

Me & AI

Children and young people's report

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

CHILD & YOUTH FRIENDLY GOVERNANCE PROJECT

child rights connect

5RIGHTS FOUNDATION

Digital Futures For Children
Research at LSE and 5Rights Foundation

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

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> WE, AS THE GENERATION MOST AFFECTED BY EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, DESERVE A SEAT AT THE TABLE IN AI GOVERNANCE.
>
> TO MAKE THAT POSSIBLE, WE MUST INVEST IN DIGITAL EDUCATION AND CRITICAL THINKING, ENSURING THAT YOUNG PEOPLE NOT ONLY KNOW HOW TO USE AI, BUT ALSO UNDERSTAND IT.
>
> IF WE HELP SHAPE THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY, WE CAN HELP SHAPE THE ENTIRE FUTURE IT CREATES.

– DAVID, PORTUGAL

Foreword

We are a group of children and young people bringing forward the voices and experiences of our peers around the world. We helped analyse what children told us in a global consultation about artificial intelligence, or AI, and worked together to develop the recommendations in this report.

This report exists because AI is already part of children's lives. Many of us use AI to learn, find information, be creative, translate, play, and express our ideas. AI can be helpful. It can make information easier to access, support learning, and give us new ways to create text, images, music, and other things.

But AI also brings risks. We are worried about fake information, unsafe content, misuse of personal data, manipulation, addiction, and AI replacing human relationships, creativity, or decision-making. We also know that children are often affected by AI systems without being asked what we think or what we need.

We want adults to understand that children are not only users of AI. We have lived experience. We know firsthand how AI affects our learning, friendships, families, safety, privacy, and future opportunities. That is why children must be involved when AI is designed, regulated, and used.

We are excited about the possibilities of AI, but we also believe it must be designed and used with our rights in mind. AI should support people, not replace them. It should help us think, create, and learn, not take away our skills, choices, or relationships.

In this report, you will find what children told us about how they use AI, what they like about it, what worries them, what they believe must be protected, and what actions they want adults to take within governments, technology companies, schools and organisations. We ask decision-makers to take our reflections and recommendations seriously when creating laws, policies, products, and other decisions about AI. Children have clear ideas and concrete solutions. We want an AI future that is safe, fair, transparent, respectful of our rights, and shaped with us, not just for us.

This is not only a report about risks. It is also a report about hope. If adults listen to us and act responsibly, AI can become a tool that helps build a better, safer, and more inclusive future for everyone.

AMELIE, UNITED KINGDOM
CEDRICK, KENYA
DANIEL, SPAIN
DAVID, PORTUGAL
DIANAH, KENYA
FAISAL, GERMANY
HAYDN, UNITED KINGDOM
MARIA, PORTUGAL
MERCY, NIGERIA
PALOMA, ARGENTINA
SARA, SLOVENIA
SAVERA, NEW ZEALAND
SHEREEN, INDONESIA

Foreword from the supporting organisations

Children are the population most likely to be affected by AI over the course of their lifetimes and by the ways in which it is developed, used, and governed.

As children are already using AI, and will continue to grow up alongside increasingly powerful AI systems, it is essential that their rights, experiences, and perspectives are reflected in discussions and decisions on AI governance. The choices made today about how AI is designed, regulated, and deployed will shape the opportunities, risks, and environments children encounter throughout their lives.

Children have a right to be heard in decisions that affect them. Ensuring their meaningful participation in AI governance is therefore not only a matter of rights, but also of good policymaking. Children bring unique insights into how AI is being used in their daily lives, the opportunities it creates, the risks it poses, and the safeguards they believe are needed. That is why we joined forces to provide children with a platform to share their experiences, concerns, and recommendations as part of the United Nations Global Dialogue on AI Governance and other policy discussions on how AI is used and regulated.

We will let this report and the recommendations developed by children speak for themselves. Here, we simply wish to express our heartfelt appreciation to the more than 1,000 children who participated in the survey consultations, and to the children and young people who analysed the findings and helped formulate the recommendations presented in this report. Their insights and recommendations demonstrate that children are not only already affected by AI in many ways but also have valuable perspectives on how it should be developed and governed.

We encourage decision-makers in governments, technology companies, and other organisations to carefully consider the views and recommendations presented in this report as they develop policies, standards, and governance frameworks for AI. Only by listening to children will it be possible to build AI systems that are safe, inclusive, supportive of their development, and respectful of their rights.

Recommendations

1 Establish clear laws and accountability to address the risks of AI

Children want stronger laws and safeguards to protect them from the risks of AI. They are particularly concerned about fake information, privacy violations, impersonation, and manipulation. Children call on AI companies recognise their responsibility, prevent harm, and protect children's safety in the design of their products; and governments and international organisations to enforce clear laws and rules that protect children's rights, safety, privacy and personal data.

2 Design AI that is safe, transparent, and respects children's rights

Children believe that safety and privacy should be built into AI systems from the start, rather than placing the responsibility on children and parents to protect themselves.

Children call on AI systems to protect children from harmful content, manipulation, privacy risks, and excessive use. Children also want greater transparency about when AI is being used and how it influences their experience. AI-generated content should be clearly labelled, and children should have simple ways to report concerns and access human support when needed.

3 Support parents and caregivers to navigate AI alongside children

Children recommend that parents and caregivers have access to information, guidance, and support that helps them understand AI, identify risks, and have informed conversations with children. Children call on schools, communities, and governments to support families to navigate AI and help children know where to turn when they encounter problems online.

4 Teach children how to use and engage with AI safely and responsibly

Children want every child to receive basic education about AI, including how it works, how to use it safely, and how to benefit from the opportunities it offers. Children call on schools and adults to teach them about misinformation, online safety, bias, privacy, algorithms, and how personal information is collected and used.

