

# A Parents' Guide to Generative AI

**Practical advice and guidance on safely and responsibly navigating GenAI**





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## **Introduction**

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is rapidly changing the way young people learn, create, and interact with technology, bringing both new opportunities and new challenges. Insights from young people through the Webwise Youth Advisory Panel, alongside findings from a National Parents Council survey, show that while parents and young people may have some different perspectives on it, they also share common concerns such as risk of exposure to misinformation, harmful content, and overreliance on Artificial Intelligence (AI). While recognising risks, there is also recognition of AI's potential for example in supporting young people's learning and education.

This booklet provides practical information and guidance to help families navigate this evolving landscape, and to support safe and responsible use of GenAI tools.

## **Acknowledgements**

This guide was developed in collaboration with the Research Ireland ADAPT Centre and the National Parents Council.



# What is GenAI?

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Generative AI (GenAI) is a type of AI that can be used to create content in different formats including text, images, video, audio, and computer code. It does this by learning from lots of publicly available information such as websites, books, and publications. In other words, it studies the information so it can create new content.

The content it makes depends on what a person asks it to do, using instructions called prompts. In common tools like ChatGPT and Google Gemini, people can interact with GenAI models through sending instructions to it through a text box, where a user prompts AI about what to create, whether it's some text for an email or document, a story, an image, or a piece of computer code.

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GenAI can:

- Answer questions
- Complete written tasks such as essays and summaries
- Produce images, videos, and audio
- Generate computer code
- Review and critique content

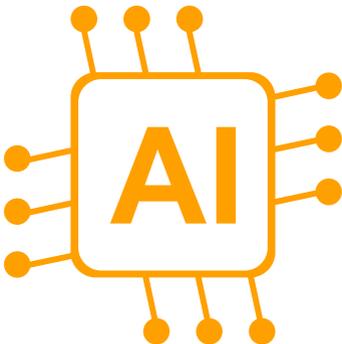


# What is GenAI?

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GenAI tools respond to requests in a human-like way, with human-like language, interacting in much the same way as you would in a conversation, taking turns to answer your request and to receive prompts to refine the result it gives you. It is important to stress though that, although it may seem human-like in the way it interacts with you, it is a technology and does not have human-like intelligence and knowledge.

Popular examples of these standalone generative AI tools include ChatGPT by OpenAI, Microsoft Copilot, and Google's Gemini. GenAI is also often built into existing apps and platforms, with young people encountering it for example on TikTok (AI video effects), Instagram (AI filters), Snapchat (My AI chatbot), and gaming platforms that use AI to create characters or storylines.





## How does it work?

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GenAI creates new content based on huge volumes of data that they have been trained on. This data can come from a mix of sources, including publicly available information like websites, books and publications.

The AI learns patterns from this data to generate new content based on the user's prompt. While AI can seem human-like, it is important to remember that it doesn't have human-like intelligence or knowledge, it generates content by making predictions based on the patterns it has learned from its training data.

For example, AI can create new artwork by learning patterns from thousands of existing images, like the way colours, shapes, and styles are used.





## What young people told us?

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Most of the young people consulted are familiar with and regularly use GenAI tools. They use these tools for a wide range of purposes, from helping with schoolwork, such as summarising texts, generating ideas, or improving writing, to exploring their creativity or creating schedules. Some may also engage with AI for entertainment and creativity.

**“ to have access for information easy and fast, if you need a deeper understanding of what ur studying ”**

**“ Learning topics with interactive explanations in the absence of a teacher ”**

### Common uses include:

- Access to information
- Learning, homework, and study
- Help and assistance
- Advice and recommendations
- Creativity and entertainment

**“ It's very useful in assisting young people create plans to help them succeed. Whether it be gym plans, study timetables, etc. Theres something useful for all of us. ”**



## What young people told us?

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While these tools can be helpful in enhancing learning, creativity, and engagement, their rapid evolution has introduced new challenges. Although recognising the benefits, equally **young people have concerns about the risks** associated with Generative AI including:

- Mis/disinformation
- Overreliance on AI Tools
- Malicious use (eg. Deepfakes, impersonation)
- Job displacement
- Privacy and data concerns
- Environmental impact
- Bias - (discrimination embedded within AI systems that can reinforce existing stereotypes)
- Replacing real human interactions (i.e. friendships, advice, therapy)

**“ I think the threat that deepfakes and impersonation creates is extremely concerning for young people. It's getting so realistic that you can't tell what's real or fake anymore and it could happen to any of us. ”**

**“ Some may use Ai as a form of companionship or sense of comfort. ”**



## **What do young people want to learn when it comes to GenAI?**

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While recognising opportunities and risks with GenAI, they are keen to learn about the safe and responsible use of AI, data and privacy considerations, critical thinking skills, and the environmental impact.

