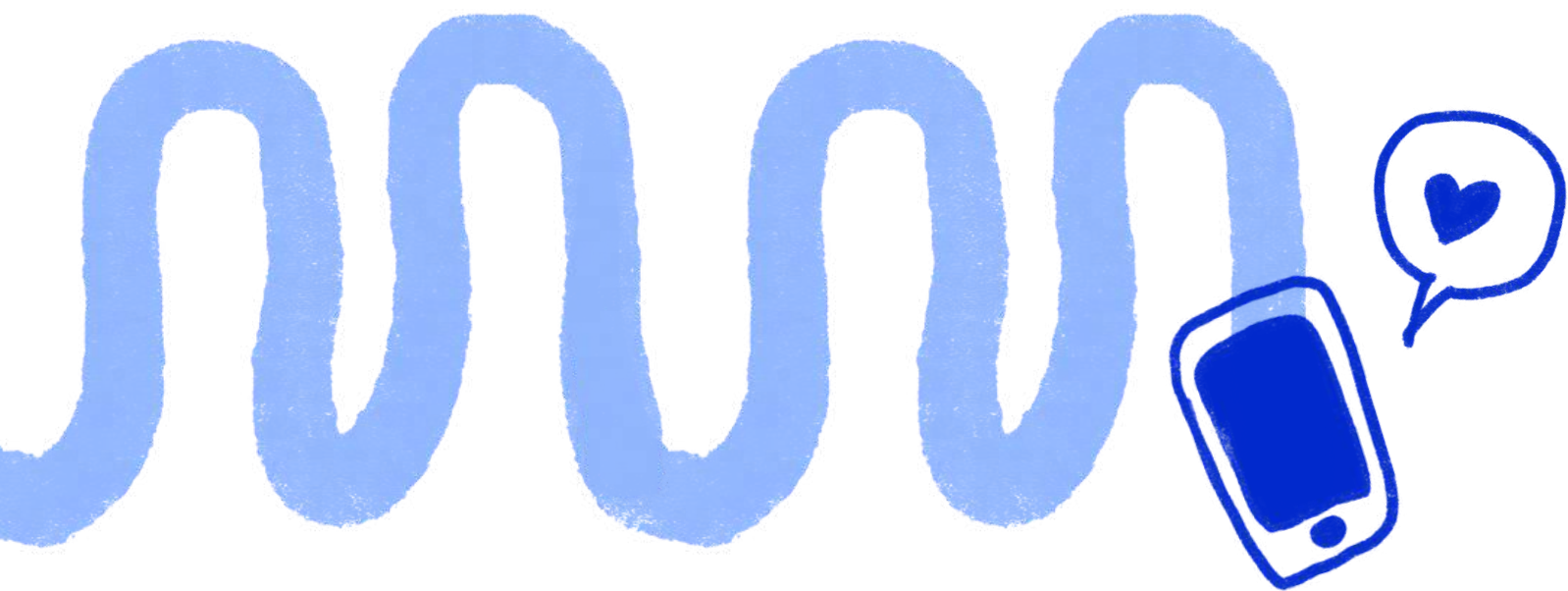


Kids love AI—here's what your brand needs to know



AI is changing how kids learn, create, and connect. And they're all in. It's exciting stuff! But it means kids brands have new responsibilities. Why? Done wrong, AI can weaken the skills kids need to grow into happy, healthy adults. This guide shows you how to reduce the risks posed by AI and design for social and emotional skill development.

What's at stake?

Kids are constantly building the skills they need to thrive, like managing emotions, making friends, reflecting, and understanding difference. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a proven framework for nurturing these skills, so we've used it to create this guide.

What's in the guide?

We'll explain the risks posed by common AI solutions to the development of social and emotional skills. How those same solutions can actively promote. And practical tips and real examples to bring the guidance to life.



Creative tools

AI-powered art, music, and writing

Opportunity

Creative expression supports emotional regulation and self-awareness. When kids create, they externalize thoughts and feelings, which helps them process emotions and build confidence.

Potential risks

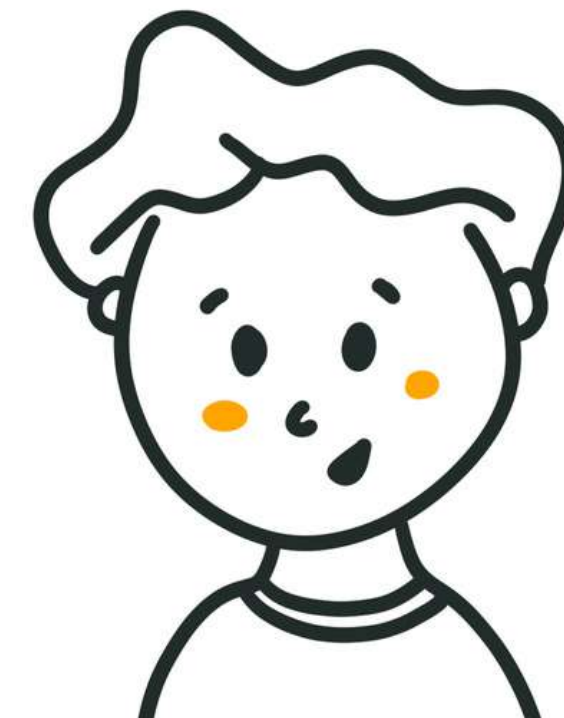
If kids lean too heavily on AI to generate ideas, they may skip the reflective, messy parts of the creative process. That can limit original thinking and problem-solving skills over time.

