

Ours to Raise

PARENTING CHILDREN FOR
A HUMAN FUTURE IN AN AI WORLD

FREE FROM OURS TO RAISE

The Family Playbook

Raising thinkers in an age of AI

Edition 1 · November 2026 · For parents, caregivers and teachers everywhere
ourstoraise.org

WELCOME

Why this playbook exists

Your child is growing up with machines that can answer almost anything. That can be a gift. It can also quietly take over the thinking, struggling and connecting that help children grow.

This playbook gives you the evidence in plain language, and practical tools you can use at home tonight. Everything in it is drawn from published research, rated honestly for how strong it is.

How to use it

1. **Notice.** Use page 3 to see how your child is really using AI.
2. **Understand.** Page 4 sums up what the research says, on one page.
3. **Guide.** Pages 5 and 6 give eight strategies, for homework and for AI "friends".
4. **Agree.** Fill in the Family AI Agreement (page 7) together, then stick it on the fridge.
5. **Build.** Use the age guide, the five-skills week, the reading plan, the school questions and the dinner questions to keep going.

How we rate evidence

STRONG controlled experiments or large rigorous studies EARLY small or not-yet-peer-reviewed SIGNAL surveys, correlations or company data EXPERT GUIDANCE advice from professional bodies

> The future will be full of machines that can answer.
> It will belong to the children who can still think.

STEP 1 · NOTICE

How is your child really using AI?

5 signs AI may be doing the thinking

- Homework is finished fast, but they can't explain how they got the answers.
- Their writing suddenly sounds unlike them.
- They give up quickly when AI isn't available.
- They ask AI first, before trying anything themselves.
- Practice marks go up, but test results don't.

5 signs an AI "friend" is becoming too important

- They prefer talking to an AI over friends or family.
- They're secretive about a particular app or character.
- They're upset or anxious when they can't use it.
- They take its advice over that of trusted adults.
- They're withdrawing from activities they used to enjoy.

A 2-minute check-in (no judgement)

Ask	Listen for
"Which AI tools do you use? What for?"	Homework, games, chatting, advice
"Show me something cool you did with AI this week."	Is your child creating, or copying?
"When you get stuck, what do you do first?"	Effort before AI, or AI before effort
"Do you ever talk to an AI about how you feel?"	Whether a chatbot is filling a gap

These are practical warning signs, not a diagnosis. If you're worried about your child's wellbeing, talk to a doctor, school counsellor or mental health professional.

STEP 2 · UNDERSTAND

The research, on one page

Finding	What it shows	Strength
AI as a crutch Bastani et al., *PNAS*, 2025	Nearly 1,000 high-school maths students in Turkey. Practice with an ordinary chatbot raised practice grades by 48%, but exam grades fell 17% once the AI was removed. A tutor that gave hints, not answers, largely avoided the harm.	STRONG
AI and brain engagement Kosmyna et al., MIT, 2025	54 participants writing essays with ChatGPT showed the weakest brain connectivity and struggled to quote their own work. A small preprint.	EARLY
Reliance and critical thinking Gerlich, *Societies*, 2025	Among 666 people, heavier AI reliance went with lower critical-thinking scores; the youngest were most reliant. A link, not proof of cause.	SIGNAL
How common it is Pew, 2026; eSafety, 2026	54% of US teens use chatbots for schoolwork. 78% of Australian children aged 10–17 have used an AI assistant.	SIGNAL
AI companions Common Sense Media, 2025	72% of US teens have tried an AI companion; 52% use them regularly. About a third of users discussed something important with AI instead of a person. 67% find these chats less satisfying than real friends.	SIGNAL
No one else to talk to Internet Matters, UK, 2025	1 in 8 children who use chatbots say it's because they have no one else to talk to; nearly 1 in 4 among vulnerable children.	SIGNAL
Loneliness MIT & OpenAI, 2025	In a 4-week randomised study of 981 adults, the heaviest daily chatbot users felt lonelier and more dependent. Cause unclear.	EARLY
Simulated empathy American Psychological Association, 2025	Young people may struggle to tell an AI's simulated empathy from genuine human understanding.	EXPERT

The big picture: AI isn't automatically good or bad for children. It depends on whether it thinks *for* them or *with* them, and on whether it adds to human relationships or replaces them.

Four strategies: crutch or coach?

1. Think first, then ask

Before opening any AI tool, your child spends 10 minutes on the problem alone, even if they get stuck. Especially if they get stuck. That struggle is where learning happens.

2. The explain-it-back rule

If AI helped, your child explains the answer back to you in their own words, without looking. *"Teach me how you got that."* If they can explain it, they learned it.

3. Hints, not answers

Teach your child to start every AI conversation with one sentence:

> "Don't give me the answer. Ask me questions and give me hints, so I can work it out myself."

This mirrors the design of the "tutor with guardrails" in the classroom study. Many AI tools now also offer a study or tutor mode; switch it on.

4. The dinner question

Once a day, ask a question no machine can answer for them: *"What did you figure out today that you didn't know this morning?"*

Crutch or coach? A quick test

Crutch	Coach
Gives answers · Does the work · Child copies	Gives hints · Asks questions · Child explains

Four strategies: keep the human door open

1. Ask, don't ambush

Start with curiosity, not a lecture: *"Do you ever talk to an AI? Which one? What do you like about it?"* Children who feel judged stop telling us things.

2. The friend test

Explore together: *"Does it ever disagree with you? Does it ever tell you you're wrong? What would a real friend say?"* A real friend can say no, remembers you over years, and notices when you go quiet.