They also emphasise that, alongside education, a whole of society approach is needed with platforms and regulators ensuring appropriate safeguards and strict regulation.

**When asked what do they wish adults (teachers, parents, policy makers, etc.) understood about how teens use GenAI?**

**“ *I wish they understood that we don't just use it for cheating on homework and stuff and that we more use it for educational purposes or entertainment or even advice.* ”**





## Parent/Guardians' views and concerns

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The National Parents Council conducted consultations on parental perspectives on the use of AI in Education, exploring awareness, expectations, and concerns about AI tools, as well as issues like privacy and ethics. Conducted during August-September 2025, the survey was completed by 911 parents. While the focus was on education, many of these insights reflect wider parental attitudes towards AI use in daily life.

When asked to rate their familiarity with AI on a scale of 1-10, most selected scores between 7 and 10, showing that most parents who completed the survey have a high familiarity with AI. Although most parents are familiar with AI, the findings also show that opinions on its implications are divided. Parents in the survey consistently emphasise that AI should complement not replace human teaching, emotional support, and relational aspects of education.

While familiarity with AI is relatively high, many feel uncertain about its use in schools and want clearer guidance, better communication, and training to support both themselves and their children, with 77% of parents wanting children to be taught how AI works and how to use it responsibly in schools. Most parents also indicated that they were unhappy with their child using AI tools, such as chatbots or adaptive learning software.



## **Parent/Guardians' views and concerns**

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Some parents recognise the potential benefits including support for children with additional educational needs, the scope to personalise learning, and to assist teachers with admin tasks.

However, most are concerned about over-reliance on AI and its potential impact on social skills, creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking, especially for younger learners. Ethical and privacy issues, including the use of children's data and unequal access to AI, are also major concerns.

### **Common parental concerns:**

- Accuracy and reliability
- Privacy and ethics
- Impact on social skills and critical thinking

The findings also highlighted that parents want AI to be carefully regulated, used cautiously, and implemented only where it adds value under human supervision, while safeguarding relationships, creativity, and emotional support.



## Parent/Guardians' views and concerns

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With the survey focus on Parental Perspectives on AI in Education, respondents provided recommendations on managing AI in education responsibly:

- Teach students digital literacy so they can question and evaluate AI outputs.
- Limit AI to support and administrative functions, not teaching or assessment.
- Train teachers, students, and parents on safe, ethical and appropriate use.
- Ensure transparency in how data is collected and used. Create clear school and national policies with input from all stakeholders.
- Protect childhood by prioritising play, creativity, and human connection.

While the perspectives of young people and parents may differ in some respects, both recognise the benefits and the risks of AI, and the importance of a whole-of-society approach that includes collaboration, safety-by-design, appropriate safeguards, regulation, and education. Almost half of parents in the NPC survey had not discussed AI with their children and this guide aims to support understanding of AI and help parents to engage with their child about it.



# GenAI – The Benefits

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## **Accessibility and inclusion:**

Generative AI, whether standalone tools like ChatGPT or integrated into another platform, can be used to improve accessibility by making content more tailored and easier to understand. Features like speech-to-text, text-to-speech, translation, and image descriptions make content and tools more accessible for people with different learning preferences, languages, or abilities to engage with.

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## **Saving time and productivity**

Generative AI tools can make accessing information, advice, and assistance faster and more personalised than traditional searches or resources. Instead of sifting through multiple websites or books, users can get explanations, summaries, or step-by-step guidance in one place, tailored to their specific query. This can save time by making the finding of information more efficient, providing immediate answers and feedback. However, users should always be aware that Generative AI tools can give inaccurate and/or misleading information.

[www.manipal.edu](https://www.manipal.edu)



# GenAI – The Benefits

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## Homework and study

While there are concerns, including accuracy, overreliance, and the risk of plagiarism, generative AI can be a useful tool for homework and study. It can help explain difficult concepts, summarise information from multiple sources, provide examples, help brainstorm ideas or offer step-by-step guidance, supporting young people to deepen their understanding.

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## Creativity

Generative AI can provide tools to allow young people to explore their creativity. It lets young people try out new ideas, like writing stories, composing music, creating digital art, or making videos, without needing advanced technical skills.



## GenAI – The Risks:

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### **Age appropriateness and age requirements:**

It is essential to be aware of the minimum age requirements of any Generative AI tools your child is using and the parental controls available and be aware of school policy around the use of AI Tools. However, age restrictions can sometimes be unclear or easy to bypass, so they should not be relied on as a complete safeguard. While these measures can help to minimise the risk of your child encountering inappropriate or inaccurate content, it is important to have open conversations with your child and remind them to come to you if they encounter something online that bothers or upsets them.