Consider this

AI should be a creative partner, not a replacement for original creative thought. Encourage kids to refine or remix AI outputs rather than simply accept them. This promotes agency and deeper engagement.

Here's Ben, a 10-year-old using an AI comic-maker to tell the story of a kid left out on the playground. Whether it's about Ben or a friend, making the comic helps him process and express feelings to make sense of what happened.

Ben sits down to make his comic and starts accepting the AI's panels. Instead of exploring his thoughts and feelings, he's just clicking. There's no chance to reflect because his experience has been hijacked by an algorithm.





Generative AI

e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini

Opportunity

Generative AI can foster curiosity, critical thinking, and reflection. That can support social and emotional development in many different ways.

Potential risks

Because generative AI sounds confident and human, kids may take its responses at face value. This can erode social and emotional skills, especially if AI becomes a default source of emotional or ethical guidance.

Consider this

These tools should support—not replace—kids' judgment. Engineer the AI to ask follow-up questions, compare sources, or nudge kids toward a caregiver. This encourages skepticism, perspective-taking, communication skills, and more.

Jenny is a 12-year-old using ChatGPT to explore how to handle a conflict with a friend. She asks how to apologize for words she regrets using and applies the AI's advice to prepare for this tricky conversation.

Jenny confides that she feels excluded at school. ChatGPT's advice sounds helpful but it oversimplifies the situation, leaving her ill-equipped to take action. She's also less likely to talk to a trusted adult fearing further disappointment.





AI companions

AI characters, virtual assistants, and virtual influencers

Opportunity

These solutions can support self-awareness and relationship skills by modeling polite conversation, emotional labeling, and encouraging kids to discover their identity through exploration.

Potential risks

They aren't human but kids may not fully grasp that. When they treat AI as emotionally available or trustworthy, they risk forming attachments to systems that can't reciprocate, empathize, or adjust for nuance.

Consider this

AI companions must be transparent about what they are and what they aren't. Engineer your AI to prompt reflection, not dependence. Direct kids back to trusted adults when emotions run high. And use real-world tie-ins to reinforce the difference between digital support and human connections.

Lashay is a 14-year-old fan of a virtual influencer who shares age-appropriate advice on DIY fashion and alternative style. It inspires her to explore different ways of dressing that make her feel creative and unique.

Lashay spends too much time alone trying to emulate the endless stream of trends pumped out by the influencer. She ultimately loses touch with what she likes and dislikes, damaging her confidence.



Community moderation

AI-driven content filtering

Opportunity

A well-moderated digital space helps protect emotional well-being and encourages respectful interaction. Reducing exposure to hate speech or harmful behavior allows kids to build social awareness and communication skills in safer environments.

Imagine a group of kids working on a collaborative story in an online forum. AI moderation filters out hurtful language and prompts kids to rephrase comments so it's respectful.

Potential risks

These tools can sometimes struggle with nuance, censoring legit expressions or failing to catch harm like coded bullying. For kids, that's confusing and feels unfair, especially when the system doesn't explain decisions.

One of the teens posts about a tough day at school. It's flagged and removed for "sensitive language." They're left feeling silenced, with no clear understanding of what they did wrong or who to ask for help.

Consider this

Be transparent, contextual, and educational. Engineer your AI to explain why content is flagged, offer respectful alternatives, and create space for kids to learn about online boundaries and responsibility. Don't ask them to follow the rules blindly.





Learning tools

AI tutors, personalized education platforms

Opportunity

When kids feel supported, they stay motivated. Personalization can build confidence, reduce frustration, and help kids stay engaged. This can aid learning and a number of social and emotional skills.

Potential risks

When AI tutors replace too much human interaction, kids may lose out on the learning that comes from group work and real-time teacher feedback. Over time, they may avoid challenges, rely on shortcuts, and miss chances to build persistence.

Consider this

AI tools should support—not skip—the hard parts of learning. Built-in scaffolding, reflection prompts, and space for real-world input from teachers or caregivers can help kids build both confidence, competence, and human connection.

Li is a 7-year-old who struggles with reading. He uses an AI that adjusts text complexity and offers encouraging feedback. He progresses, which boosts his confidence.

Li begins to rely on the tool to read tricky words aloud. It keeps him moving but without encouraging him to try on his own, Li's progress stalls.





Mental health tools

AI-powered emotional support apps

Opportunity

These tools can promote self-awareness and emotional regulation by giving kids strategies to name, process, and manage feelings.

Potential risks

AI can't truly understand emotions or offer the nuance that real relationships provide. If kids turn to AI instead of trusted adults, they may miss out on the empathy and support they really need.

Consider this

AI should always point kids back to real-world support. Design tools that normalize reaching out to adults, offer prompts to talk to a parent or teacher, and reinforce the link between well-being and human connection.

Carlos is an anxious middle schooler who uses a chatbot to talk through his worries before bed. The bot suggests exercises that help him name his worries, which helps him feel more in control.

Carlos starts using the app daily but never mentions his feelings to a caregiver. He feels understood but important concerns go unnoticed and spiral.



Want to go further?

Brands that don't embrace AI may risk falling behind, but innovation isn't everything. Brands must do the work to safeguard kids and families. Read the full article on our website and read more more insights about kids and AI. Reach out if you'd like our help getting AI right.



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