5 Strengthen critical thinking skills

Children do not want AI to replace thinking. They call on education systems to help them develop the skills needed to question information, form their own opinions, and make informed decisions. Children believe learning about AI should go beyond identifying AI-generated content. They want support to ask questions such as: Why am I being shown this? Who created it? What is it trying to make me think, feel, or do? They also call on education systems to encourage independent thinking, creativity, and problem-solving so that AI supports learning rather than doing the thinking for them.

6 Design AI to strengthen human capabilities and wellbeing, not to replace relationships and human judgment

Children believe AI should be designed to support human capabilities and wellbeing, not replace relationships, care, creativity, or human judgement.

Children are clear that AI should never replace family relationships, friendships, teachers, doctors, therapists, or important decisions made by people. They call for AI to be designed with human wellbeing at its centre and used as a tool that helps people learn, create, and connect.

7 Reduce addictive design and over-reliance on AI

Children are concerned that AI systems may encourage people to spend too much time using them and encourage them to become too dependent on it.

Children call for stronger action to prevent addictive design and reduce features that encourage excessive use. AI systems should include safeguards that encourage people to think independently, maintain healthy habits, and seek support from trusted people when facing emotional, mental health, or personal challenges.

8 Strengthen human connections and support

Children want stronger opportunities for connection, belonging, and support in their families, schools, and communities.

Children call for safe and accessible ways to discuss negative experiences with AI and receive support from trusted adults. They also want greater investment in programmes and spaces that strengthen friendships, family relationships, wellbeing, and social connection. AI should complement human support, not replace it.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly becoming an increasingly prominent part of children's lives.[1] It is changing how children learn, relate, communicate, create, play, and access information. As AI continues to develop, adults around the world are making important choices about how it should be governed - decisions that will affect whether or not AI is designed and used in ways that are safe, fair, and respectful children's rights.

To inform global discussions around AI - and contribute to the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance - a coalition of organisations (Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on Violence Against Children, Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project, 5Rights Foundation, Child Rights Connect, and the Digital Futures Commission) invited children from around the world to share their experiences, concerns, and recommendations regarding AI.

This report presents children's perspectives on AI and the steps they want governments, tech companies, and other decision-makers to take. The recommendations presented in this report reflect their vision for an AI future that is safe, transparent, inclusive, and centred on children's and everyone's rights.

Methodology

The consultation process

A Children and Young People's Reference Group was established to help shape the survey, analyse the findings, develop recommendations, and inform this report. The Group consisted of 14 children and young people from the advisory boards of the Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project and the 5Rights Foundation.

The consultation centred on a global survey and follow-up focus group discussions with the Reference Group. The survey questionnaire was developed based on themes identified through previous consultations with children, as well as suggestions provided by the Reference Group. The survey uses terms and language that would be accessible for children.

A total of 1,128 children aged 10–17 from all regions of the world responded to the survey, sharing how they use AI, what they value about it, what concerns them, and what changes they would like to see.

The survey findings were subsequently reviewed and discussed during two focus group discussions with the Reference Group. Facilitated by the Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project and the 5Rights Foundation, these discussions enabled children and young people to interpret the findings, identify key themes emerging from the responses, and shape the recommendations presented in this report.

[1] When we use the terms "child" or "children", we refer to individuals under the age of 18 as defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 1.

Report development

This report was developed based on the survey findings and contributions from the focus group discussions. While the supporting organisations assisted with drafting and editing the report, its findings, messages, and recommendations are drawn from the views and contributions of the participating children and young people. The Children and Young People's Reference Group also reviewed and provided input on the report.

Follow up and accountability

The Reference Group and supporting organisations will continue to collaborate on the dissemination and presentation of the Me & AI Report and its recommendations, including at upcoming policy events related to AI governance.

Children who participated in the survey will be able to follow updates and developments through the report website, where information on follow-up activities and next steps will be shared.

Safeguarding

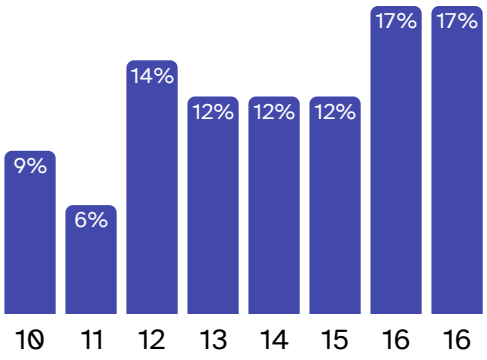
The engagement with children and young people was governed by the safeguarding policies and procedures of the Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project and the 5Rights Foundation. Meetings with the Reference Group were facilitated by trained participation and safeguarding specialists, and participants were regularly briefed on safeguarding measures and support mechanisms. The supporting organisations also agreed on a set of safeguarding measures to ensure children's safety throughout the consultation process.

Safeguarding was also a key consideration in the survey design. To protect respondents' privacy and wellbeing, all questions were multiple-choice, no personally identifiable information was collected, participants were directed to local helplines should they require support, and explicit consent was sought before participation.

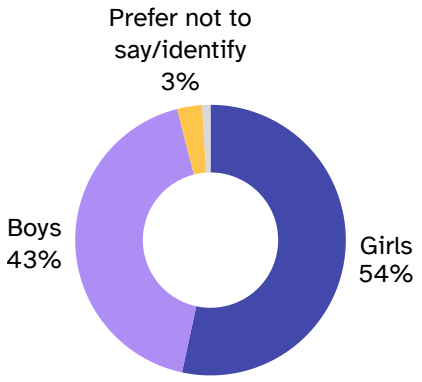
Children consulted

1,084 children aged 10 to 17 from 49 different countries across all continents responded to the survey.