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### **Bias**

Generative AI tools can reflect biases present in the data they were trained on. This means the content they produce may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes, favour certain viewpoints, or exclude others. For example, an AI trained mostly on images of certain types of people might struggle to represent others accurately, or a language model might give answers that reflect cultural or social biases.



# GenAI – The Risks:

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## Overreliance

It's important to be aware of the potential for young people to become over reliant on Generative AI tools. While they can be helpful for homework, creative projects, or idea generation, relying on it too much can limit critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent learning. This could lead to academic dependency or plagiarism if there is a reliance on AI tools to complete homework or if content produced from Generative AI tools (commonly termed AI generated content) is submitted as original work.

Encouraging your child to use AI as a support tool rather than a replacement for their own thinking helps them develop skills while still benefitting from the technology. In fact, because of Generative AI's potential for producing inaccurate or misleading information, ensuring young people have the skills and level of subject knowledge to be able to critically assess Generative AI information is essential.



# GenAI – The Risks:

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## Privacy

Privacy is an important consideration when using generative AI tools. Many AI platforms collect and store the prompts and data users provide, which could include personal information. Even if the AI doesn't "remember" individual sessions, the information shared with it may be used to train the AI or shared with a third party. Encourage your child to avoid sharing sensitive personal information and to be mindful of what they input in their prompt or upload when interacting with GenAI tools.

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## Environmental Impact

As the use of Generative AI in apps and tools grows, so does its energy demand. The resources needed to train and maintain Generative AI systems and data centres involve high energy and water use, highlighting the risks of significant resource consumption and carbon emissions. Estimates suggest that "a search driven by generative AI uses four to five times the energy of a conventional web search," and that "large AI systems are likely to need as much energy as entire nations" (Crawford, 2024).



## GenAI – The Risks:

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### **Design features (Persuasive design)**

Tools are often designed to be engaging, helpful and tend to ‘people please’. This means they may give answers that sound confident, agreeable, or entertaining, even when the information isn’t fully accurate. Some tools encourage ongoing interaction by prompting users to ask more questions, often tailoring responses to align with the user’s views or expectations. AI companions, which are often designed for deeper interactions, don’t just wait for user prompts, they can initiate interactions. These companions are designed to feel friendly, supportive, and responsive, and children could be susceptible to forming attachments or placing trust in them. In this instance it is important to remember that these companions are artificial in nature, designed to simulate these qualities.

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# GenAI – The Risks:

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## **Misinformation and Inaccurate Content**

GenAI can produce content that appears convincing but is inaccurate, misleading or biased. This happens because AI creates its answers based on patterns it learns from lots of sources, like websites, books, articles, text or images, some of which may have mistakes, bias, or outdated information. The AI's main goal is to produce content that is fluent and plausible, not what is guaranteed to be true. Sometimes it can even make up an answer that sounds real but is not, which is called a "hallucination". Hallucinations happen because the goal of the AI is to predict a plausible response, even if it doesn't know the answer. It may not know the answer because the training data did not contain the information, the information is too new, or the question requires real thinking or logic. Stop, Think, Check, remind young people that AI-generated content isn't always accurate, encourage them to think critically, and verify information with a trusted source.



# GenAI – The Risks:

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## **Harassment and Harmful Content**

Generative AI tools have the potential to be used to create content that targets or harms others. For example, Generative AI tools could be used to generate messages, images, or videos intended to mock, humiliate, or spread false information about someone. Deepfakes or other types of manipulated media can make this content even more convincing. It is crucial for young people to recognise that using Generative AI content for these purposes is harmful and carries serious risks, such as potential legal consequences. It is important to encourage safe and respectful use of these technologies.

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# Common Types of Generative AI tools that Children May Encounter

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Young people are likely to encounter Generative AI in a variety of ways, not just in standalone tools like ChatGPT and Google Gemini. Many AI features that use GenAI are now embedded within familiar platforms and apps, such as social media, messaging, or creative tools, where they may appear as filters, chat features, or content suggestions. GenAI content is also increasingly integrated into search engines, which can prioritise AI-generated content over verified websites.

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## **Conversational AI Tools**

These tools generate or assist with written content such as essays, stories, or messages. They can also answer questions or hold conversations.

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## **Image and Art Generation Tools**

These tools create images, artwork, or illustrations from text descriptions or prompts.

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## **Video and Audio Creation Tools**

These tools generate or edit videos, animations, voiceovers, or music.



