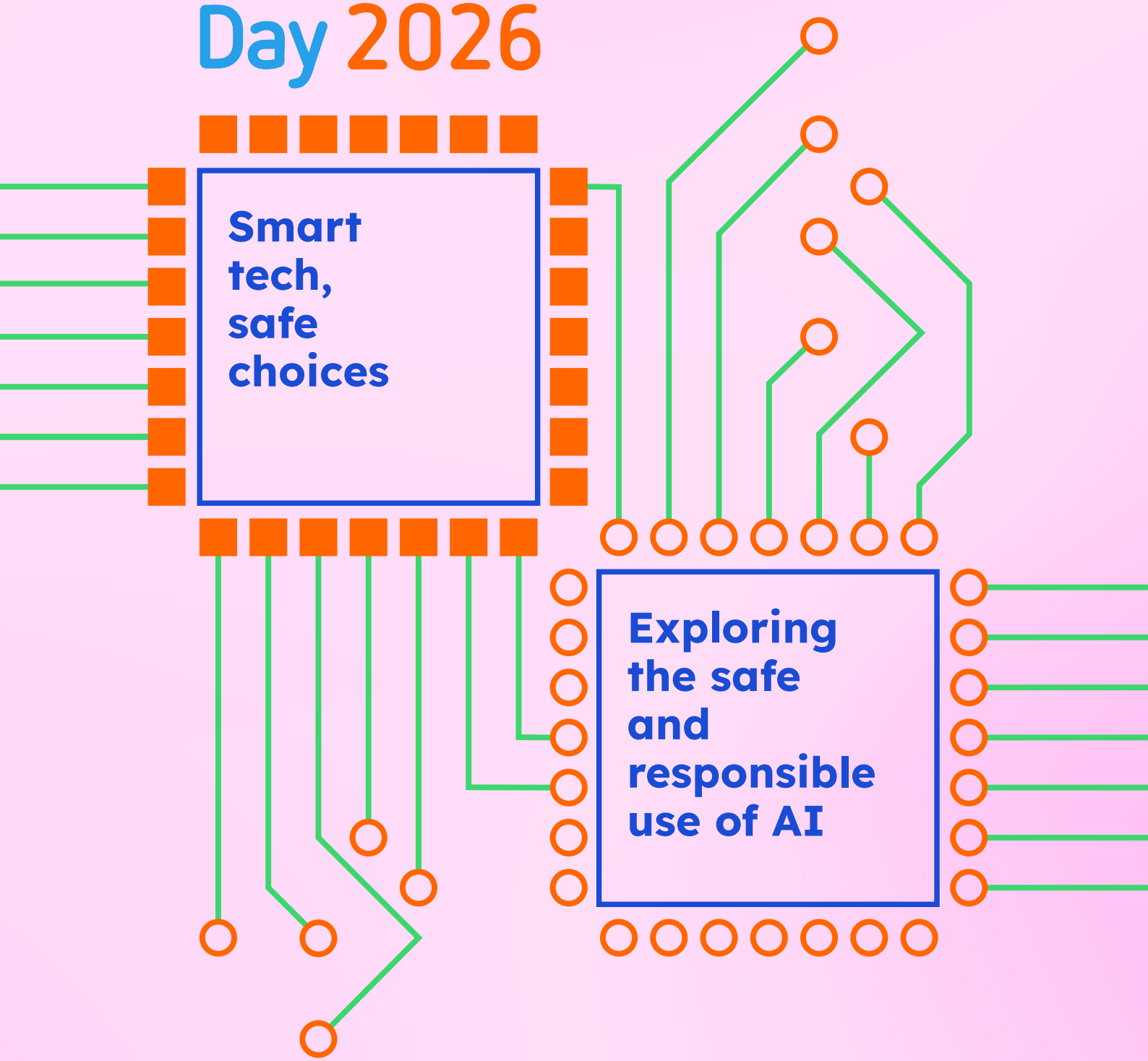
Safer Internet Day 2026



UK Safer Internet Centre

Supported by Nominet

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A summary research report by the UK Safer Internet Centre for Safer Internet Day 2026

saferinternetday.org.uk.