Age



Gender





The value of AI

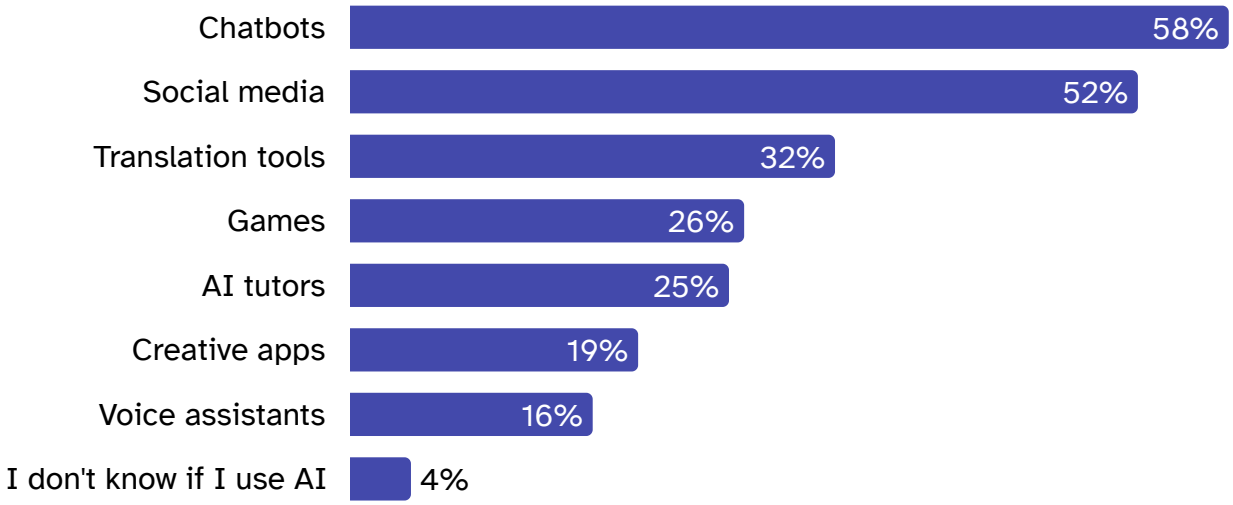
Key message

Children are already growing up with AI at school, online, and in everyday life. They value AI as a tool that can support learning and creativity – while also recognising that it presents risks.

AI in children's lives

Children are exposed to or use AI in many aspects of their lives. More than half of the children consulted report using chatbots or social media (Figure 1). In reality - the number exposed to AI through social media is likely much higher, as many children may not realise that content is shaped by AI-powered algorithms. More than one in four children also report using AI through translation tools, games, or AI tutors.

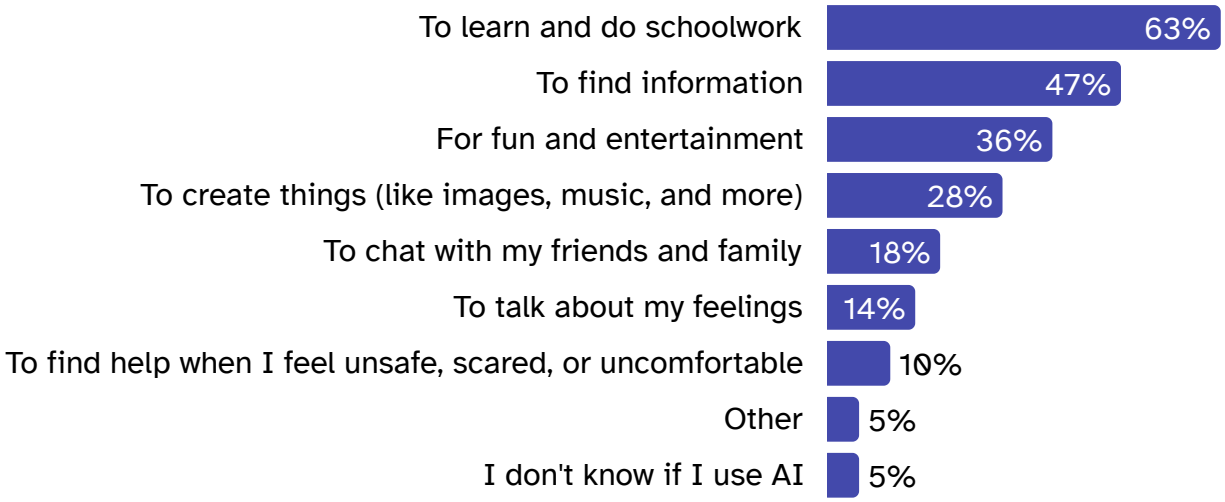
Figure 1. AI tools used by children:



Why and how children use AI

According to survey findings, learning is one of the most common uses of AI among children: more than half of the children responding to the survey report using AI to support their learning and schoolwork (Figure 2). In discussions with the Children and Young People's Reference Group, children and young people described using AI to explain difficult concepts, answer clarifying questions, and help generate ideas for creative assignments. Findings also reveal that AI is also widely used as a source of information, with 47% of children reporting that they use it to find information.