# Common Types of Generative AI tools that Children May Encounter

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## **AI Companions and Chatbots**

Some apps powered by GenAI tools are designed for ongoing, human-like conversations and companionship, learning from interactions over time. They can appear as built-in chat features on apps or as stand-alone virtual companions, and are focused more on relationship-building and emotional support than completing tasks or providing information.

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## **Coding and Development Tools**

AI can assist with writing and debugging computer code or can help in building apps and games.

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## **Embedded AI Features**

Many GenAI tools are now integrated into existing platforms and services rather than used as standalone apps. These may appear as filters, search enhancements, writing assistants, or content recommendations. Examples include Google Search's AI Mode and WhatsApp's Ask MetaAI feature.



## Advice

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Here are some practical tips to help you guide your child in using generative AI safely, appropriately and responsibly.

**Age Restrictions:** Most AI tools are not designed for children, and many do not offer parental controls. Some Generative AI tools require users to set up an account and age restrictions vary from 13, 16 to 18 with some requiring parental consent. However, many of these tools are now built into popular platforms children and young people regularly access for example on social media or search engines. It is important to check the age restrictions on the platform before allowing access.

**Supervision and Guidance:** Supervision and guidance are key for parents supporting young people's use of generative AI. This involves having open conversations about risks like misinformation, setting clear boundaries for use, and ensuring that tools and content are age appropriate. Parents should also familiarise themselves with the privacy and safety settings available on generative AI tools their child is using.

**Prioritise Privacy:** Remind your child to never share personal information with any AI tool, including their full name, address, or school. Explain that their interactions may be used to train the AI model.



## Advice

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**Talk about the risks and appropriate use:** It is important that children are aware of the risks and limitations of Generative AI. Explain to your child that AI-generated information is not always accurate or true, and AI can get things wrong. Explain the need to check AI-generated information with other sources and the importance of being able to learn and do things without using GenAI tools. Emphasise that AI is one of many tools that can help with learning. When used it should be seen as a way to support, but not to replace, ways of learning new knowledge and skills. AI also collects a lot of information, and privacy policies on various platforms can be unclear about how data is collected and used. Information provided by AI systems can often be biased and reinforce harmful stereotypes. It is important for children to be aware that GenAI content needs to be read with the understanding that they may represent narrow, biased, or even harmful depictions of people and places.



## Advice

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### **#StopThinkCheck - Encourage Critical Thinking:**

Because GenAI can "hallucinate" and produce wrong or misleading information, teaching your child to think critically about the content they create or encounter is one of the most essential skills you can support your child in developing.

- **Fact-Checking:** Remind them to always verify important information with a reliable source.
- **Critical Thinking:** Encourage them to ask, "Where did this information come from?" and "Does this sound right?"

**Understanding AI Design:** GenAI tools tend to agree with users and provide validation, agreeing rather than challenging their thinking. Explain that Generative AI tools are designed to be engaging through constant validation and agreement and help your teen recognise this isn't genuine human feedback. Ensure your child is aware that although they can seem human-like, Generative AI apps are tools that cannot replace humans or provide professional advice. Children often seek advice from AI tools as they may fear judgement from adults. Remind your child that they can talk to you about anything that might be bothering them.



## Advice

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**Encourage your child to use AI responsibly:** Help your child understand that GenAI can be a useful tool to support their learning and creativity rather than a shortcut. Check with the school as they may have guidance and rules in place around the use of GenAI that your child should be aware of. Explain to your child that using GenAI for work they did not create themselves could be considered plagiarism or cheating. A useful activity to do together might be to use generative AI to come up with a list of fun family activities or help brainstorm ideas for a school project. Remind them that with using any digital tool it is important to be respectful and kind.

**Rules and Guidance:** Consider drafting a "Family Agreement" with clear rules for using GenAI, including approved apps, privacy rules, and a plan for what to do if they encounter something that makes them uncomfortable. Visit [npc.ie](https://npc.ie) for additional advice and guidance on creating a Family Agreement.



## Conversation Starters

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As AI tools and technologies become an increasing part of everyday life, it is important to be aware of your child's understanding of it, how they might be using it, and supporting them to be safe and responsible. This means not just talking but also listening.

Open and regular conversations about your concerns, along with agreeing on clear rules, can help guide your child. These conversation starters can help you begin those discussions, you can adapt them to fit what you think your child or young person is capable of understanding.

**Tip: When trying to explain AI you might start with:**

- AI is like a very smart robot brain that can help us do things, like answering questions, playing games, or helping doctors. But it's not a person, and it doesn't think or feel like we do.



