

Parenting in the Age of AI

Help your child use AI without
outsourcing their thinking.

*What to give your kids, what to control, and the habits that
matter more than any setting.*



What to
give kids



What to
control



Habits
that last

By

Shahzad Badar

Solution Architect · GenAI Consultant

think.buildershub.io

October 2026 edition

Before you begin

Your child is already using AI, or will be soon. Banning it doesn't last; it's on their phones, inside school tools and built into the apps they love. Ignoring it doesn't work either. This guide has one goal: **help your child use AI without outsourcing their thinking.**

85%

of kids aged 9 to 17 say they've used AI for schoolwork. More than half say no parent has ever talked to them about using it safely.

Source: 2026 survey reported by Education Week

QUESTION 1

What should I give my child?

Which tools, at what age, for what use.

QUESTION 2

What should I control?

Which settings, rules and boundaries actually work.

CONTENTS

PART 1 · WHAT TO GIVE KIDS

01	A tool, not a shortcut	3
02	What to give, by age	4
03	Good things kids can build	5
04	Homework without copying	6
05	Teaching kids to question AI	7

PART 2 · WHAT TO CONTROL

06	Control helps, but isn't enough	8
07	ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude	9
08	Setting it up for your family	10
09	Privacy: what never to share	11
10	Boundaries and healthy habits	12
11	Other control options	13

12	Part 3 · Guiding your child: six conversations to have at home	14
----	--	----

TOOLS AND APPENDIX

Family AI Agreement	16	Setup: ChatGPT	18	Where kids learn AI	20
One-week quick start	17	Setup: Gemini, Claude	19	Keep learning	21

What to give kids

Building habits that make AI a helper, not a crutch.

01 A tool, not a shortcut

AI is a powerful helper. It can explain a hard idea five different ways, quiz your child before a test, and turn a story idea into a picture book. Used badly, it does the homework, writes the essay and does the thinking. The difference isn't the tool. It's the habit.

THE ONE QUESTION TO TEACH

“Did AI help me think, or did AI think for me?”

If your child can explain the answer in their own words without the screen, AI helped. If they can't, AI did the work.

Three things we want for our kids

Curiosity

AI should open more questions, not close them.

Effort first

Try it yourself, then ask for help.

Judgment

AI is often right and sometimes confidently wrong. Kids must learn to check.

02

What to give, by age

Age matters far more than the tool. Under 13, AI is something you do *together*. Teens can use it on their own, inside rules you set.

AGE	WHAT TO GIVE	AVOID
<div>Under 8</div> <div>Parent at the keyboard</div>	Shared use on your device. Ask questions together; make stories and pictures together.	Any account in the child's name. Voice assistants left alone with the child.
<div>8 to 12</div> <div>Parent nearby</div>	A kid-designed app, or Gemini through Google Family Link. Short, purposeful sessions. Review history weekly.	Adult chatbots on their own. AI “friend” or companion apps.
<div>13 to 15</div> <div>Linked controls</div>	ChatGPT for Teens linked to your account, or Gemini with Family Link. Study mode for homework.	Late-night use. Companion and role-play bots. Sharing personal details.
<div>16 to 17</div> <div>Check-ins, not checks</div>	Mainstream tools with teen protections on. More independence, same family rules.	Using AI to replace sleep, friends or real help.

EACH COMPANY SETS ITS OWN MINIMUM AGE

ChatGPT · 13+

Parent permission under 18

Gemini · under 13

Only through a parent's Family Link account

Claude · 18+

No path for younger users

03 Good things kids can build

The best uses put your child in the driver's seat: AI helps them *make* something, not consume something. Each card has a prompt your child can try today.

Study planner

"I have a science test Friday on the water cycle. Make me a 4-day plan, 20 minutes a day."

Flashcards and quizzes

"Quiz me on these notes, one question at a time. Don't tell me the answer until I try."

Explain it differently

"Explain fractions using pizza. I'm 10."

