

Talking About AI with Your Child

20 Research-Backed Conversation Starters for Parents & Teachers

How to Use This Guide

These 20 questions are designed to spark **meaningful conversations about AI and technology** with children aged 8 to 16. You don't need to use them all at once; pick one or two that fit naturally into your day. The goal is to **listen, learn together, and help your child think critically**.

Why these conversations matter:

- Children who discuss technology with parents are **40%% less likely** to encounter online risks (EU Kids Online)
- Open dialogue builds **digital resilience**, the ability to recover from negative online experiences
- Children are more likely to seek help from adults they've had **non-judgmental conversations** with about technology
- Early conversations create a foundation of **trust** that becomes critical during teenage years

Conversation Tips for Parents & Teachers:

- **Listen more than you talk**; let them share their thoughts first
- **Be curious, not judgmental**; they may know things you don't!
- **Share your own uncertainties**; it's okay to say "I don't know either, let's find out together"
- **Make it casual**; conversations work best during natural moments (car rides, walks, dinner)
- **Avoid lecturing**; if it feels like a test, children shut down

- **Follow their lead;** if they're excited about something, explore it with them
- **Revisit topics;** one conversation isn't enough, so build an ongoing dialogue

Category 1: Everyday AI Encounters

These questions help children recognise AI they already interact with daily, building awareness of how pervasive AI technology has become.

Question 1

“What apps or games do you use that seem to know what you like?”

Recommendation algorithms are children’s most frequent interaction with AI. TikTok’s algorithm can profile a user’s interests within 40 minutes of use (Wall Street Journal investigation, 2021).

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- How do you think they figure that out?
- How does it feel when something is recommended to you: helpful, convenient, or a bit creepy?
- Do you ever feel like the app is trying to keep you scrolling? How?
- If you watched one type of video, what happens to your recommendations?

Best time: During dinner, car rides, or after screen time

Question 2

“Have you ever asked Siri, Alexa, or Google Assistant something? Did it give you a good answer?”

Voice assistants process requests by sending audio to cloud servers. Amazon confirmed in 2019 that some Alexa recordings were reviewed by human employees for quality improvement.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- What do you think happens when you talk to them? Where does your question go?
- Do you think they're really listening all the time?
- Is there anything you wouldn't ask them? Why?
- How is asking a voice assistant different from searching on Google?

Best time: When using a smart device at home

Question 3

“When you’re typing a message, does your phone suggest the next word? How do you think it knows?”

Predictive text uses a form of AI called a language model, the same fundamental technology behind ChatGPT, just at a much smaller scale.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- Does it ever suggest something funny or wrong?
- Would you let it write a whole message for you? Would that really be “your” message?
- How does it get better at predicting what you’ll say over time?

Best time: When texting together

Question 4

“How does YouTube or TikTok know what videos you want to watch next?”

YouTube's recommendation algorithm is responsible for over 70% of all time spent on the platform. A 2022 Mozilla Foundation study found that 71% of videos people regretted watching were recommended by YouTube's algorithm.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- Do you ever watch something you didn't plan to? How did you end up there?
- Has the algorithm ever shown you something that made you uncomfortable? What did you do?
- Do you think the algorithm shows you what's "good" or just what keeps you watching longest?
- What would happen if you started watching completely different types of videos?

Best time: After screen time

Category 2: Critical Thinking Questions

These questions develop children’s ability to think critically about AI, truth, and the nature of intelligence itself.

Question 5

“If you read something online, how do you know if it’s true?”

A Stanford study found that 82% of students couldn’t distinguish between a news article and a sponsored advertisement. AI-generated misinformation is making this challenge even harder.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- Have you ever shared something that turned out to be fake? What happened?
- What clues help you spot fake information?
- If a friend sent it, would you assume it’s true? Should you?
- Could AI be used to create believable fake news? How would you tell?

Best time: When seeing news or social media posts together

Question 6

“Have you heard of AI that can make fake photos or videos of real people? What do you think about that?”

Deepfake videos increased by 550% between 2019 and 2023. In 2024, deepfake images of Taylor Swift went viral, sparking global discussions about AI regulation and consent.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- How could someone misuse this technology?
- How might you tell if a photo or video was AI-generated?
- Should there be laws about creating deepfakes? What should they say?
- What would you do if someone made a fake image of you?

