



Online Safety Bulletin - Summer 2026

The Digital Playground: A Parent's Guide to AI

You have likely heard a lot about **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** in the news recently. From chatbots that can write essays to apps that generate artwork, AI is rapidly changing how our young people learn, create, and interact with the world.

As a school, we see great potential in these tools, but we also recognise that navigating them can be daunting. This newsletter is designed to give you a clear, jargon-free overview of what AI is, how your child (aged 11–16) might be using it, and how we can work together to keep them safe online.

What is AI, anyway?

To understand Artificial Intelligence, it helps to realise that AI doesn't "think" the way a human brain does. Instead, think of it as a highly advanced computer program that is incredibly good at spotting patterns.

Traditional computers only do exactly what a human codes them to do, step-by-step. AI is different. Scientists "train" an AI by feeding it massive amounts of information—millions of books, articles, images, and websites. The AI studies all this data to learn how humans speak, write, solve math problems, and create art.

When your child types a question into an AI tool, the computer isn't looking up a single right answer like a Google search. Instead, it uses what it learned from its training to predict and assemble the most helpful response, word by word, in a fraction of a second.

Common Types of AI Your Teenager Might Be Using

AI isn't just one single website; it is built into many different apps and platforms. Here are the four main categories your child is most likely interacting with:

- **Generative AI Chatbots (The Homework & Research Aids):** Tools like **ChatGPT**, **Google Gemini**, and **Microsoft Copilot** are conversational assistants. Teens use them to summarize long articles, explain school topics, or help draft text. Many of these platforms now require users to be at least 13 years old and feature built-in parental control dashboards. These controls allow parents to link accounts, view their teen's chat histories, and track usage statistics. Another popular tool in this space is **Perplexity**, which functions like an AI search engine, pulling together information from across the web and explicitly citing its sources.
- **Social & Companion AI (The Virtual Friends):** Many teenagers interact with AI built directly into social media. A prime example is **Snapchat's My AI**, a chatbot that sits at the top of their friend list and can chat, recommend recipes, or plan day trips. Another highly popular platform among 11–16 year olds is **Character.AI**, which allows users to text highly customized AI characters built to mimic favorite celebrities, anime characters, or fictional figures. These tools carry distinct emotional risks, as their conversational nature can sometimes blur the line between real-life friendships and automated software.
- **Creative & Visual AI (The Art & Design Tools):** AI is heavily integrated into creative spaces. Programs like **Midjourney**, **DALL·E**, and the "Magic Design" features inside **Canva** allow students to generate brand-new, polished digital artwork, graphics, or logos just by typing in a description (e.g., "*draw a futuristic city in the style of Van Gogh for a school project*"). While excellent for design, parents should know these tools require careful monitoring to ensure teenagers are generating appropriate content.
- **Supervised & Kid-First AI Platforms:** Recognizing the risks of adult AI models, a new wave of youth-focused platforms has emerged. Tools like **Khanmigo** (an AI tutor from Khan Academy) are designed to act strictly as Socratic coaches—asking guiding questions rather than simply handing over homework answers. Other popular teen-centric apps include **HeyOtto** and **HolaNolis**, which feature strict parental guardrails, real-time crisis detection, and age-adaptive filtering to ensure interactions remain safe, constructive, and age-appropriate.

The Bright Side: How AI Can Benefit Your Child

When used thoughtfully, AI can be much more than a novelty; it can be a brilliant educational companion. Here is how these tools can positively support your child's growth, study habits, and creativity:

- **A Personalised, 24/7 Tutor:** Every student learns at a different pace. If your child is struggling to grasp a concept taught in class—such as photosynthesis, algebra, or a specific historical event—they can ask an AI chatbot to explain it to them. They can even use prompts like, "*Explain the water cycle like I am 12 years old,*" or "*Give me a simpler analogy for Newton's laws.*" This allows them to learn comfortably without the fear of asking "silly" questions.
- **Overcoming the "Blank Page" (Creative Sparking):** Starting an assignment, a piece of creative writing, or an art project is often the hardest part for teenagers. AI is excellent for brainstorming. A student can type in, "*Give me five interesting plot hooks for a gothic*

horror story," or "What are some unique angles for a geography presentation on renewable energy?" It acts as a collaborative partner to get their creative juices flowing.