Figure 2. How children use AI:

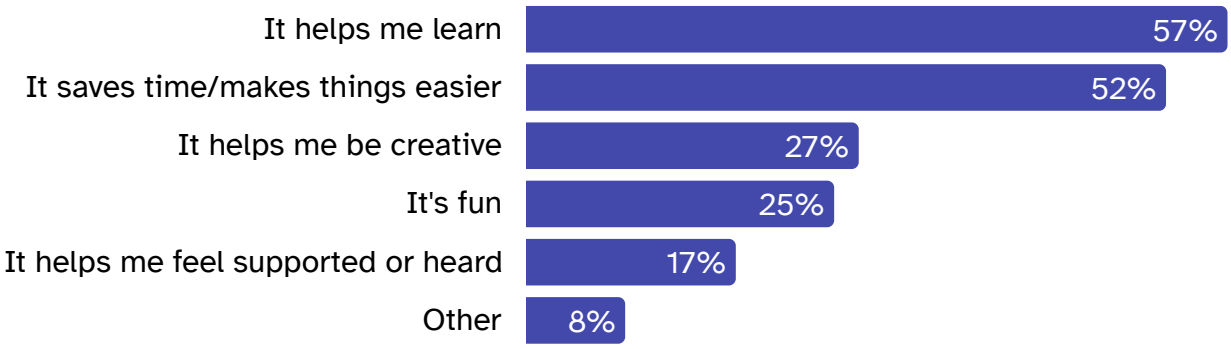


For some children, AI was also used to chat with friends and family (18%), or to talk about feelings using AI chatbots or other tools (14%). 1 in 10 children also used it to seek help when feeling unsafe. (See below, *Human connection & wellbeing* for more.)

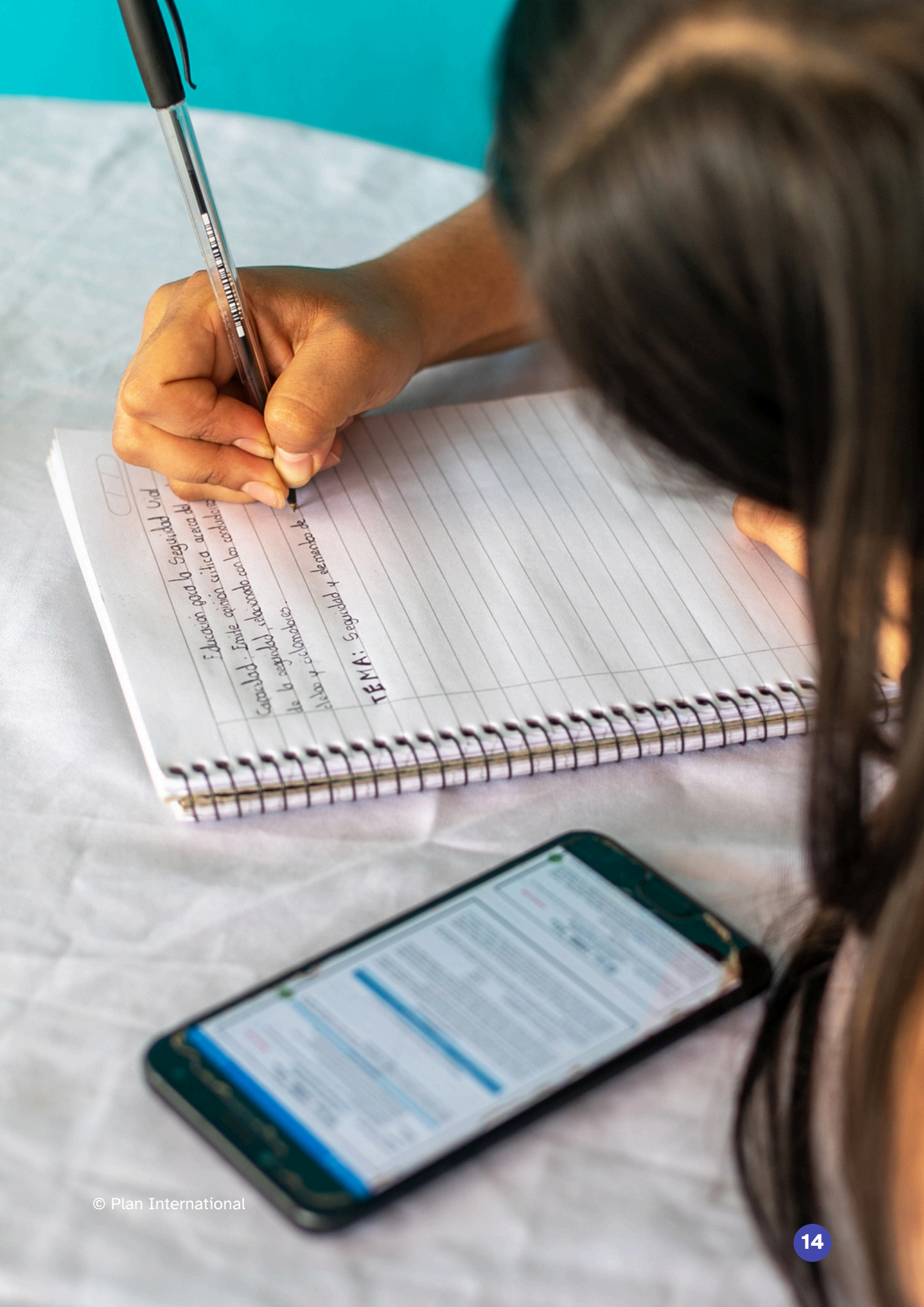
The benefits of AI

Survey responses indicate that children see many benefits in using AI. More than half of the children shared that they like using AI because it helps them learn, saves time and makes things easier. Around one in four children indicate that they enjoy AI because it helps them be creative and is fun to use. A significant number of children (17%) also responded that AI helps them feel supported or heard (see below, *Human connection & wellbeing* for more).