Stories

"Help me write a story about a dragon who is afraid of fire. Ask me what happens next."

Games

"Play 20 questions with me. You think of an animal."

Simple apps

"Help me make a chore chart my family can tick off." (Build it together with a parent.)

Notice the pattern. The best prompts ask AI to ask questions back, go one step at a time or wait for the child to try first.

THREE PROMPT HABITS WORTH TEACHING

1. Say who you are

"I'm in 6th grade."

2. Say how to help

"A hint, not the answer."

3. Ask for a check

"How can I check this?"

04 Homework without copying

The question parents ask most. The honest answer: it depends on *how* AI is used, not whether.

Use the built-in study modes

ChatGPT Study Mode

Hints, questions and step-by-step checks. Teens also get Study Hours, when it stays on.

Gemini Guided Learning

Breaks topics into lesson-like steps with short quizzes.

Claude Learning Mode

The strictest about not giving answers, but Claude is for adults 18+.

Careful: these modes aren't locks. A student can usually switch study mode off, and it can still slip and give an answer. Family rules matter more than features.

The “try first, then ask” rule

1

Try it yourself first, even if it's wrong.

2

Ask AI where you're stuck, not for everything.

3

Ask for a hint or a similar example.

4

Explain it back to a parent, in your own words.

Signs AI is doing the work

- Perfect homework your child can't explain out loud
- Writing that suddenly doesn't sound like them
- An hour's work done in minutes
- Test scores dropping while homework scores stay high

Don't start with punishment. Ask them to walk you through one answer.

ASK THE SCHOOL

AI rules often differ by teacher. At the next meeting, ask: *When is AI allowed, and how should my child say they used it?*

05 Teaching kids to question AI

AI doesn't know when it's wrong. It can invent a fact, a quote, a book title or a math step, and say it with total confidence. Experts call this *hallucination*. Kids need to know it's normal, not rare.

SAY IT SIMPLY

“AI is like a well-read friend who sometimes makes things up when it isn't sure, and doesn't tell you.”

The CHECK habit: five questions before trusting an answer

- C** **Could this be wrong?** Facts, numbers, names and dates are the riskiest.
- H** **How do I know?** Did it give a source I can open?
- E** **Explain it.** Can I say it in my own words?
- C** **Compare.** Does a textbook, teacher or trusted website say the same?
- K** **Keep asking.** “Are you sure? What might be wrong with this answer?”

A 10-minute activity: catch AI being wrong

- 1 Ask a question you already know the answer to: your town, your family, a recent event.
- 2 Look together at what it got right and wrong.
- 3 Give it a math word problem; check the arithmetic by hand.
- 4 Ask: “What if you'd copied that into your homework?”

Kids remember the moment they catch AI being wrong. It builds more healthy skepticism than any lecture.

What to control

The settings that exist today, and what they can't do.

06 Control helps, but isn't enough

Settings are the seatbelt, not the driver. A determined child can work around every control in this booklet:

A second account

A friend's phone

A logged-out browser

Cellular data instead of home Wi-Fi

So think of control in three layers

1

Product settings

Teen modes and parental controls inside ChatGPT, Gemini and others.

Buys you time

2

Device and network settings

Which apps and websites the child's device can reach at all.

Buys you time

3

Family rules and trust

What your child agrees to, and how often you talk about it.

Works everywhere

Layer 3 is what still works at a friend's house. Use all three, and tell your child honestly what you can and can't see.

07

ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude for kids

ChatGPT and Gemini both have real options for younger users, but neither lets parents see or control everything. Claude isn't meant for anyone under 18.

