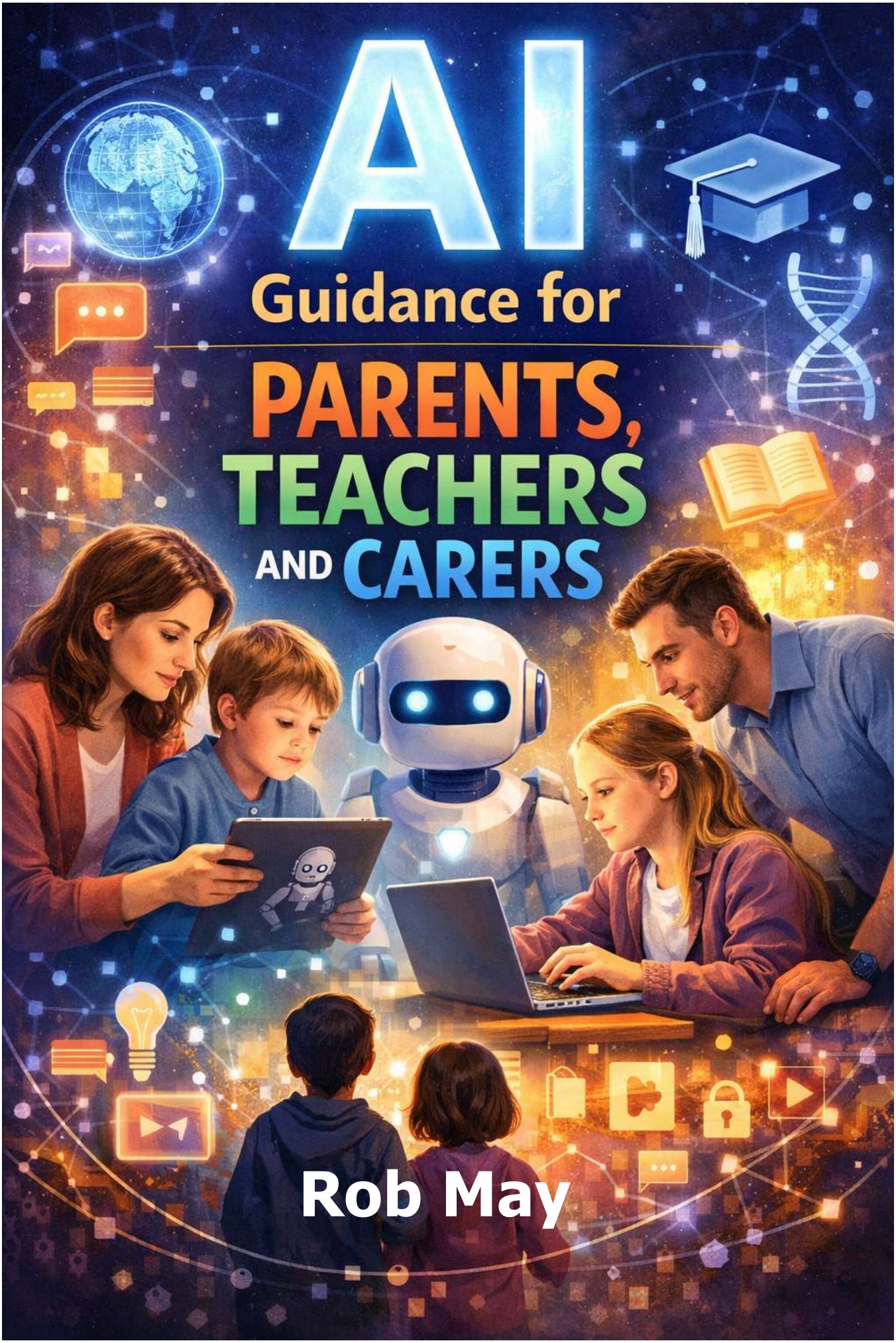
AI
Guidance for
PARENTS, TEACHERS AND CARERS
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AI guidance for parents and carers

Helping children and young people use AI well, safely and thoughtfully

Artificial intelligence is already woven into our everyday life. It appears in homework, creative tools, search engines and conversations about future jobs, often long before families have had the chance to agree what good use looks like. Many parents feel they are expected to have an opinion, or even an answer, before they have had time to feel comfortable themselves.

This guide exists to change that.

It is not a technical manual, and it is not a list of strict rules. It is a calm, practical guide designed to help parents, teachers and carers feel more confident guiding children and young people through AI, from early childhood through to young adulthood. You don't need to be an expert. You don't need to keep up with every new tool. What matters most is judgement, values and conversation.

The aim is simple. Not to ban AI, and not to hand it over unchecked, but to help young people learn how to use it wisely, honestly and safely.

Calm guidance for a fast-moving world

What parents need most is confidence, not control

For many parents, artificial intelligence has arrived with a familiar feeling. It sounds important, slightly overwhelming and worryingly out of reach. It impacts homework, creativity and thoughts about the future careers of the young people in our lives, and in your role, you will no doubt feel that you need to be informed and take a stance on all of this. The instinctive response is usually one of two extremes, either to block it entirely or to quietly hope children will work it out for themselves.

Neither approach really works.

AI is not a passing trend, and it is not something children can simply avoid. Equally, it is not a harmless shortcut that can be handed over without guidance. What parents need is not technical mastery, but confidence. Confidence to talk about AI as a tool, to set

expectations and to help children develop judgement that will last far longer than any single app or platform.