Figure 3. What children like about AI:



> *I like that AI is weaving all this information from everywhere and bringing it close to you on your computer.*
>
> *- Dianah, Kenya*



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Protection from harm, manipulation, and misinformation

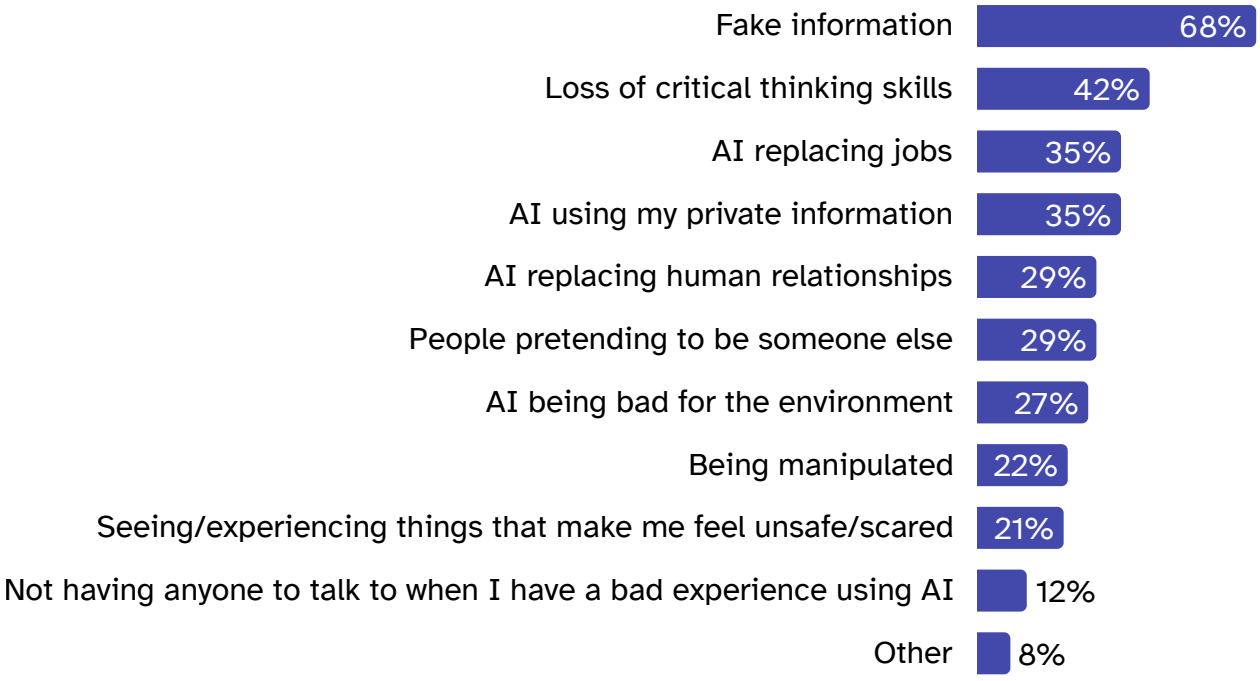
Key message

Children see significant risks in AI, particularly fake information, manipulation, and misuse of personal data. They want stronger safeguards, greater transparency, and clear accountability from AI companies, governments, and other actors to ensure AI respects and protects children's rights.

The fear of fake information

According to survey results, children's main concern about AI is fake information, which worries more than two thirds of children (68%) who responded to the survey (Figure 4). Many children are also concerned about losing critical thinking skills (42%), AI using their private information (35%), AI replacing jobs (35%), AI replacing human relationships (29%), and people using AI to pretend to be someone else (29%). (See chapter Human connection & wellbeing for more.)

Figure 4. What worries you MOST about AI?



Red lines for the use of AI

Children also identify clear “red lines” for AI. They say AI should never be allowed to:

1. Create fake images or videos of people – **60%**
2. Be designed in a way that manipulates children or makes them addicted – **53%**
3. Collect personal/private information and data – **53%**
4. Show children things that make them feel unsafe, scared, or uncomfortable – **52%**
5. Pretend to be someone else – **52%**
6. Target or manipulate children – **52%**
7. Be used without informing children about it – **40%**

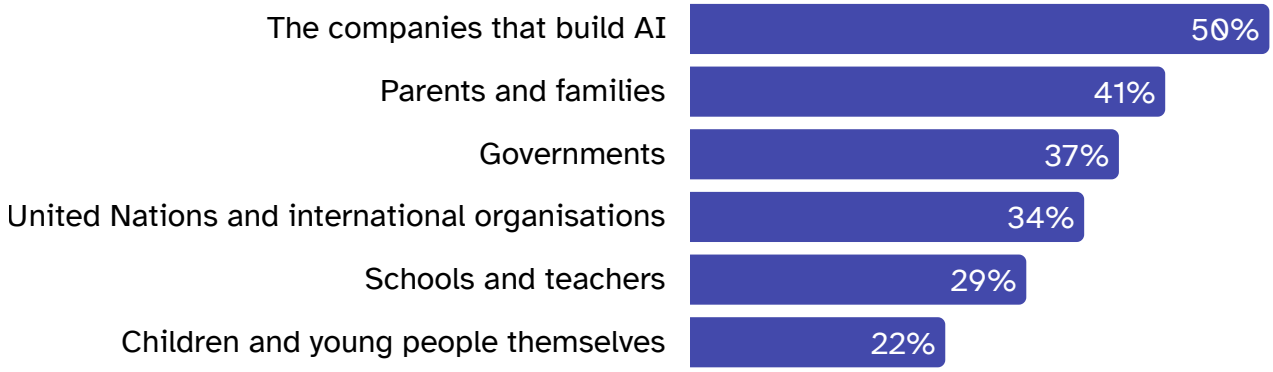
Responsibilities for making sure AI is safe

Children place the greatest responsibility for AI safety on the companies that develop AI. Half of survey respondents identified AI companies as the actors most responsible for ensuring that AI is safe for children (Figure 5). When asked what actions are needed to make AI safer for children, more than half (52%) called for better protection of privacy and personal information, while 41% said AI systems should be designed to be safe and suitable for children (Figure 9, Annex II). Reference Group members reinforced this view, calling on AI developers to prevent harm and prioritise children’s safety in the design of their products.