# Conversation Starters

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## Begin with everyday examples

- Have you ever noticed how Netflix or YouTube suggests videos you might like? That's AI tracking what it knows about you and what you like. Why do you think it does that?
  - When we ask Alexa or Siri or Google a question, how do you think it figures out what we mean?
  - Can you think of any other places that you see or use AI in everyday life, like an app or a website?
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## Encourage them to be curious

- Do you think AI could ever learn to play your favourite game? How would it learn that?
- If you could design an AI tool to help you with something, what would it do?
- If you use AI a lot to answer questions or help with homework, do you think that will change how you learn or work things out?



# Conversation Starters

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## Connect to their interests

- **For gamers:** Did you know the character in your game makes choices using AI? How do you think that works?
  - **For creative kids:** Imagine an AI that could draw pictures or write stories with you. What would you ask it to create?
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## Explore big ideas

- Do you think AI can think like humans? Why or why not?
- What jobs do you think robots or AI might do in the future?
- What kinds of things do you think AI is good at?
- Can you think of anything that AI might mess up or be really bad at?



# Conversation Starters

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**Try to explain it in simple terms that they might understand**

AI can make mistakes: Sometimes AI gives wrong answers, just like when we guess and get it wrong. So, we shouldn't believe everything it says without checking.

- **How would you check?**
  - **Who else could you ask?**
- 

It doesn't know right from wrong: AI doesn't understand feelings or fairness. If someone teaches it bad things, it might copy them. That's why humans need to check it.

- **When you chat with AI, how is that different from talking to me, your teacher, or a friend?**
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## Conversation Starters

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**It can be used in bad ways:** Just like a hammer can build a house or break a window, AI can help people or hurt people. Some people might use it to trick others, so we have to be careful.

- **How would you decide if the answer from AI is true?**
  - **When you type in a question, what do you think AI might do with what you wrote?**
- 

**It needs rules:** AI needs rules so it doesn't cause problems. Grown-ups make these rules to keep everyone safe.

- **What kind of personal information (like your full name, where we live, or private pictures) should you never tell AI?**
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## Supports

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ISPCC Childline provides services on a 24/7 basis where children affected by issues encountered on the internet may turn for advice and guidance. Childline can be contacted by any child or young person by calling 1800 66 66 66 or chatting online at [Childline.ie](http://Childline.ie)

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NPC is the national representative organisation for parents. It provides a Helpline and Information Service and Parents' face-to-face and online training courses. Parents can access information at [npc.ie](http://npc.ie) or contact the NPC Helpline by calling 01-887 4477

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The Irish Internet Hotline is the Irish national reporting centre where members of the public can securely, anonymously, and confidentially report concerns in respect of illegal content online, especially child sexual abuse material (CSAM). [hotline.ie/report/](http://hotline.ie/report/)



# Supports

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Coimisiún  
na Meán

Coimisiún na Meán are responsible for Ireland's Online Safety Framework. This important framework will hold digital services accountable for how they protect people, especially children, from harm online. [Coimisiún na Meán – Online Safety](#)

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# Glossary

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## **AI (Artificial Intelligence)**

Systems that perform tasks requiring human intelligence. It's important to know that there are many types of AI. AI techniques and approaches have been used for a long time in everyday technologies and devices such as smartphones, tablets as well as in computer games, map apps and social media.

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## **Algorithm**

A set of rules that determine the actions taken by an AI system.

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## **Bias**

Bias that occurs when an AI system generates unfair or inaccurate results because of the biases or errors in the data the system was trained on.

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## **Chatbot (Conversational Agent)**

An AI programme that can have conversations with people usually through text or speech and are designed to interact with users in a 'human-like' conversational way.



# Glossary

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**Data Privacy**      Protecting personal information from being collected or shared.

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**Deepfakes**      Deepfakes are computer-created artificial videos in which images are combined to create new footage that depicts events, statements or action that never actually happened.

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**Generative AI (GenAI)**      AI that creates content in different formats for example text, images, or videos. This is one of many types of AI that exist.

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**Hallucination**      When AI generates information that seems plausible but is actually inaccurate, misleading or made-up.

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**LLMs**      Large Language Models, or LLMs, are AI systems that are trained on large amounts of data to be able to process and create human-like text.



# Glossary

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## **Prompt**

A prompt is the instruction, input or question a user gives to an AI system to produce a result for example to generate text, images or outputs.

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## **Training Data**

Information such as text, audio, or images that is used to train AI systems to generate new content based on this information.

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Engaging Content  
Engaging People



**For more information and advice  
visit [webwise.ie/parents](http://webwise.ie/parents)**



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