Best time: When discussing news, celebrities, or social media

Question 7

“Do you think AI is smart like humans, or smart in a different way?”

This explores the difference between Narrow AI (good at specific tasks) and General AI (human-like intelligence that doesn't exist yet). Understanding this distinction prevents both fear and over-trust.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- What can AI do better than humans? (Hint: maths, patterns, speed)
- What can humans do that AI can't? (Hint: empathy, creativity, moral judgment)
- Can AI feel emotions? Can it be creative? What does “creative” mean?
- If AI can write poetry, paint pictures, and compose music, is it truly “creating”?

Best time: Long car rides, walks, or thoughtful quiet moments

Question 8

“If ChatGPT helped you write an essay, would you say YOU wrote it?”

This touches on academic integrity, intellectual property, and the purpose of education. Schools are actively debating these questions, and children benefit from discussing them at home too.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- Where is the line between getting help and cheating?
- How is it different from using a calculator for maths? Or is it?
- What do you actually learn if AI does the thinking for you?
- If an AI writes a song, who owns it: the AI, the person who asked, or the company?

Best time: During homework time

Category 3: Privacy & Safety Discussions

These questions address online safety in the context of AI, helping children develop protective habits through understanding rather than fear.

Question 9

“What information would you never tell a chatbot or AI?”

Most AI companies store user conversations. OpenAI’s privacy policy states that conversations may be reviewed by human trainers. Samsung banned employees from using ChatGPT after sensitive company data was accidentally shared.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- Why is it risky to share personal info with AI?
- Where do you think that information goes? Who can see it?
- Has an AI chatbot ever asked you something personal?
- If ChatGPT asked for your school name to help with homework, would you tell it?

Best time: After using a chatbot or AI tool

Question 10

“If someone online asked you to send a photo, what would you do?”

AI can generate realistic fake profile photos, making catfishing easier than ever. The NSPCC reports that online grooming offences in the UK rose by 80% between 2019 and 2023.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- How can you tell if someone online is really who they say they are?
- Could AI be used to create fake profiles that look real? How?
- What would you do if this happened to a friend?
- Why do some people pretend to be someone else online?

Best one: Regular check-ins (make it casual, not an interrogation)

Question 11

“Have you ever gotten a message that seemed weird or suspicious?”

AI is being used to create highly personalised phishing messages. Traditional “Nigerian prince” scams are being replaced by AI-crafted messages that reference real events and use natural language.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- What made it seem off? What clues did you notice?
- Could AI be used to create more convincing scam messages?
- What’s our family plan if you receive one?
- Is it okay to be rude to a scammer? (Hint: just don’t reply at all!)

Best one: When checking messages together

Question 12

“How would you feel if someone made a fake picture of you using AI?”

Creating AI-generated intimate images of anyone (including children) is a criminal offence in the UK. The Online Safety Act 2023 strengthened protections against this.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- What would you do about it? Who would you tell?
- How can we keep your photos safe online?
- Should it be illegal to make fake images of real people?
- What's the difference between funny filters and harmful deepfakes?

Best time: When discussing social media or photos

Category 4: Future-Focused Questions

These questions help children think about AI's impact on their futures, encouraging both optimism and thoughtful consideration.

Question 13

“What job do you think you might want when you grow up? How might AI change that job?”

The World Economic Forum estimated that AI would create 97 million new jobs by 2025 while displacing 85 million. The jobs that grow most are those requiring creativity, empathy, and complex judgment.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- Could AI help with that job? How?
- What skills will humans always need, no matter how good AI gets?
- What completely new jobs might AI create that don't exist yet?
- What if AI could do 80% of a doctor's/teacher's/architect's work, would we still need them? Why?

Best time: Thoughtful moments, bedtime conversations

Question 14

“If you could invent an AI to help with anything in the world, what would you create?”

This question develops design thinking and ethical reasoning, two skills that will be essential in an AI-augmented world.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- How would you make sure it was used safely and fairly?
- Could your invention be misused? How would you prevent that?
- What rules would you set for how it works?
- Who should have access to it: everyone, or only certain people?

Best time: Creative time, art/drawing sessions, walks

Question 15

“Should there be rules about how companies use AI? What rules would you make?”