Governments were identified as another key actor, with 37% of respondents selecting them as having an important responsibility for AI safety (Figure 5). This is reflected in children’s policy priorities: over half (52%) called for stronger laws and regulations to ensure AI is safe for children (Figure 9, Annex II). One-third of respondents (33%) also saw international organisations, such as the United Nations, as playing an important role in protecting children in the age of AI (Figure 5).

Parents and family members were also seen as critical sources of support, with 41% of children identifying them as important for helping children stay safe (Figure 5). Reference Group members explained that parents and caregivers should ideally be the first people children turn to when they have a negative online experience and play an important role in guiding children's use of digital technologies. At the same time, many group members noted that parents do not always understand how AI works or the risks it can present, highlighting the need for greater transparency, awareness, and support for families.

Figure 5. Responsibilty for making sure that AI is safe and good for children should be on:



> *Historically parents were relied upon to decide on screen time limits, but AI is another new technology with unique dangers – so laws and regulations should be at the forefront of keeping children safe.*

- Amelie, United Kingdom

Recommendations

Establish clear laws and accountability to address the risks of AI

Children want stronger laws and safeguards to protect them from the risks of AI. They are particularly concerned about fake information, privacy violations, impersonation, and manipulation. Children call on AI companies recognise their responsibility, prevent harm, and protect children's safety in the design of their products; and governments and international organisations to enforce clear laws and rules that protect children's rights, safety, privacy and personal data.

Design AI that is safe, transparent, and respects children's rights

Children believe that safety and privacy should be built into AI systems from the start, rather than placing the responsibility on children and parents to protect themselves.

Children call on AI systems to protect children from harmful content, manipulation, privacy risks, and excessive use. Children also want greater transparency about when AI is being used and how it influences their experience. AI-generated content should be clearly labelled, and children should have simple ways to report concerns and access human support when needed.

Support parents and caregivers to navigate AI alongside children

Children recommend that parents and caregivers have access to information, guidance, and support that helps them understand AI, identify risks, and have informed conversations with children. Children call on schools, communities, and governments to support families to navigate AI and help children know where to turn when they encounter problems online.



Skills to navigate AI safely

Key message

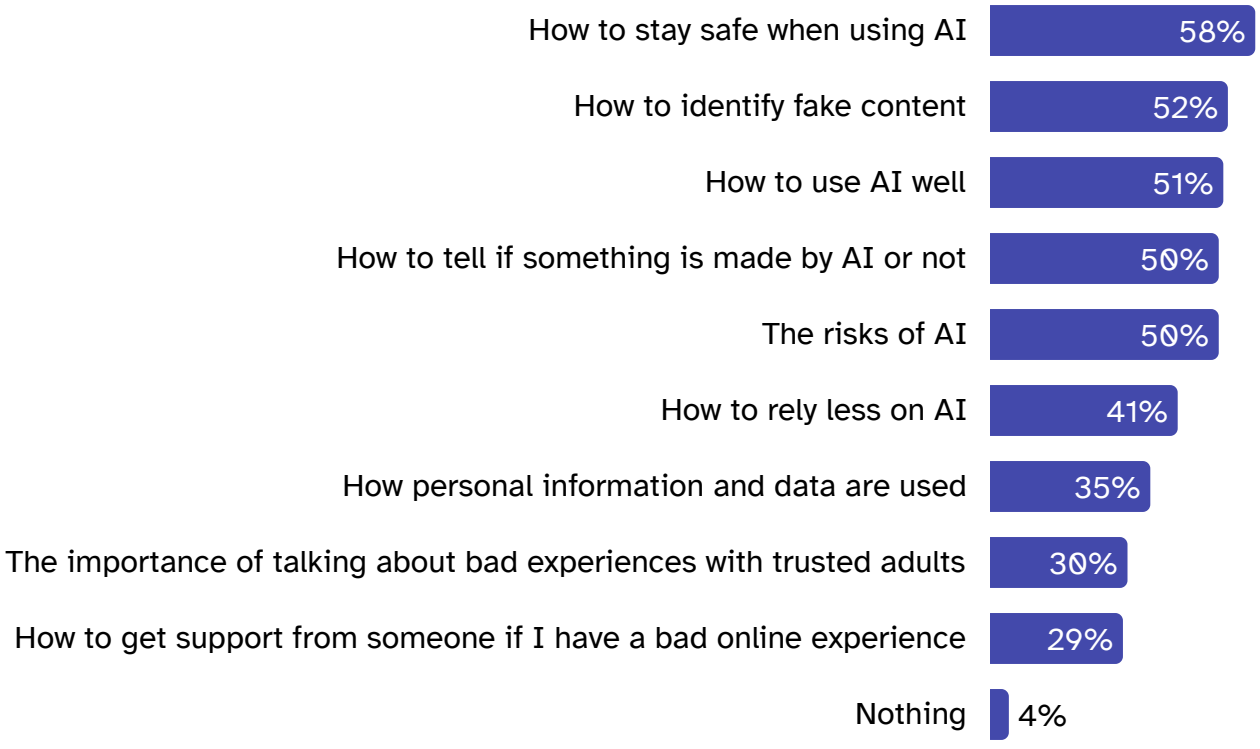
Children want skills, not just protection. They want to understand AI, use it well, recognise risks, and know how to get support when something goes wrong, and they also want to learn how to rely less on AI.

