SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE

October 2026 | Primary | What parents and carers need to know about: Artificial Intelligence

Helping children use AI safely, respectfully and responsibly

Artificial intelligence is becoming part of children's everyday lives. It can support learning and creativity, but primary-aged children still need adult guidance to understand what AI is, recognise its limits and use it in ways that protect themselves and others.

Your child may already be using AI

Children do not need to open a dedicated AI app to encounter artificial intelligence. It may be built into search engines, homework tools, games, smart speakers, video platforms and photo-editing features. They might use it to answer questions, explain a school topic, suggest story ideas, translate words, change pictures or talk to a chatbot. Ask your child where they have encountered AI and what they think it does—they may know more about using it than about staying safe.

What is generative AI?

Generative AI creates new content, including words, pictures, videos and music, in response to a question or instruction.

Its answers can sound confident and convincing, but they are not always accurate, appropriate or fair. AI does not think or understand things in the same way that a person does.

Children may copy an AI-generated answer without understanding it, believe inaccurate information or accidentally share personal details. AI can also be misused to create unkind or embarrassing images, pretend to be someone else or produce content that frightens or upsets another person.

What feels like a joke to one child can have a real impact on someone else's feelings, reputation and safety.

Using AI safely

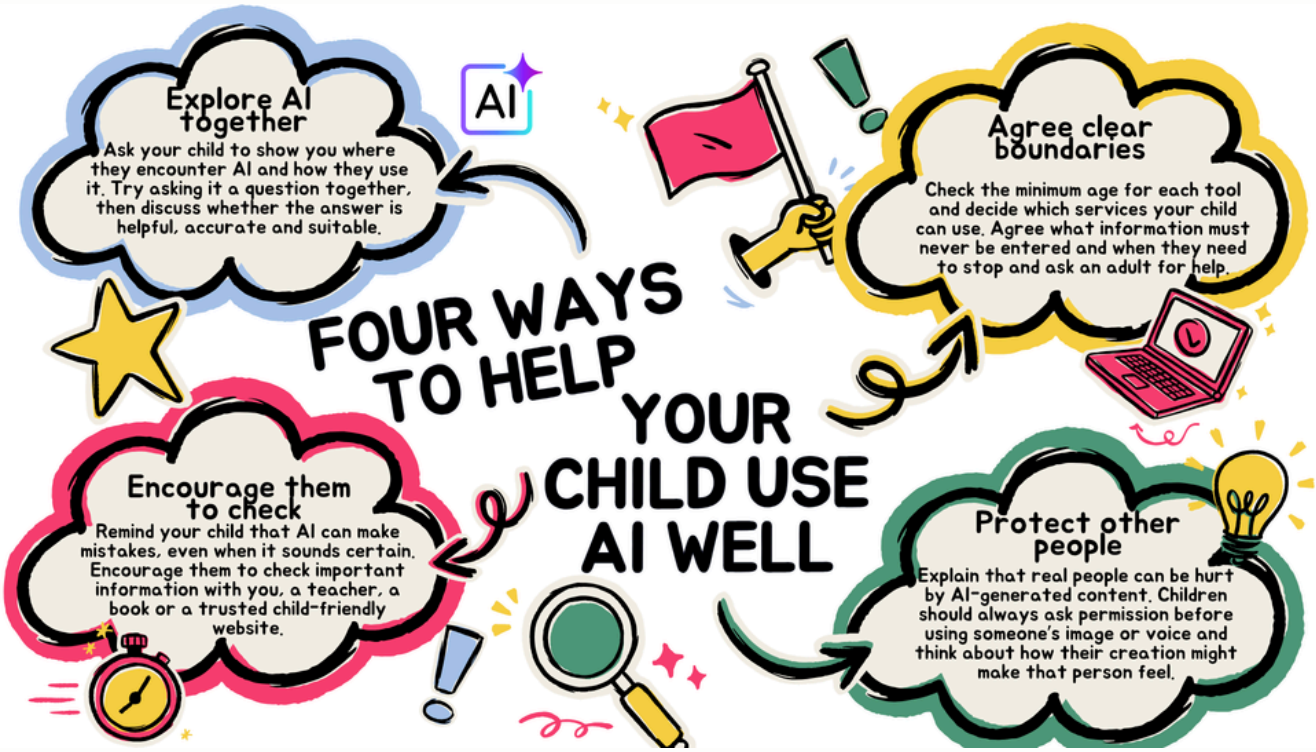
Children should never share their full name, school, address, location, passwords, photographs or private worries with an AI tool. They should use age-appropriate services with adult support and tell a trusted adult if AI produces anything upsetting, confusing or inappropriate.