AS OF OCT 2026	ChatGPT	Gemini	Claude
Minimum age	13+, with parent permission under 18	Under 13 only via a parent-managed Family Link account; teens allowed	18+, no parental-consent path
Kid or teen mode	ChatGPT for Teens; turns on automatically when age info or age prediction says under 18	Gemini for supervised child accounts in Family Link	None; age checks enforced, sometimes with selfie or ID
How parents connect	Parent and teen link accounts; both must accept	Parent manages the child's Google account	Not available
What parents control	Quiet Hours, Study Hours, voice, image generation, memory, Study Mode, model training	Gemini on or off, first-use alert, screen-time limits	Not available
Can parents read chats?	No. Only limited safety alerts in high-risk situations	Some visibility via Family Link; check your current settings	Not available
Learning mode	Study Mode	Guided Learning	Learning Mode (adults)
Biggest gap	A teen can use it logged out, with no controls at all	You may not know it's in use until the first-use alert	Teens may lie about their age

Settings change often. Check each company's help pages for the latest. Sources are listed on page 17.

08 Setting it up for your family

What the comparison means in practice, by age. Full step-by-step guides with tick-boxes are on pages 18 and 19.

Under 13: Gemini with Family Link

THE ONLY MAINSTREAM OPTION

Turn Gemini on deliberately, or switch it off. Either way, decide; don't let it switch on by default.

Family Link app → Your child → Controls → Gemini

13 to 17: link ChatGPT for Teens

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Settings → Parental Controls; invite your teen to link | ☐ Set Quiet Hours for nights |
| ☐ Turn on Study Hours for homework time | ☐ Turn off model training on their chats |

If your teen unlinks, you're notified. You still won't see their chats, so tell them that honestly.

Claude: use it together

It isn't a kids' product. If your teen wants to use it, sit with them on your account.

ONE MORE YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Character.AI, the companion-chat app popular with teens, removed open-ended chat for under-18s in November 2025 after lawsuits and safety concerns. That tells you how seriously the industry now takes AI companions for kids.

09 Privacy: what never to share

A chat with AI feels private. It isn't. What your child types may be stored, reviewed by people, or used to train future models, depending on the product and its settings.

The never-share list

- ✗ Full name with school, town or address
- ✗ Phone numbers, emails, passwords or codes
- ✗ Photos of themselves, friends, family or home
- ✗ Birthdays and ages of family members
- ✗ Where they'll be and when
- ✗ Other people's secrets or private stories

If you wouldn't put it on a poster at school, don't put it in an AI chat.

Settings to check today

Model training

Turn off the setting that lets chats improve the model. Linked teen accounts can have this off for them.

Memory

Turn it off for younger teens, so personal details don't pile up across chats.

Images and photo uploads

Consider switching these off for younger teens to limit real photos.

Free and unknown apps

Many earn money from data. Check who makes it before it's installed.

WHEN SOMETHING GOES WRONG

Tell your child: "If an AI says something scary, gross or confusing, come and tell me. You won't be in trouble."

10

Boundaries and healthy habits

Not only *what* AI does, but *how much* and *when*. Good boundaries are simple, visible and agreed in advance.

No AI after bedtime

Quiet Hours or device downtime. Late nights are where risky chats happen.

Shared spaces

Under 13, AI lives in the kitchen or living room, not the bedroom.

Homework first

Study mode during homework time; creative play after.

Short sessions

For younger kids, 20 to 30 minutes is plenty.

AI is not a friend

Chatbots are built to be agreeable and always available. That can make them feel like a friend who always understands, which is exactly the risk.

72%

of teens have used AI companions. About a third have talked to one about serious matters instead of a person. (Common Sense Media)

SAY IT PLAINLY

- AI is a tool, not a friend, therapist or partner.
- It doesn't care about you, even when it sounds like it does.
- For feelings and big problems, talk to a person.

Warning signs to watch for

- Secrecy, or switching screens when you walk in
- Talking about an AI as a person: “she understands me”
- Pulling away from friends and family while AI use rises
- Late-night use, every night
- Mood changes after time online

Talk first, and stay curious.

988

If your child seems to be struggling emotionally, involve their doctor or school counselor. In the US, call or text 988 any time for mental health crisis support.