Empowering children with skills and knowledge about AI

Children are keen to learn more about AI, its opportunities, risks, and safe use. Over half of respondents call on governments and organisations to teach children how to use AI safely and identify AI-generated content (Figure 9, Annex II).

They are particularly interested in learning how to stay safe when using AI, recognise fake or AI-generated content, use AI well, and better understand the risks of AI (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Schools and adults should teach children...



Children in the Reference Group stressed that schools provide very little education, guidance, or support on navigating AI. They also highlighted that schools can play a critical role empowering children with skills and knowledge. Many feel they are expected to navigate AI tools on their own, despite their widespread use in learning and everyday life.

> *We, as the generation most affected by emerging technologies, deserve a seat at the table in AI governance. To make that possible, we must invest in digital education and critical thinking, ensuring that young people not only know how to use AI, but also understand it. If we help shape the beginning of the story, we can help shape the entire future it creates.*
>
> - David, Portugal

Strengthening critical thinking skills and job readiness

Children understand the impact AI has on their learning. More than four in ten are concerned about losing critical thinking skills (41%; Figure 4), and as many children want to learn how to rely less on AI (41%; Figure 6). Beyond the direct impact, more than a third (36%; Figure 4) are concerned about the impact of AI on future jobs.

During discussions in the Reference Group, children expressed concern that relying too much on AI for schoolwork, ideas, problem-solving, or decisions could reduce opportunities to think for themselves. Some felt that constantly turning to AI for answers could affect their creativity, confidence, and ability to make their own judgements.

> *One of the biggest risks is not that AI will make people less intelligent, but that it may slowly reduce the habit of struggling through difficult thinking, which is often where real understanding develops.*
>
> - Savera, New Zealand

For many children, this is why critical thinking is one of the most important skills for the AI era. They want education that goes beyond teaching them how to identify AI-generated content and instead helps them question information, recognise bias, understand why content is being shown to them, and make informed decisions about when and how to use AI.

Recommendations

Teach children how to use and engage with AI safely and responsibly

Children want every child to receive basic education about AI, including how it works, how to use it safely, and how to benefit from the opportunities it offers. Children call on schools and adults to teach them about misinformation, online safety, bias, privacy, algorithms, and how personal information is collected and used.

Strengthen critical thinking skills

Children do not want AI to replace thinking. They call on education systems to help them develop the skills needed to question information, form their own opinions, and make informed decisions. Children believe learning about AI should go beyond identifying AI-generated content. They want support to ask questions such as: Why am I being shown this? Who created it? What is it trying to make me think, feel, or do? They also call on education systems to encourage independent thinking, creativity, and problem-solving so that AI supports learning rather than doing the thinking for them.



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Human connection & wellbeing

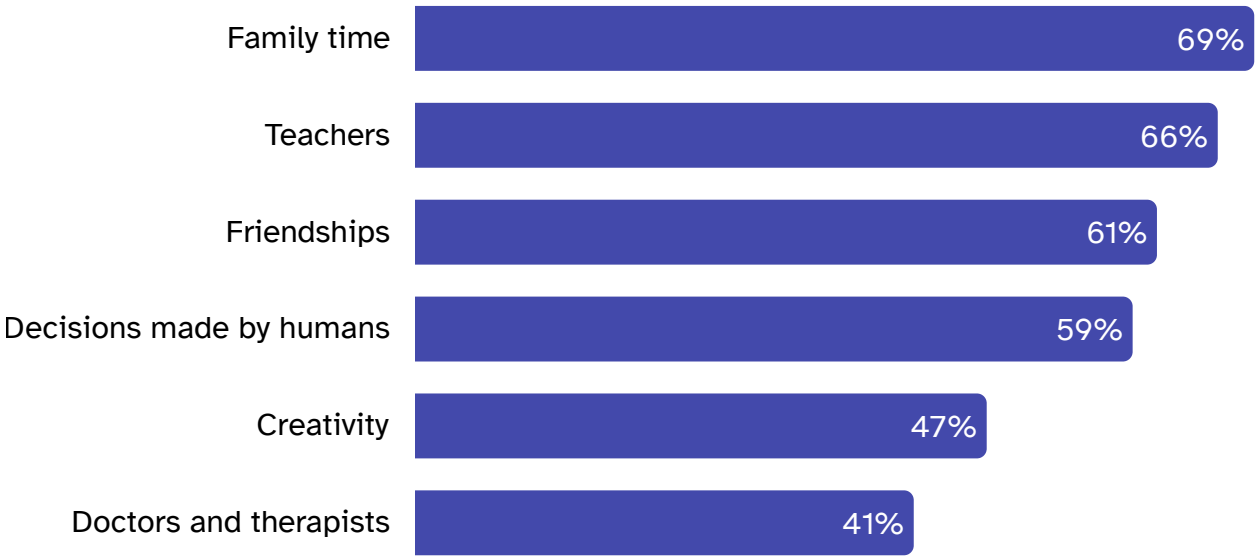
Key message

Children see the benefits of AI, but they do not want it to replace human relationships, care, protection, creativity, or important decisions made by people.