Using AI respectfully

Children should ask permission before using another person's name, photograph or voice. AI should never be used to embarrass, frighten, impersonate or be unkind to someone—even as a joke.

Using AI responsibly

AI should help children develop their ideas, not do all their thinking for them. Children should check answers with an adult or another reliable source and explain what they have learned in their own words.



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AI Images: Can you trust what you see?
AI can now create photographs, videos and voices that appear convincing, even when the people or events shown are not real. Helping children question what they see online is becoming an important part of keeping them safe.

What are AI-generated images?
Some images are created entirely by artificial intelligence, while others are genuine photographs that have been altered. AI can change someone's appearance, place them somewhere they have never been or make it look as though they have done something that never happened. These images may be created for fun or creativity, but they can also be used to mislead, embarrass or harm others.

Where might children see them?
Children may encounter AI-generated or altered images in games, videos, social media, messaging groups, search results and photo-editing apps. They may not realise that what they are seeing has been created or changed. A realistic image is no longer proof that a person, place or event is genuine.

Why does this matter?
AI images can be used to spread false information, play unkind jokes, bully someone or damage their reputation. Children may also create and share an altered image without fully understanding how upsetting it could be for the person involved. Once an image has been shared, it can be copied, changed and passed to others very quickly.

Could someone be pretending to be someone else?
AI can create realistic profile pictures or alter a person's face, voice and appearance. Someone online might use these tools or a stolen photograph to pretend to be a child, a friend, a celebrity or another trusted person.
Teach your child that a photograph, video or friendly message does not prove someone is who they claim to be. They should never share personal information, photographs or private messages with someone they only know online.

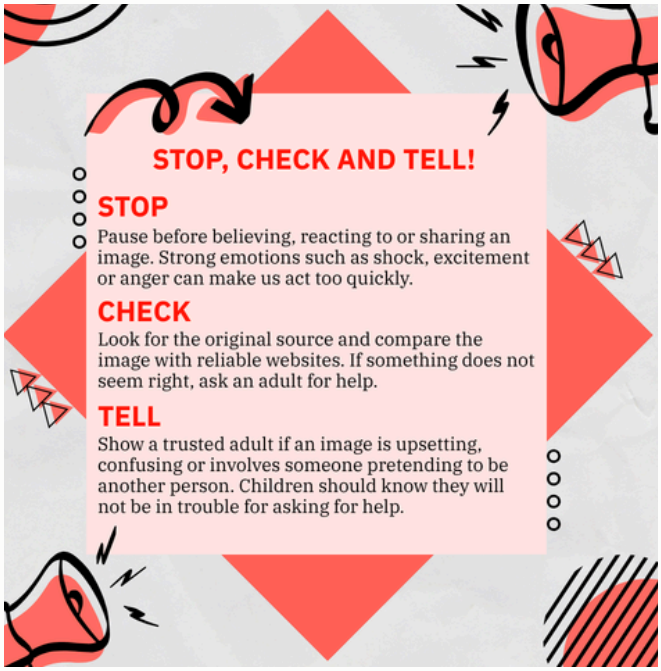
Warning signs might include someone who:

- avoids answering simple questions about who they are;
- gives information that does not add up;
- asks to keep the friendship secret;
- requests photographs or personal details;
- wants to move the conversation to a private app;
- becomes demanding, upsetting or threatening.

If your child is unsure about someone, they should stop responding and show a trusted adult.

Can you spot an AI image?
AI images are becoming increasingly difficult to identify. Sometimes there may be unusual hands, distorted objects, strange writing, inconsistent shadows or details that do not quite make sense. However, an image can still be artificial even when none of these clues are present.
Encourage your child to ask:

- Who shared this?
- Where did the image come from?
- Is it being reported anywhere reliable?
- Could it have been created or changed?
- Am I being encouraged to react or share it quickly?



Using AI images respectfully
Creating an image with AI does not remove the need for kindness and permission. Children should not use another person's photograph, name or identity without asking them first.
Encourage your child to consider:

- Do I have permission to use this image?
- Could this embarrass or upset someone?
- Am I pretending something is real when it is not?
- Would I be happy if someone made this about me?
- What could happen if other people shared it?

Something intended as a joke can still cause real harm.

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