ca/airedy.

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