The impact of AI on relationships and wellbeing

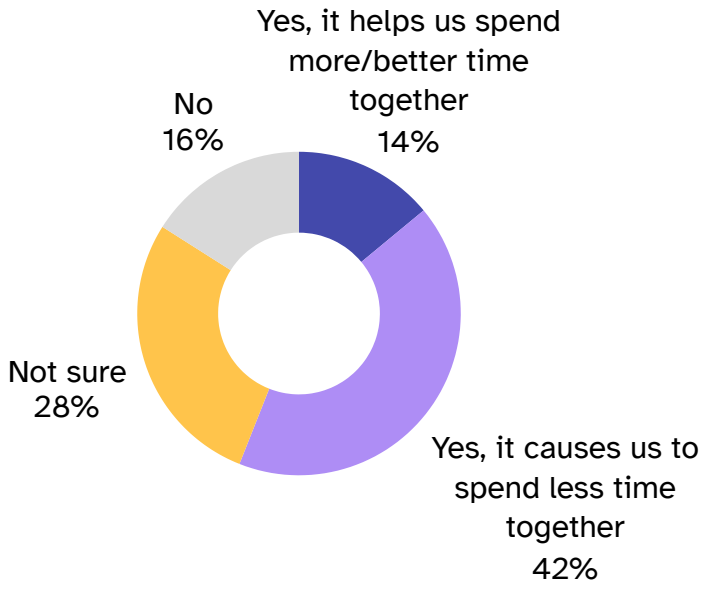
Nearly one-third of children responding to the survey (29%; Figure 4) are concerned about AI replacing human connections. While children feel that AI should never replace family time, teachers, friendships, and decisions made by humans, there is a bit more openness towards a role for AI when it comes to supporting creativity or seeking health advice and mental health support (Figure 7).

Figure 7. AI should never replace...



Four in ten of the consulted children indicate that AI already causes children to spend less time with friends or family (Figure 8). Only 14% feel that AI helps children spend more or better-quality time together with friends or family. A further 28% are unsure, suggesting that many children are still trying to understand the impact of AI on relationships and social connection.

Figure 8. Do you think AI affects how children spend time with friends or family?



> *I can't sit and talk with my parents or my brothers in the same way because of AI. I no longer have a reason to go and ask them, 'What is this?' because I can just ask AI instead. That is not a good thing. It's making family relationships more difficult. You can see families sitting together, but everyone is on their phone instead of talking to each other.*
>
> - Mercy, Nigeria

Using AI for emotional support

Some children report using AI to talk about their feelings (14%) or seek help when they feel unsafe, scared, or uncomfortable (10%; Figure 2). Others say AI helps them feel listened to or understood (17%; Figure 3). These findings suggest that, in some situations, children view AI as a source of comfort, information, or guidance when other sources of support may not be available.

In discussions, Reference Group members highlighted that children's use of AI for emotional support reflects broader challenges related to isolation, loneliness, and a lack of meaningful human connection.

> *The society is making people turn to AI because they don't feel like they are connected to their society, with their family, with their friends. If we want to have a good relationship with AI, we need to make sure that people have a good relationship with each other.*
>
> - Maria, Portugal

At the same time, Reference Group members are also very concerned about children relying too heavily on AI for emotional support or using it as a substitute for friends, family and teachers. While some of them say they seek support in chatbots, they are also concerned about the quality of the support AI provides – in particular AI generated advice that can be directly harmful. Some children also worry that AI may not respond in helpful or safe ways when they are upset, struggling, or seeking support, and that there should be better safeguards in place to ensure children receive appropriate help and protection.

> *At the end of the day, you get the best advice from people who are close to you.*
>
> - Sara, Slovenia

Finally, the Reference Group also reflected on the importance of children being able to safely and comfortably seek support when having bad experiences using AI. These concerns are also reflected in the survey findings, where over a third of children (36%; Figure 9, Annex II) call for stronger support systems to make it easier and safer for children to discuss negative experiences with AI.

Promoting a healthy relationship with AI

Children also raise concerns about addiction[1] and over-reliance on AI. More than half say AI should never be designed in a way that manipulates children or makes them addicted (53%), and almost just as many (46%) recommend that countries and organisations should prevent dependency on AI tools (Figure 9, Annex II).

In Reference Group discussions, children highlight that it is easy to become over-reliant on AI from daily interactions to schoolwork, as chatbots are adapted to keep them engaged.

> *It's a database where we can search all the information and the answers are tailored to our exact way of thinking, exact way of liking the world, and conformed to what we want to see and what we want to hear. It's like a little mirror that will always tell you what you want. It's impossible to turn away from it.*
>
> - Maria, Portugal

[1] The term "addiction" is used here because it was the language children themselves used to describe their experiences and concerns. While the term has a specific clinical meaning, it is not used in this report as a diagnosis, but rather to convey children's perceptions of unhealthy or excessive engagement with AI systems.

Recommendations

Design AI to strengthen human capabilities and wellbeing, not to replace relationships and human judgment

Children believe AI should be designed to support human capabilities and wellbeing, not replace relationships, care, creativity, or human judgement.

Children are clear that AI should never replace family relationships, friendships, teachers, doctors, therapists, or important decisions made by people. They call for AI to be designed with human wellbeing at its centre and used as a tool that helps people learn, create, and connect.

Reduce addictive design and over-reliance on AI

Children are concerned that AI systems may encourage people to spend too much time using them and encourage them to become too dependent on it.

Children call for stronger action to prevent addictive design and reduce features that encourage excessive use. AI systems should include safeguards that encourage people to think independently, maintain healthy habits, and seek support from trusted people when facing emotional, mental health, or personal challenges.

Strengthen human connections and support

Children want stronger opportunities for connection, belonging, and support in their families, schools, and communities.

Children call for safe and accessible ways to discuss negative experiences with AI and receive support from trusted adults. They also want greater investment in programmes and spaces that strengthen friendships, family relationships, wellbeing, and social connection. AI should complement human support, not replace it.


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