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About Safer Internet Day

Safer Internet Day is the UK's largest celebration of online safety. Coordinated by the UK Safer Internet Centre each year, it reaches millions of young people, parents and carers, and educators across the UK, giving them the vital information and support they need to keep young people safe online.

The UK Safer Internet Centre (UKSIC), established in 2011, is a leading global partnership helping to make the internet a great and safe place for everyone. We provide support and services to children and young people, adults facing online harms, and professionals working with children.

Formed of three charities, Childnet, Internet Watch Foundation and SWGfL, we work together to identify threats and harms online. By creating and delivering critical advice, resources, education and interventions, we help keep children, young people and adults safe online. We share our best practices across the UK and globally.

About Nominet

Nominet has run the UK's national domain registry since 1996 – which is relied on by millions of individuals and businesses every day.

As a public benefit company, Nominet runs .UK for the greater good – working with its members to bring the benefits of the internet to all.

Nominet plays an essential role in operating the internet's infrastructure, helping to run the Domain Name System that supports government services in the UK, including the NHS. It also helps some of the world's biggest brands to have their own online home.

Young people are embracing AI and want to learn more about using it safely and responsibly. But they, and their parents and carers, urgently need more support.

Everyone's talking about AI and **almost all young people aged 8 to 17 (97%) have used AI in some form**. With many using AI online on a weekly, and even daily, basis, it's important they have the skills and confidence to make safe choices when they are using smart technology.

There is much enthusiasm among young people about AI. **80% have seen AI used in positive ways and 58% think AI makes their life better**. But they have real concerns too. While **41% of young people think AI can be a great source of emotional support**, a slightly higher **45% are worried about people their age getting really close to AI, like it's a friend**. When it comes to schoolwork, we know that **73% of young people find AI helpful for revising and studying**. But our research also suggests that heavy use of AI in schoolwork is giving rise to issues of trust between schools and pupils, with **over half (53%) of young people worried that their school may think that they used AI for their work when they didn't**. Finally, inappropriate and potentially harmful content made using AI is a major source of concern, with **60% of young people worried about someone using AI to make inappropriate pictures of them**. A relatively low, but still significant proportion of young people of all ages, including children as young as 8, have seen people their age use AI to make inappropriate pictures or videos of other people. This is an area that requires urgent attention.

What is AI?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a kind of computer system that's made to try and think and learn like people do. AI can do a range of things, including writing messages or emails, helping with research or finding answers, or creating pictures or videos.

Our research shows loud and clear that parents and carers are playing a critical role as the primary source of advice and support for young people when it comes to AI, with **74% of young people saying they would talk to a parent or carer if they were worried about AI**. But it also reveals that parents and carers urgently need more support. Our Top Tips for Parents and Carers and free resources are a great place to start and can help families have productive conversations and know where to go for further support if they need it.

Young people want to play their part, with **over half (51%) asking for more lessons at school about using AI safely and responsibly**. They also have invaluable real-life experiences of AI to share, and we must create opportunities to learn from their perspectives. We hope Safer Internet Day can be a catalyst for this and for important discussions about the full breadth of measures all stakeholders can take to support and protect young people in the context of AI, as well as an opportunity to champion young people's own ideas about this, now and going forward.

