

## Parents and carers

# How AI is influencing new online risks for children and young people

This webinar summary outlines the nature and influence of generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI).

Gen AI is **changing how** children and young people experience the online world in powerful ways. AI systems are embedded throughout online spaces and influence what children and young people **see, think, feel,** and **how they form connections.**

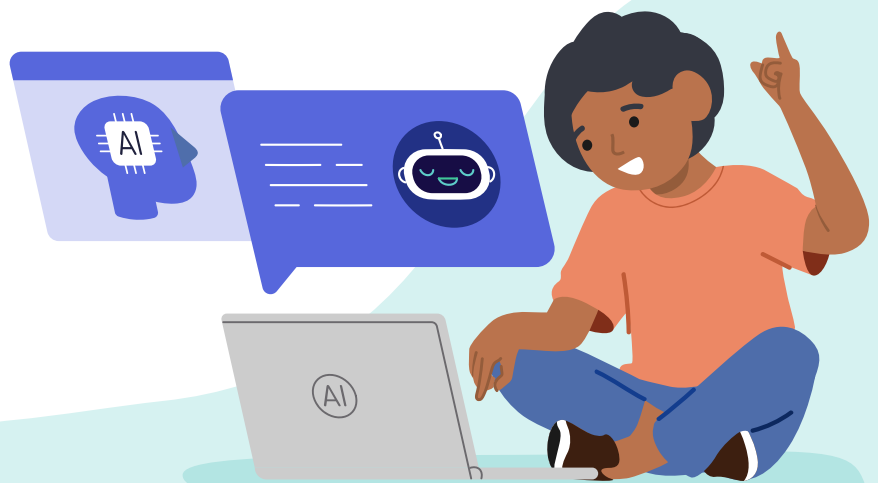
**Deepfakes** (extremely realistic – though fake – images or videos that show a real person doing or saying something that they did not actually do or say), and AI-driven **disinformation**, are making it increasingly difficult for young people to tell what's real and what to trust online.

The more we understand how these systems work, the better we can **support** children and young people to use them safely and with confidence.

## The difference between human and artificial intelligence

Even though it's called 'artificial intelligence', **Gen AI doesn't think or understand like a human.**

- Gen AI is a technology that **learns patterns** from vast amounts of data and uses this information to create **new** text, images, audio, or video.
- It appears intelligent but has **no understanding or self-awareness.** It makes statistically informed **guesses and predictions** to create content.
- In contrast, human intelligence is shaped by experience, emotion, context, and ethical judgement.



## Engagement with AI

Young people and adults are engaging with AI tools and technologies in different ways.

- Young people adopt new AI tools **faster** than adults but are **more vulnerable** to harm.
- Adults are **more cautious** in their engagement but have **stronger critical thinking** skills to navigate potential harms.

## AI and influence

AI influencers are a common feature of online spaces, influencing young people in both positive and negative ways. Their presence is expected to grow, as they are relatively low-cost, easily managed, and always active.

**Positive impacts** of AI influencers include:

- supporting health and fitness
- encouraging passions and interests
- broadening worldview
- enhancing self-image
- helping young people feel part of a community.

**Negative impacts** of AI influencers include:

- unhealthy body and social comparisons
- exposure to harmful ideologies and narratives
- an increased focus on food and fitness in unhealthy ways.

**AI influencers can produce content 24/7**, across platforms, language and time zones, capturing and holding young people's attention. And it's holding that attention that drives profits for these platforms.

## AI and attachment

AI companion chatbots and toys are designed to build ongoing and personalised connections with children and young people. While these systems can feel engaging and supportive, they also increase the risk of unhealthy emotional attachment to technology rather than real people.

- **AI-enabled toys** use personalities and engagement techniques to keep children interacting for longer. This can expose children to harmful or inappropriate content and may affect social development at a critical stage.
- **AI companion apps** create immersive experiences that mimic human relationships, including intimate or emotionally dependent interactions. They can disrupt social and emotional development and may provide misleading or harmful health and relationship advice.
- **Privacy risks** – children and young people's personal information may be collected and used to train AI systems. Data storage and protection practices are often unclear and vary widely between platforms.

## AI and content

AI tools are making it easier to create and spread **low-quality and unsafe** content, including children's videos, deepfakes, disinformation, and online harassment.

- **Children's videos** – cheap and fast AI production can flood platforms with repetitive, low-quality content. Some videos include unsafe or disturbing themes disguised as child-friendly material.
- **Deepfakes** – many AI platforms can create highly realistic images, video, and audio.
  - **Explicit deepfakes** can be created using 'nudify' apps, with minimal skill and effort. Young people targeted by this content often report significant **psychological, emotional and social harm**.
  - **Non-sexual deepfake content** can be used for **disinformation** and **harassment**, overwhelming individuals online, and causing serious distress.

## Agentic AI

Agentic AI systems are semi or fully **autonomous**, meaning they can plan, decide, act and adapt on behalf of a user with **minimal supervision**. Unlike Gen AI, which responds only to **human prompts**, agentic AI can initiate actions and make **decisions independently**.

## Preparing young people for AI

These are three foundational skills that will help support **children and young people** to navigate an AI-driven digital world with confidence.

- **'Question what you see'** – build healthy curiosity and scepticism by exploring technologies and tools together.
- **'Protect what you share'** – keep personal details out of prompts, uploads and conversation with AI tools.
- **'Talk about what doesn't feel right'** – encourage children and young people to speak up when something feels uncomfortable or concerning.

## Report online harm

If a child experiences online harm, such as cyberbullying or image-based abuse, you can help them report the material to the platform and/or eSafety. Even if your child is under 16 and the cyberbullying happens on an age-restricted social media platform, encourage them to report it. They won't get into trouble for being on the platform. Find out more at [Social media age restrictions and your family](#).

When reporting to eSafety, context matters:

- Include information about the impact of the harm, and any vulnerabilities the child may have.
- A trusted adult can be authorised to report on behalf of a child or young person.

### [Report forms](#)

### [How to collect evidence](#)

### [What you can report to eSafety](#)

# eSafety information links

[The eSafety Guide](#)

[Social media age restrictions hub](#)

[Advisories and blogposts](#)

[AI companions: information sheet](#)

[AI chatbots and companions – risks to children and young people](#)

[eSafety media: report shows AI companions are putting children at risk](#)

## References

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