

The Web: Keeping Kids from Getting Entangled



By Chloe Phillips

Back in 1991, the World Wide Web was new, exciting, and fairly limited in use compared to today. But more than 30 years later, the Web has evolved, guided by the age of the internet and artificial intelligence (AI). Nowadays, there is much more we can do with a wi-fi connection than ever before, but there are also more dangers to watch out for, especially for younger users. Learning to be safe online is just as important as it is offline. We can't look both ways before clicking a link on a website as we would when we cross the road—or can we? Imagine a child has to complete a research project about an animal. How would they go about doing that? Very likely, they would first turn to a search engine, like Google. Books from

the library might be used as a secondary resource, but the internet often provides a more accessible, seemingly limitless pathway for factual, fast, and fun information. But at what cost?

Keeping young users safe online against computer viruses to cyberbullying to adult predators is an important consideration when helping young people learn how to navigate digital devices and the internet. Although the internet can be used as a powerful learning tool, it is a vast highway of data. It can be challenging for young users to filter all that information by themselves. However, there are easy ways to keep private information secure while allowing learners to engage with AI, giving them a chance to benefit from the internet's educational opportunities.

Teenagers aren't likely to face the same risks as younger users online. But they are currently being given unprecedented access to one of the greatest advances in online learning: AI. While there are advantages to learning how to use AI properly, there are, of course, challenges related to online safety and security. AI can use existing data to successfully portray humans online and can be used to

uncover personal information. Without proper regulation, it can also be used to “cheat” and create content that does not belong to the user. These days, access to social media is access to AI tools. Social media applications like Snapchat and Instagram are creating AI chat bots to increase the use of their app. While this might be a fun concept, these AI programs are new and untested, so users can often receive offensive responses or false information.

For older students who are completing work online, there will likely be pressure to use an AI chat program like ChatGPT. This AI program answers the questions posed to it using language that is emotive and believable. This presents challenges relating to student accountability, as an AI program can attempt to do students’ work for them. Students can ask for help with their homework and AI programs can generate complete answers, although these answers are not always coherent or correct, reducing opportunities for individual learning and development. This also creates an unfortunate situation in which a student might submit work that is not their own, which is increasingly becoming considered a form of plagiarism.

Solutions for protecting students from the dangers of AI programs include providing opportunities for handwritten assignments that ask for the students' own opinions on a topic.. Personal beliefs often connect to personal feelings (which AI cannot possess) and providing opportunities for students to explore those feelings and demonstrate their critical thinking is essential in our digital world. Overall, having open relationships and discussions with students, specifically of older ages, about AI and online safety will benefit them and help prevent the possibility of AI interfering negatively with their learning opportunities.

Make sure to look both ways before crossing the digital road and remember that there are ways to prevent roadblocks and move forward to a place of meaningful, beneficial collaboration between the internet, AI, and education.



Top Tips for Safe Screen Time

- Scan and review websites before allowing children to access them
- Block unwanted advertisements or pop-ups on websites
- Prioritize platforms created specifically for children
- Do not use personal information when creating online usernames and passwords
- Talk to children about the importance of protecting personal information online
- Prevent or discourage children from using platforms where public commenting is permitted
- Discuss the idea of misinformation so children understand that what they read online is not necessarily true
- Create space for conversation about what is encountered online
- Sit with or near children when they are online to observe their engagement
- Limit screen time when appropriate, reducing time if necessary

- Give alternatives to using the internet when possible for school work