Will Gardner OBE,
Director of the UK Safer Internet Centre

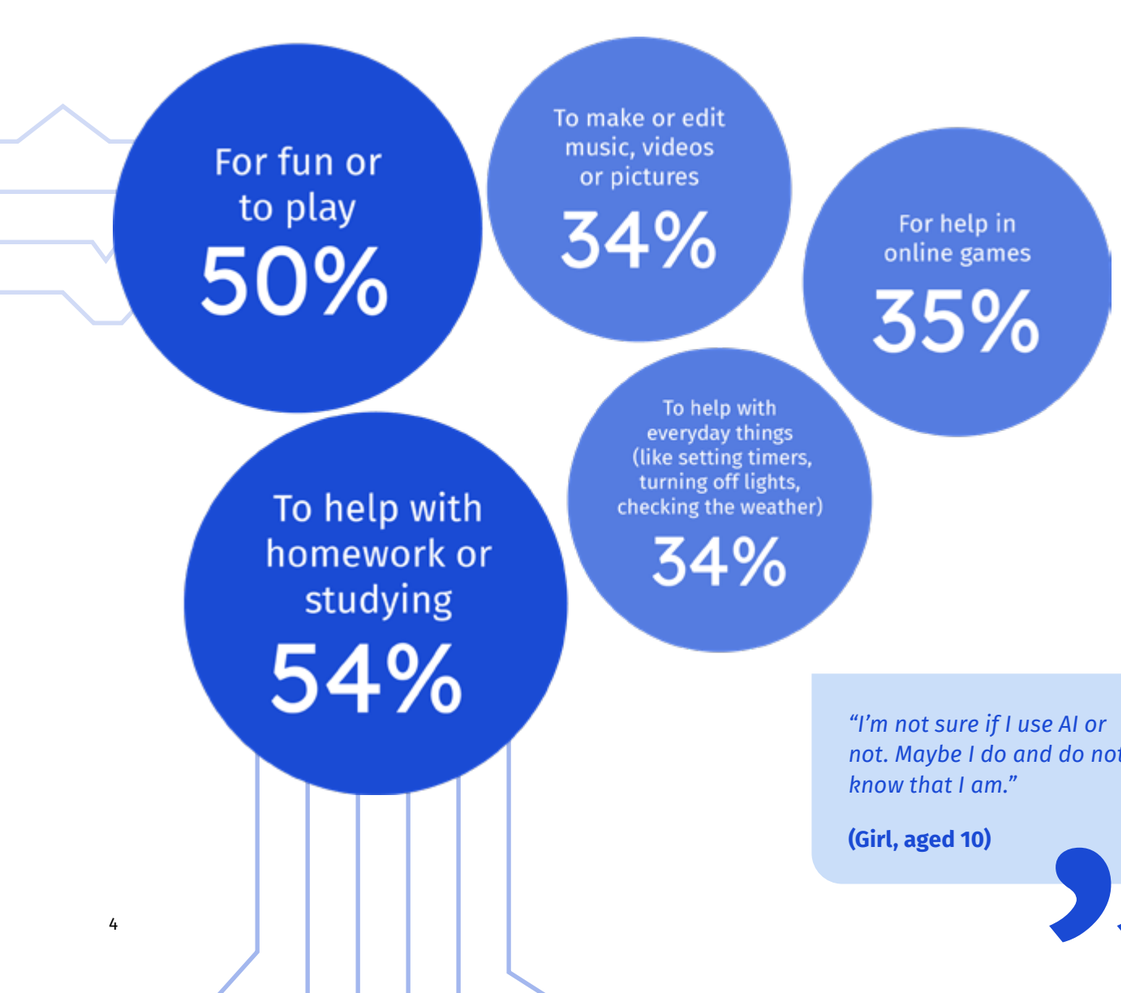
UK Safer Internet Centre

AI and young people's everyday lives, learning and emotional wellbeing

Many young people are using a wide range of AI tools on a weekly, and even daily, basis. Voice assistants (e.g. Alexa, Siri) and AI in search engines (e.g. AI summaries on Google) are the two types of AI tools most frequently used by young people: 69% use voice assistants at least once a week and over a third (39%) use them at least once a day. Even 88% of 8-year-olds have used voice assistants.

Young people use AI tools for a wide range of things in their everyday life, and are most likely to use them for homework or studying. In fact, **69% of 13 to 17-year-olds and 61% of 8 to 12-year-olds feel like people their age rely heavily on AI for studying and homework**. As mentioned, our research indicates that this heavy use of AI is having an impact on trust between pupils and schools, which may explain why **40% of young people want clearer rules at school about when it's OK to use AI for schoolwork**. This highlights a positive opportunity for dialogue on responsible use of AI between schools and their students.

What do 8 to 17-year-olds use AI tools for?



"I'm not sure if I use AI or not. Maybe I do and do not know that I am."