3. Check the app, together

Look at each app's age rules and parental controls side by side with your child. Many general chatbots require users to be at least 13, and some companion apps are adults-only. Check each app's terms, because they change.

4. Keep the human door open

Make sure your child has at least one trusted adult to talk to. Watch for pulling away, secrecy, or distress when the app is taken away.

If you're worried

If your child seems withdrawn, distressed, or talks about harming themselves, contact a doctor, school counsellor or mental health professional, or your local emergency number if they are in immediate danger. You don't have to handle it alone.

STEP 4 · AGREE

Our Family AI Agreement

Fill this in together. Agreements children help write are the ones they keep.

We agree that...	Our rule
We use AI for homework...	☐ after trying alone first ☐ for hints, not answers ☐ only with an adult nearby
We explain our AI-helped work...	☐ every time ☐ when asked ☐ for big assignments
AI apps we use as a family are...	_____
AI "friend" or companion apps...	☐ not yet in our family ☐ only together ☐ with check-ins
Screens and AI go to bed at...	_____
No-AI times and places are...	☐ meals ☐ bedrooms at night ☐ first 10 minutes of homework
If something online worries us, we...	tell a trusted adult. No one gets in trouble for telling.
We'll review this agreement on...	_____

_____ Child signature and date

_____ Parent or caregiver signature and date

STEP 5 · BUILD · AGE BY AGE

What's right at each age?

A practical starting point, not a rulebook. Every child is different, and each app sets its own minimum age.

Around 6

- AI only with an adult, side by side
- Use it to wonder together ("Ask it why the sky is blue, then check a book")
- No chatbot accounts of their own
- Plenty of hands-on play, reading aloud, boredom

Around 10

- Short, supervised use for learning
- Introduce "hints, not answers"
- Explain-it-back after any AI help
- Talk about how AI can be wrong
- No AI companion apps

Around 14

- More independence, regular check-ins
- Use study or tutor modes
- Talk openly about AI friends and feelings
- Agree on AI-free times at night
- Check age rules for each app together

Around 17

- Coach, don't control
- Discuss honesty and AI in assessment
- Build judgement: when to trust AI and when not
- Prepare for university and work norms
- Keep the door open for tough conversations

At every age: the goal isn't to keep AI out. It's to keep thinking, effort and human connection in.

STEP 5 · BUILD · THE FIVE SKILLS

Five skills, one week

Five skills no app can hand over, and one small habit for each. Try one a day this week, then keep the ones that work in your home.

Day	Skill	The habit
Monday	Thinking for themselves	**Guess first.** Before anyone looks anything up, ask *"What do you think, and why?"* Then check together.
Tuesday	Creativity	**Make it first, then compare.** Your child draws, writes or invents before any AI is asked. Their version comes first.
Wednesday	Self-control	**Ten minutes of trying.** Ten minutes of effort before asking for help, from a person or a machine.
Thursday	Real relationships	**One real conversation.** Phones away, and your child does at least half of the talking.
Friday	Working through difficulty	**Add "yet".** When your child says *"I can't do this"*, add *"yet"*, and ask *"What's the first small step?"*
Weekend	All five	One project with no AI at all: cook, build, paint, play, explore. Talk about what was hard and what you're proud of.

The evidence behind the five

Employers rank analytical thinking first (World Economic Forum, 2025) SIGNAL · Childhood self-control predicts adult health and wealth (Dunedin Study, 1,037 children) STRONG · Good relationships keep us happier and healthier (Harvard Study of Adult Development, since 1938) STRONG · About half of top creative thinkers don't also excel academically (OECD PISA 2022) SIGNAL

The rule behind all five: your child does the thinking, creating, waiting, connecting and struggling first. The machine helps after.

STEP 5 · BUILD · READING

A reading plan for every age

Children who enjoy reading keep reading. And reading the whole book builds what a summary can't: vocabulary, patience, and the ability to follow a long thought.

Around 6

- Read aloud every day, even after they can read
- Talk about the pictures and ask "What happens next?"
- Let them choose the bedtime book

Around 10

- Twenty minutes of family reading, phones away
- Comics, sport and fantasy all count
- Library visits as a treat, not a chore

Around 14

- The book before the summary
- AI only to check their own understanding
- Read the same book and talk about it

Around 17

- Paper for set books and hard texts
- Ask "What would you have done?", not "What happened?"
- Share what you're reading too

What the research says

Only about 1 in 3 UK children aged 8–18 enjoy reading in their free time, the lowest in 20 years (National Literacy Trust, 2025) SIGNAL · Comprehension is slightly better on paper than on screen, especially for factual texts (Delgado et al., 54 studies, 2018) STRONG · Reading for pleasure at 10 is linked to more progress by 16 in vocabulary, spelling and maths (1970 British Cohort Study) STRONG · Training parents to share picture books improves young children's language (Dowdall et al., 19 trials, 2020) STRONG

Questions to ask your child's school

1. What is the school's policy on students using AI, and how is it explained to children?
2. How do teachers tell the difference between AI-assisted learning and AI doing the work?
3. Which AI tools does the school use, and what happens to children's data?
4. How are assessments changing so they still show what children really understand?
5. How can parents support the school's approach at home?

10 dinner questions no machine can answer

1. What did you figure out today that you didn't know this morning?
2. What was hard today, and what did you try?
3. When did you change your mind about something?
4. What's a question you'd love to know the answer to?
5. Who helped you today, and how?
6. What would you do if AI gave you a wrong answer?
7. What's something only you could have made?
8. When did you feel proud of your own thinking?
9. What makes a real friend different from a chatbot?
10. What do you want to get better at, by yourself?

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Where the evidence comes from

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