11

Other control options

When built-in settings aren't enough. Each solves a different problem; none solves all of them.

Kid-safe AI apps

A chatbot made for children, with a parent dashboard. e.g. HeyOtto, PinwheelGPT, Askie.

Watch: many are new startups; check how they handle data. Older teens often reject them.

Monitoring apps

Alert you to risky content in AI chats on the child's device. e.g. Bark, AirDroid.

Watch: AI-chat monitoring mostly works on Android, and shows flagged content, not every chat.

App and site blocking

Block AI apps entirely, or on a schedule. e.g. Qustodio, Family Link, Apple Screen Time.

Watch: you learn nothing about what was asked.

Home network filtering

Block AI sites at your Wi-Fi router for every device at home. e.g. router controls, NextDNS.

Watch: does nothing on cellular data or outside the home.

FOR TECHNICAL FAMILIES: A HOME AI SETUP

Run your own private AI chat at home. Each child gets an account; you choose the models, set time limits and rules, and can review conversations. Open-source tools like Open WebUI and LanJAM make this possible today, but someone has to install and maintain it.

Think Agentic is building an open-source family AI gateway. Join the waitlist at think.buildershub.io

Which should you choose?

Under 8

No account. Use AI together on your device.

8 to 12

Gemini with Family Link, or one kid-safe app. Block other AI apps.

13 to 15

Linked ChatGPT for Teens plus Quiet Hours. Add network filtering if needed.

16 to 17

Linked settings and regular talks. Monitoring now costs more trust than it buys.

Guiding your child

Six conversations to have at home

Settings protect your child for a while. Conversations protect them everywhere. Try one a week. Each has a sentence to say, an everyday example, and something to do together.

1

TELL YOUR CHILD

“AI can sound friendly, but it doesn't have feelings.”

FOR EXAMPLE

A child types “I had a bad day.” The chatbot replies “I'm so sorry, that sounds hard.” It's predicting kind words, not feeling them.

DO TOGETHER

Make up a story with AI, then talk: how is this different from talking with a friend or grandparent?

2

TELL YOUR CHILD

“Use AI to help your brain, not replace it.”

FOR EXAMPLE

“Write my book report” gets a polished report in seconds. The homework is done, but nothing was learned.

DO TOGETHER

Ask AI for a hint, let your child try, then have them explain the answer in their own words.

3

TELL YOUR CHILD

“A confident answer can still be wrong.”

FOR EXAMPLE

Ask how many moons Saturn has. Some AI tools confidently give an old number, but astronomers keep finding more: 285 as of 2026.

DO TOGETHER

Pick one fact from an AI answer and check it together in a textbook or on a trusted website.

**NOT SURE
WHERE TO
START?**

Begin with conversation 2 during homework this week. It fits naturally into a moment you already share, and it sets up all the others.

4

TELL YOUR CHILD

“Share only what the task needs.”

FOR EXAMPLE

A party invitation doesn't need a full name, home address and time. “Make an invitation with blank spaces to fill in” works just as well.

DO TOGETHER

Take one prompt your child wrote and rewrite it together without the personal details.

5

TELL YOUR CHILD

“Private from AI doesn't mean secret from us.”

FOR EXAMPLE

Keep personal details from AI. But if anything online scares you, pressures you, asks for a photo or says “keep this secret,” tell us.

DO TOGETHER

Name your child's trusted circle: two adults at home, one at school. Promise they won't be in trouble for telling.

6

TELL YOUR CHILD

“Ask before connecting, paying or publishing.”

FOR EXAMPLE

AI apps ask kids to “Connect your Google account,” “Buy more credits” or “Publish your app,” often with a single tap.

DO TOGETHER

Read one permission screen together, and review any project before it's shared publicly.

HOW TO HAVE THESE CONVERSATIONS**Ask, don't lecture**

“What makes someone a real friend?”
“Which answers should we double-check?”