(Girl, aged 10)

49%

of 8 to 17-year-olds think AI makes people their age less creative.

"AI is a large part of social media, online platforms and apps as we know it...(it's) inescapable and inevitable to interact with."

(Girl, aged 16)

Our research suggests that a significant number of young people of all ages are turning to AI as a source of emotional support. **41% of 13 to 17-year-olds and even 39% of 8 to 12-year-olds feel like people their age rely heavily on AI for emotional support or help with personal issues**.

It is important to recognise that most young people still prefer talking to a real person – **61% of young people disagree that they would rather talk to AI about a personal problem than talk to a real person**. However, the high level of concern among both young people and parents and carers highlights that we need to better understand this topic of young people potentially relying too heavily on AI for emotional support, so that we can offer young people, and parents and carers, the right guidance and help when they need it.

45%

of 8 to 17-year-olds are worried about people their age getting really close to AI like it's a friend.

52%

of parents and carers are worried about their child relying heavily on AI for emotional support or help with personal issues.

"AI gives young people the opportunity to share how they feel freely and anonymously, which whilst (this) can be beneficial, can also prove dangerous, if young people are experiencing emotions/ feelings which could put their own safety both physically and mentally at risk."

(Girl, aged 18)

How are young people learning to use AI safely?

Young people have mixed views on how safe AI – including chatbots – is for young people to use. **Only just under half (46%) of young people agree with the statement that AI is safe for children and young people to use, compared to around 1 in 6 (18%) who disagree, and over a quarter (29%) who are unsure**. Similarly, on the topic of chatbots, **over a third (38%) of young people think people under the age of 16 should not be allowed to use AI companions or chatbots**, but almost as many, **31%, think under-16s should be allowed to use them**, and almost a quarter (24%) are unsure. Looking at the opinions of 11-14s on this, it is split down the middle, with 34% agreeing and 34% disagreeing. This is significant, as this age group are among those who would be most affected by such an age-restriction.

"I think talking to AI is a mix of both good and bad...because...if it's like, a good AI, then you talk about general stuff, and it won't be inappropriate. But...sometimes AI would think you're (an) adult, and would talk about adult topics that children aren't allowed to know about."

(Primary school pupil)

Of concern is that, **almost one in five young people (19%) say they have never learned about using AI safely**, highlighting a need to make every effort to reach all young people and their families with information, education, and support to use AI safely and responsibly – something we hope Safer Internet Day can help with.

We must better support parents and carers to support their children with AI

Our research found that young people are most likely to learn about using AI safely at home from their parents and carers, or in school. Added to this, **74% of young people, including even 68% of 15 to 17-year-olds, would talk to a parent or carer if they are worried about the way they use AI or about something made by AI**, highlighting the vital role that parents and carers play in supporting their children to use AI safely and responsibly. However, parents and carers feel less confident than their children on the topic and only **22% of parents and carers think they know more about AI than their child**. This perceived lack of knowledge compared to their children may go some way to explaining why **less than one in five parents and carers (19%) have set rules or guidelines for how their child can use AI at home**. Also concerning is the fact that only **13% say they know where to go for advice or support if they are worried about their child's use of AI**. The lack of rules or guidance from parents and carers, and their lack of knowledge about where to go for help is a wake-up call for all stakeholders. We must ask what more we can do to help parents and carers both be more proactive to ensure safe and responsible use of AI by their children, and to help them access support if they are worried about their children and AI. We must provide information, tools, and safety features that are relevant, practical, and accessible to help them support and protect their children.

Many young people, including children as young as 8, are worried that AI may be used to create inappropriate or sexual content of themselves or their peers. **60% of young people, including even 58% of 8 to 10-year-olds, are worried about someone using AI to make inappropriate pictures of them**. As well as young people themselves, **65% of parents and carers are worried about someone using AI to create images of their child**. These significant levels of worry could be connected to the fact that a smaller, but still concerning, number of young people of all ages have actually seen people their age using AI image manipulation in this way. **12% of 13 to 17-year-olds have seen people their age using AI to make sexual pictures or videos of other people** and, even **14% of 8 to 12-year-olds have seen people their age using AI to make rude or inappropriate pictures or videos of other people**. The level of concern among young people, and their parents and carers, about how their images, or images of other young people, may be appropriated and manipulated as they go about their online lives is very real. We must do all we can to help young people understand, prevent, and manage these risks; and seek advice and help when they need it.

