Safer Internet Use

Tips for encouraging open discussion about digital life

Make your interest clear

Ask to see your child's favourite games and apps which will help you spot issues

Be open, honest, and appropriate to their age

When answering questions about puberty, relationships, etc.

Remind your child they can always talk to you

Even when they view harmful content, talking about it openly will help

Discuss that not everything we see online is real

Use examples from your own online world, like posts that show perfect houses

Try to remain calm

Your initial reaction could stop a child from speaking openly about what they've seen

Create a family agreement

About device use including when to use devices, parental controls and why it's good to talk

Keep talking

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The AI Edition

AI (Artificial Intelligence) is everywhere. It is a fantastic tool that promises to make life easier and better for us all, but as with any tool – especially one connected to the internet – comes with a range of risks. This newsletter will hopefully highlight a range of these to promote conversations with your child about how to use AI in a safe and responsible way.

OpenAI

What are the main risks?

Privacy Concerns

The conversational nature of AI tools such as Grok and ChatGPT encourage children to see them as a friend. Early research shows that children are sharing much more than they should – personal details, contact information, deepest fears and secrets – which could compromise your child's privacy.

Accuracy Concerns

Many AI tools are in early stages of development and there is plenty of evidence to show that it frequently gets things wrong! Children who rely on or believe the answers given could be reinforcing incorrect information or taking bad advice that negatively impacts on their lives.

Wellbeing Concerns

Many children are talking to AI tools for several hours a day and well into the night. They perceive the AI to be like a friend and this may reduce their ability to develop social skills.

There have been plenty of news articles recently showing that children are seeking emotional wellbeing advice and at times asking AI tools to recommend dangerous things such as how to self-harm. AI is not always pushing back, giving safe information, or seeking crisis support; and at times is encouraging unhealthy and harmful behaviours.

A New Reality

This is Mia Zelu – an Instagram influencer pictured at Wimbledon in the summer who soon amassed a large following. However, soon afterwards it emerged that she wasn't actually real! She is one of many AI-generated influencers that you can find across many social media platforms:

What are the dangers?

Not always honest
Mia's profile states that she is an AI influencer (though some children may not understand what that means or miss it entirely when scrolling through her page) but many do not. For a long time children have been comparing their whole life to someone's highlight reel creating emotional wellbeing issues; but to compare your life to someone who is not real and living a curated perfect existence could make these issues worse.

Financial risks
The primary motivation is advertising. The AI image will be seen with a range of products and services making children wanting to buy the products on show.

Connecting with strangers
Following these profiles online can lead to follow-backs. Some of the profiles may be run by unsafe adults who will then interact with your child. All the while your child may think they are talking to the influencer. This could place them at risk.

How can you make things safer for your child?

- Talk to your child about this phenomenon to give them the tools to understand that not everything is real
- Show your child an example profile – such as Mia's – to help them to understand what an AI influencer is
- Remind them that they should not compare all the highs and lows of their lives to a perfect life generated by a computer

What should I upskill myself on?

As a parent/carer it can be a challenge to keep up to date with all of the different AI tools – there are hundreds! The main ones that research shows are being used by children (though things change all the time and the latest research is now two-years old!) are My AI (a Snapchat plug-in that can't be disabled on a standard account – 59% of under-16s use this tool); Open AI (including ChatGPT and DALL-E); and Midjourney (an image-creator and general AI tool that looks a bit like Pinterest). Many will also use Google Gemini (built into Google's search engine) by default:
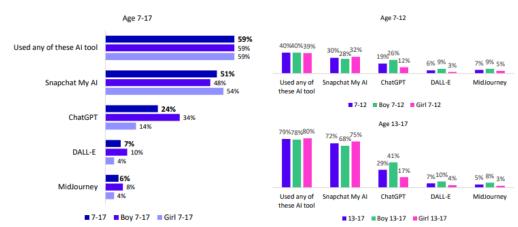

Figure 23: Online children who have used artificial intelligence tools

Source: CHILDWISE summer omnibus 2023. Services used in the past six months: Fieldwork conducted June-July 2023.

Further information related to ChatGPT can be found here: ChatGPT and AI: a parent guide | Parent Zone

The rise of romantic AI

- Targeted at adults but increasingly being used by teenagers, romantic AI is a chat programme that pretends to be the romantic partner of its user
- Not only are the messages sexually explicit and encourage similar responses in return but many come with an AI-generated moving image of a person, often with very few clothes on, that will respond to prompts/requests made by the user
- These apps passively encourage and reinforce harmful behaviours and could prevent your child from forming healthy romantic relationships in the future.