The EU AI Act (2024) is the world’s first comprehensive AI law. The UK is taking a different approach with principles-based regulation. These real-world debates make for great family discussions.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- Who should make these rules: governments, tech companies, or everyone together?
- How would you enforce them? What happens if companies break the rules?
- What’s the most important rule you’d create?
- Should AI companies have to explain how their AI works? Why or why not?

Best time: When discussing tech news or current events

Question 16

“Do you think AI will make the world better or more complicated, or both?”

This teaches nuanced thinking, avoiding the extremes of techno-utopianism and techno-pessimism. Most technology is neither purely good nor purely bad; it depends on how we use it.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- What's the best thing AI could do for the world?
- What worries you most about AI?
- What excites you most about AI?
- Is it possible for something to be both exciting and scary at the same time?

Best time: Deep conversations, family dinners, long journeys

Category 5: Feelings & Experiences

These questions focus on children's emotional relationship with technology, creating space for them to express concerns and develop self-awareness.

Question 17

“Have you ever felt like you spent too long on your phone or games? What helps you take a break?”

The NHS reports that children who spend more than 3 hours a day on screens are twice as likely to report poor mental wellbeing. Helping children develop self-regulation is more effective than imposing strict limits.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- How do apps try to keep you playing or scrolling? (Notifications, streaks, autoplay)
- What signals tell you it's time for a break? (Tired eyes, irritability, boredom)
- What do you enjoy doing that doesn't involve screens?
- Do you feel different after 30 minutes of screen time vs 3 hours? How?

Best time: After long screen sessions (approach gently, not critically)

Question 18

“Is there anything you've seen online that confused you or made you uncomfortable?”

Ofcom reports that 79% of children aged 8 to 17 have had a potentially harmful experience online. The most important factor in how children cope is whether they feel they can talk to a trusted adult.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- You know you can always talk to me about it, right? I won't get angry or take your phone away.
- What made you feel that way?
- What did you do when you felt like that?
- Is there anything you wish you could unsee? Let's talk about it.

Best time: Bedtime chats, quiet one-on-one time (not in front of siblings)

Question 19

“Is there anything about AI or technology that worries you?”

Children often have significant anxiety about AI that they haven't expressed, from job replacement fears to existential concerns from films like The Terminator. Addressing these fears with facts and context is important.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- What have you heard from friends about AI? (Peers are a major source of both information and misinformation)
- Is there anything you'd like to know more about? Shall we look it up together?
- What would help you feel more confident about technology?
- Do any films or TV shows about AI scare you? Let's talk about what's real and what's fiction.

Best time: One-on-one time, walks, car rides

Question 20

“Do you ever prefer talking to AI (like Siri or ChatGPT) over asking a person? Why?”

Research shows some children find it easier to confide in AI because it doesn't judge. While this can be positive, it's important that AI doesn't replace human connection and emotional support.

Follow-up questions to keep the conversation going:

- What's different about talking to AI versus a person?
- Are there things you'd only ask AI? Why?
- Can AI really understand you like a person can? What's missing?
- Is it possible to feel lonely even when you're chatting with an AI?

Best time: Curious moments, after using AI tools

Bonus: Turn Conversations Into Activities

AI Scavenger Hunt

Spend a day noticing AI together. Every time someone spots AI being used (voice assistant, recommendation, autocomplete, navigation, face unlock, spam filter, etc.), call it out! See who finds the most. Most families are surprised to discover they interact with AI 50 to 100 times per day without realising it.

Reverse Interview

Let your child interview YOU about technology. What did you think computers would be like when you were their age? What surprises you most about technology today? What technology that exists now would have seemed like science fiction when you were young? This builds connection and shows that technology uncertainty is a shared experience.

The Real vs AI Challenge

Find examples of AI-generated images online (many are shared on social media) and mix them with real photos. Can your family tell which is which? Discuss the clues that helped you decide. This builds critical viewing skills in an engaging way.

Design an AI Together

Grab paper and pens and design an AI system together. What problem would it solve? What data would it need? What rules would you give it? What could go wrong? This develops computational thinking and ethical reasoning.

Create a Family AI News Alert

Set up a shared note or group chat where family members share interesting AI news they come across. Discuss one article per week at dinner. This normalises conversations about technology and keeps everyone informed.

The Most Important Thing

The specific questions you ask matter less than the **relationship you build** through asking them. A child who knows they can talk to you about technology without judgment is a child who will come to you when something goes wrong.

“The conversations you have with your children today become the inner voice they hear tomorrow.”