"This is definitely a concern for young people at the moment - whether such (inappropriate) images are intended for harm or "banter" they are definitely becoming a prominent issue in the lives of young people."

(Boy, aged 17)

67%

of 13 to 17-year-olds agree that pictures, images or writing created by AI can still break the law.

Awareness, transparency, and trust: Navigating content made with AI

Young people often recognise content online that has been made by AI, but many have questions or concerns about this too. While **around two in five (41%) say they can easily tell when pictures, videos, or writing were made by AI**, 30% disagree that they can easily tell and 25% are not sure about this. **60% of young people are worried about not being able to tell if something is real or made by AI and 75% feel it is getting harder to tell**. This said, young people do look for a range of signs to help them tell if something is made by AI, the most cited signs being unreal or unbelievable images or content, or images that look overly perfect.

AI remains an important source of information for most young people. **72% of 13 to 17-year-olds and 68% of 8 to 12-year-olds feel like people their age rely heavily on AI as a source of information and 58% of parents and carers are worried about this**. This data should alert us to the importance of helping young people develop their knowledge, skills, and critical thinking around content made with and information provided by AI. As AI continues to be part of every area of their online lives, we need to equip them to assess what they see, be curious about the content that AI provides, and apply their own knowledge and critical thinking to validate the answers that AI gives them.

"Younger kids might believe everything it says. To make it safer, AI needs better checking of information, clear warnings and stronger protection for younger users."

(Boy, aged 17)

56%

of 8 to 17-year-olds and **66%** of parents and carers are worried that too many things online are being made by AI.

"There are so many more AI videos online recently and people are believing they are real more often as the quality of AI heightens."

(Girl, aged 15)

54%

of 8 to 17-year-olds often check if the things AI tells them are correct.

What changes do young people and their parents and carers want to see, to help young people use AI safely and responsibly?

Our research clearly demonstrates that many young people are embracing AI and have positive feelings about it. **54% of young people think AI can help make the world a better place and 74% say they have learnt something new from AI**. But it also reveals their very real concerns about safety, schoolwork, and how their images may be used online, to name a few. Both young people and their parents and carers are calling on the government as well as the technology industry, including AI, social media, and gaming companies, to do more to help keep young people safe and support them to use AI responsibly. Many are also asking for better support for parents and carers, as well as asking for schools, who are already playing a vital role, to offer young people even stronger education and guidance on using AI.

75%

of 8 to 17-year-olds think the government should make more rules so that AI companies keep children safe.

51%

of 8 to 17-year-olds want more lessons at school about how to use AI safely and responsibly.

31%

of 8 to 17-year-olds want help or information for their parents or carers about AI.

65%

of parents and carers think the government is not doing enough to keep children and young people safe when using AI, and should be doing more.

"AI is unsafe as it wasn't built with children in mind, and it can include misinformation or discuss sensitive topics. It should potentially have a further, locked-down 'Child Mode' to remind every time to check the source to ensure accuracy, and stricter filters."

(Boy, aged 17)

Our recommendations and full report

Read our recommendations for the technology industry (including AI, social media, and gaming companies); on support for parents and carers; on the vital role of schools; and for the Government.

Read the full report here.

About this research

This research was commissioned by Childnet (as part of the UK Safer Internet Centre) and Nominet, and was carried out by Opinium in November, 2025. Opinium conducted two surveys. One of them was of 2,018 children, aged 8-17, in the UK. The second survey was of 2,000 parents and carers of children, aged 8-17, in the UK. The data from both surveys has been weighted to be nationally representative.

Childnet also consulted its Digital Leaders, Digital Champions and its Youth Advisory Board, aged 8-18, in November-December, 2025, and ran focus groups with young people in primary and secondary schools in May and June, 2025.

With thanks to:

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