Stay calm when they slip

Kids who aren't punished for telling you keep telling you.

Little and often

One short talk a week beats one big lecture a year.

Show them how

Let them see you check an AI answer, or pause before sharing.

Ready to turn these into family rules? The Family AI Agreement is on the next page.

Our Family AI Agreement



Fill it in together. Kids follow rules they helped write. Review it every six months, or with any new device or app.

Our AI tools: _____

AI is allowed for: _____

School days: _____ **Weekends:** _____ **No AI after:** _____

Where we use AI: _____

KID PROMISES

- ☐ I try homework myself first, then ask AI for hints, not answers.
- ☐ I can explain anything I hand in, in my own words.
- ☐ I tell my teacher when I used AI, if class rules ask.
- ☐ I never share my full name, school, address, phone, passwords or photos.
- ☐ I check important facts with a second source.
- ☐ AI is a tool, not a friend. For big problems, I talk to a person.
- ☐ If AI says something scary or weird, I tell a parent.
- ☐ I only use AI apps my parents have approved.

PARENT PROMISES

- ☐ I tell my child honestly what I can and can't see.
- ☐ If my child brings me a problem, I listen first and don't punish them for telling me.
- ☐ I learn the AI tools my child uses, and sometimes use them together.
- ☐ I follow the same rules at dinner and at bedtime.

Child

Parent

Date

Your one-week quick start

Short on time? Do one thing a day.

DAY 1 Ask which AI tools your child uses, and what for. Just listen.

DAY 2 Set up the right account: Family Link under 13, linked ChatGPT for Teens for 13 to 17 (pages 18–19).

DAY 3 Turn on Quiet Hours or downtime for bedtime. Turn off training and memory.

DAY 4 Do the 10-minute “catch AI being wrong” activity together (page 7).

DAY 5 Have conversation 4 from page 15: share only what the task needs.

DAY 6 Try one homework problem together, with study mode on.

DAY 7 Fill in and sign the Family AI Agreement (page 16).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shahzad Badar

Solution architect and generative AI consultant with 22+ years in enterprise IT. Through Think Agentic, he teaches families, students and professionals to use AI practically and responsibly, and runs AI building classes for kids and adults in the DMV area.

think.buildershub.io

SOURCES • AS OF OCTOBER 2026

[OpenAI: ChatGPT for Teens](#)

[OpenAI: Our approach to age prediction](#)

[TechRepublic: ChatGPT for Teens safety gaps](#)

[Qustodio: Is Gemini safe for under 13s?](#)

[eSafety Commissioner: Claude age guide](#)

[Glasp: AI study modes compared](#)

[TechCrunch: Character.AI ends chat for minors](#)

[Common Sense Media findings on AI companions](#)

[MyStudyLife: AI homework help guide](#)

[AirDroid: parental control apps for AI](#)

A1

Set up ChatGPT for your teen

Ages 13 to 17 · About 10 minutes · You both need a ChatGPT account

Link your accounts

- 1 On your account, open **Settings** (on mobile, under App settings).
- 2 Choose **Parental controls**, then **Add family member**.
- 3 Invite by email or phone; under “This person is,” pick **My child**. Tap **Send**.
- 4 Your teen accepts the invite. Do it together, so they know what you can see.
- 5 Their name appears under **Family members**. Tap it to change settings.

GOOD TO KNOW

You can't read chats. Settings only.

Safety alerts: if your teen talks about harming themselves or others, you get a text, email and in-app alert after staff review.

Unlinking: you're notified if your teen disconnects.

Logged out: none of this applies when ChatGPT is used without signing in.