- **Interactive Skill Building and Language Practice:** For pupils learning a modern foreign language, AI can act as a patient conversation partner, allowing them to practice text-based conversations in French, Spanish, or German at their own skill level. Similarly, for students interested in computer science, AI can look at a piece of code they have written, find the error, and explain how to fix it step-by-step.
- **Time Management and Study Organization:** Moving through secondary school requires a big jump in organisational skills. Students can use AI to help break down large, overwhelming tasks into manageable steps. For example, they can ask, *"Help me create a study timetable for my science exam over the next two weeks,"* or *"How should I structure a 10-slide presentation on climate change?"* This builds essential project management skills for the future.

The Flip Side: Important Concerns to Watch For

While these tools are exciting, they do come with risks that require adult guidance. Here is what you should be aware of:

- **"Hallucinations" (Inaccuracies):** AI programs do not actually "know" facts; they predict words based on patterns. This means they can confidently state things that are completely made up or factually incorrect. Children should never rely on AI as a sole source of truth for homework.
- **The "Copy-and-Paste" Temptation:** It can be tempting for students to let AI write their essays or do their homework for them. This is plagiarism and stops them from developing critical thinking and writing skills.
- **Privacy Issues:** Anything your child types into an AI chatbot could be saved and used to train the system. Teach them **never** to share personal details, such as their full name, address, school, or private photos.
- **Emotional Attachment:** As mentioned above with apps like Snapchat or Character.AI, some tools simulate relationships. It is important to remind teenagers that these are machines, not real people, and they shouldn't replace human friendships or be used for emotional support during a crisis.

Top Tips for Parents: Navigating AI Together

- **Have the "AI Talk" (Move from Monitoring to Mentoring):** Instead of banning AI tools—which often just drives the behavior underground—approach them with curiosity. Ask your child to show you how their favorite AI tool works. You might say, *"I've heard a lot about ChatGPT. Can you show me how you use it?"* Sitting down together shifts your role from a "digital police officer" to a trusted guide. If they feel you understand the technology, they are much more likely to come to you if they encounter something strange or upsetting online.
- **Teach Critical Thinking and Fact-Checking:** Because AI systems are designed to sound highly confident, teenagers often take their answers as absolute truth. You can help them develop a healthy skepticism. Treat AI like a classmate who is notorious for

gossiping—they know a lot of stories, but they don't always get the facts straight. Introduce the **"Rule of Three"**: if AI gives them an important fact for a school project, they must verify that same fact using two other reliable sources, like a textbook, a reputable news site, or an educational database.

- **Set Clear Boundaries Around "Academic Integrity"**: It is incredibly easy for a student to type their homework prompt into an AI and get a completed essay in five seconds. We need to help them understand the difference between using AI as a *launchpad* versus a *crutch*. Establish clear household rules on what is acceptable. **Green Light (Go)**: Using AI to brainstorm essay topics, explain a difficult concept, or generate practice quiz questions to study for a test. **Red Light (Stop)**: Copying and pasting AI-generated text directly into school assignments, or letting AI write the conclusion of an essay.
- **Create a "Data Privacy" Game Plan**: Teenagers are used to sharing their lives online, but they often don't realize that AI companies keep and analyse everything typed into them. Sit down and look at the privacy settings of the apps they use. Use the **"Billboard Rule"**: tell your child never to type anything into an AI chatbot that they wouldn't be comfortable displaying on a massive billboard outside the school gate. Remind them to never input names, addresses, phone numbers, or personal worries they wouldn't want strangers to read.

Trusted Resources for More Information

If you want to dive deeper into keeping your family safe online, these excellent organisations offer free, straightforward guides for parents:

- **Internet Matters**: internetmatters.org – Excellent guides on AI safety, privacy settings, and age-appropriate apps.
- **NSPCC**: nspcc.org.uk – Practical advice on online safety and talking to your teen about digital risks.
- **Childnet**: childnet.com – Toolkits and conversation starters to help you discuss online safety at home.

We Are Here to Help

As a school, we are actively educating our pupils on how to use AI ethically and safely. If you have any questions, concerns, or if you suspect your child is struggling with an aspect of online safety, please do not hesitate to contact us.

- **For general questions about AI in schoolwork**: Speak to your child's Form Tutor or Head of Year.
- **For urgent safety or safeguarding concerns**: Contact our Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) at Alcester Academy or call the school office on 01789 762285.

Together, we can help our young people navigate this exciting new digital world safely and confidently.