PARENT FACTSHEET: OCTOBER 2026

AI risks: parent/carer factsheet

What is AI?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is the use of computer systems to solve problems and make decisions. It's already a part of everyday life – for example, AI is used to give you personalised suggestions on social media, shopping sites or route-planning apps.

Generative AI takes a written instruction (known as a 'prompt') and runs it through an algorithm to generate new, 'natural'-seeming content. Tools include:

- Chatbots such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Grammarly, which generate text
- Text-to-image programs like DALL-E and Midjourney, which create images
- Text-to-video programs, which create videos

AI technology is developing rapidly, and these tools will only improve over time. For example, they'll be able to create more convincing images or videos.

Many AI tools are free to access, increasingly popular with children and some can be used to generate inappropriate content.

What are the safeguarding risks to my child?

AI might be involved in:

- **Hacking and scams** – text-generation tools can write convincing emails and text messages to trick children into giving away personal information, including access to their social media or bank accounts
- **Bullying** – AI can be used to make fake images, videos, and audio of real people. Children may come across or share these without realising they're fake, and this content can be used for bullying and pranks
- **AI-generated child sexual abuse images** – AI tools can be used to create child sexual exploitation material
- **'Deepfake' or 'deep nudes'** – some AI tools (often called 'nudifying' apps) can digitally edit or generate sexual imagery of people, including children. This could be used for sexual gratification, as a means of bullying or humiliating a child, or to pressure them into sending real sexual imagery
- **'Catfishing' and 'sextortion'** – criminals can use AI-generated profile pictures to appear younger than they are to befriend and groom children, and then ask for information and/or images from them (e.g. nude or semi-nude photos). They can then use this to extort the child into sending money or sharing more sexual imagery, for example
- **Fake news and disinformation** – text-to-image tools can be used to create convincing fake photos of world events, which could be used to promote certain beliefs (including hateful ones)

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AI chatbot relationships – some AI tools allow children to chat and build a relationship with a fake person. Children can become emotionally dependent on the AI and these relationships can become very intense. The AI may also make dangerous or inappropriate suggestions, such as validating thoughts around self-harm and suicide

Signs to look out for

If your child is facing a safeguarding issue online, they might:

- Spend more time online, or more time offline
- Be up late online, or complain about being tired because they were online all night
- Receive a lot of messages and notifications on their phone
- Have stronger emotional responses or outbursts when they are online – they may get unusually angry, upset or distant after checking their phone or using their computer/tablet
- Be secretive about their use of the internet or a device – they may refuse to show you their phone or device, or refuse to tell you what they get up to online
- Become more withdrawn and distant from real-life relationships

What can we do at home?

We talk about the risks of AI in school, but this is always more effective if the conversations happen at home, too.

You can help keep your child safe by:

- **Talking about AI** – you can talk about both what it's good for, and where it can be more dangerous
- **Set clear expectations** – put in place rules and limits around how your child uses AI to help make sure it's used safely
- **Being aware of what they're doing online** – most social media apps have ways for parents/carers to monitor their child's activity
- **Listening to them** if they tell you anything that's worrying them – don't blame them for anything that has happened

Sources

This factsheet was produced by The Key Safeguarding**: thekeysupport.com/safeguarding**

- With thanks to education expert Aaron King for his help with this content
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026, GOV.UK
- What are AI chatbots and companions?, Internet Matters

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