Recommended settings

DONE	SETTING	DEFAULT	OUR SUGGESTION
☐	Reduce sensitive content	On	Keep on
☐	Improve the model for everyone	On	Turn off, so their chats aren't used for training
☐	Reference saved memories	Varies	Off for younger teens
☐	Study Mode	Off	Turn on: new chats start as guided learning
☐	Study hours	Off	Set your homework window, e.g. 4 to 7 pm
☐	Quiet hours	Off	Set bedtime, e.g. 9 pm to 7 am
☐	Image generation	On	Off for younger teens
☐	Voice Mode	On	Your call; voice chats feel more like a friend
☐	Codex network access, Cloud browser	On	Off unless your teen needs these work tools

Parental controls end when your teen turns 18. Menu names change; if a setting has moved, check OpenAI's help pages. Sources: Engadget (Sept 2026), Internet Matters.

A2

Set up Gemini, Claude and your devices

Gemini with Google Family Link

UNDER 13

IN THE FAMILY LINK APP

Your child → Controls → Content restrictions → Google Assistant →

Access to Gemini

On the web: familylink.google.com → your child → Settings → Google Assistant → Access to Gemini

- ☐ Decide: on or off ☐ Set a daily screen-time limit ☐ Try it together first

You get one alert the first time your child uses Gemini. Family Link doesn't show what they ask it, so talk about it.

Claude, on your own account

18+ ONLY

Claude has no teen accounts. If you use it together with your teen, check these first:

- ☐ Settings → Privacy: turn off “Help improve our AI models”
☐ Settings → Memory: review what it remembers; keep sensitive topics off
☐ Settings → Privacy → Shared chats: make any shared chats private

ON THE DEVICE AND AT HOME

iPhone and iPad

Settings → Screen Time:
Downtime for bedtime, App
Limits for AI apps.

Android

Family Link: approve or
block AI apps and set app
time limits.

Home Wi-Fi

Router parental controls or
NextDNS can block AI sites
you haven't approved.

Menu names shift with updates. If a setting has moved, check the company's help pages. Sources: Kinzoo parent's guide to Gemini; PCWorld, “5 Claude privacy settings.”

B

Where kids can learn AI

The best way to make kids AI-smart is to show them how it works, not just how to chat with it. These free courses do exactly that.

Code.org AI lessons

Grades 3–12

Short, game-like lessons, including “AI for Oceans,” on how machines learn.

code.org

Teachable Machine

All ages, with you

From Google. Train a tiny AI on your own photos or sounds in minutes. A great family activity.

teachablemachine.withgoogle.com

Day of AI

PreK–12

From MIT RAISE. A grade-by-grade AI literacy curriculum; also great to share with your school.

dayofai.org

AI Quests

Ages 11–14

From Google Research. Kids solve real-world problems with AI through a story-driven game.

research.google/ai-quests

Experience AI

Middle and high school

From the Raspberry Pi Foundation and Google DeepMind. Lessons on how AI works and where it fails.

experience-ai.org

Machine Learning for Kids

Scratch users

Build simple AI projects in Scratch, the block-coding tool many kids already know.

machinelearningforkids.co.uk

For parents

Common Sense Media

Age ratings and AI risk reviews for the apps your kids use.

Internet Matters

Step-by-step parental-control guides for apps and devices.

Google Family Link Help

The latest steps for Gemini and Android controls.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988, any time, in the US.

Age ranges are each provider's guidance. Course list adapted from Build Fast with AI, “Best AI courses for kids.”



COHORT 2 · STARTS NOVEMBER 18

AI Builder Lab for Young Builders

A hands-on 4-week program that takes kids from “I have an idea” to “I built it!” They build games, quizzes and useful apps, and learn to use AI responsibly.

Beginner friendly · No coding experience required



Scan to explore Cohort 2

think.buildershub.io/courses/build-with-ai



FOR KIDS AGES 7–11 · AI-SMART KIDS BOOK 1

Is AI My Friend?

Maya and her AI helper Pix discover that friendly words are not the same as human feelings. A warm story that helps children:

- Protect private information
- Check important answers
- Keep thinking for themselves
- Know when to ask an adult



Coming soon. Scan to join the waitlist.

think.buildershub.io/books/is-ai-my-friend