What AI is, and why it feels convincing

The most important thing to understand is that AI is not intelligent in the way people are. It doesn't understand, care or take responsibility. It predicts words, images or answers based on patterns in data, and it does so convincingly. That confidence can be useful, but it can also be misleading. Children and young people need help recognising that *sounding sure is not the same as being right*, and that tools which feel conversational are still just that, tools.

Why parents matter (more than some may realise)

Young children don't need explanations of algorithms or training data. They learn from what they see. When parents treat AI as a helpful but limited tool, rather than something magical or authoritative, children absorb that framing. When adults check answers, question outputs and put devices down, they are modelling exactly the habits they want to see. At this stage, guidance is mostly about tone and boundaries, keeping AI visible, shared and grounded in reality.

As children grow, curiosity takes over. They want to try things for themselves, test limits and explore what AI can do. This is a natural moment for conversation rather than control. Asking how an answer was produced, comparing it with a book or trusted website and talking openly about mistakes builds critical thinking without turning AI into a forbidden object. The message is simple and powerful. *AI can help you think, but it shouldn't do the thinking for you.*

By early adolescence, the questions become more complicated. Homework, assessments and social pressure collide with tools that can produce polished work in seconds. This is where silence becomes risky. If parents don't talk about what counts as fair, honest and meaningful use, children will make those decisions alone, often based on convenience rather than values. Clear conversations about school expectations, learning and integrity help young people understand that using AI well is not about avoiding punishment, but about developing skills they will actually need.

For teenagers, independence brings both opportunity and responsibility. AI starts to shape how they write, revise, research and even present themselves online. Parents can no longer sit beside every interaction, but they can still ask good questions. Talking about bias, misinformation and data privacy turns AI from a shortcut into a subject of thought.

Asking whether something should be done, not just whether it can be done, helps teenagers connect their choices to real-world consequences.

By the time young people reach adulthood, AI is no longer theoretical. It appears in university study, recruitment processes and the workplace. The risk here is not misuse so much as over-reliance. When tools do too much, too early, people lose confidence in their own abilities. Parents can play an important role by reinforcing the value of human strengths such as judgement, creativity, empathy and context. These are the skills that AI supports best when they are already strong and replaces poorly when they are not.

Across all ages, the safety conversations remain surprisingly consistent. Personal information shouldn't be shared casually. Important facts should be checked. Emotional support should come from people, not tools. AI can generate inappropriate or inaccurate content, even when safeguards are in place. None of this requires fear, just awareness.

What parents are really doing, often without realising it, is helping children build an internal compass. Rules matter, but they expire quickly. Platforms change; features update and new tools appear. The questions that last are quieter and more durable. Why am I using this? What did I contribute myself? Who might this effect? What would I do if this tool wasn't available?

Parents don't need to have all the answers. In fact, pretending to be an expert often shuts down the very conversations that matter most. Saying "I'm still learning too" creates space for honesty and shared exploration. Children are far more likely to talk about their AI use when they feel curiosity rather than judgement coming back at them.

The real opportunity with AI is not efficiency or automation. It is the chance to teach young people how to think carefully in a world full of confident answers. If parents can stay present, ask thoughtful questions and keep people at the centre of every conversation, AI becomes just another tool, powerful, imperfect and ultimately shaped by the values of those who use it.

Guidance that grows with your child

How your role changes from early years to young adulthood

One of the most common mistakes parents make with AI is assuming there is a single right approach. In reality, good guidance changes as children grow. What stays consistent is the role of the parent, not as an expert, but as a steady reference point.

With younger children, guidance is mostly about modelling and framing. Children under eight are not making independent choices about AI use, they are absorbing cues from the adults around them. When parents treat AI as a normal, limited tool, something that helps but doesn't decide, children internalise that message. This is less about rules and more about tone. Keeping AI visible, shared and unremarkable helps prevent it from becoming either mysterious or powerful in the wrong way.

As children move into primary and early secondary years, curiosity increases. They want to experiment, test boundaries and see what AI can do. At this stage, guidance works best when it sounds like interest rather than supervision. Asking how an answer was produced, what surprised them or what they would change encourages reflection without shutting curiosity down.

Early adolescence is often where tensions appear. School expectations, peer pressure and performance anxiety all collide with tools that promise quick, polished results. This is the moment where values matter more than enforcement. Clear conversations about honesty, fairness and learning help young people understand that the purpose of schoolwork is not simply to submit something, but to develop capability.

For older teenagers and young adults, guidance shifts again. Independence is growing, and AI use becomes more private. Parents can no longer monitor everything, but they can still shape thinking. Conversations about long-term consequences, bias and responsibility help young people see AI as something to be used thoughtfully, not casually.

Across every age group, one principle holds. Children don't need parents to be perfect or all-knowing. They need them to be present, curious and willing to talk. Guidance that grows with the child, rather than trying to hold them still, is what allows AI to become a support rather than a substitute.

How to talk to your child about AI

Conversation matters more than control

Many parents worry about saying the wrong thing or not knowing enough to start a conversation about AI. In practice, how you talk about AI matters far more than having the perfect answer.

Open conversations work best when they are regular, low-pressure and grounded in real examples. Talking about AI while helping with homework, watching the news or using

technology together feels more natural than setting up a formal discussion. Asking what your child thinks, rather than immediately correcting them, creates space for honesty.

It also helps to name uncertainty. Saying "I'm still learning about this too" models healthy scepticism and shows that questioning tools is normal. This approach encourages children to bring questions and mistakes to you, rather than hiding their AI use for fear of judgement.

Thinking ethically and the environment

Helping young people look beyond convenience

AI raises ethical questions that go beyond schoolwork or screen time. These conversations don't need to be abstract or political. They can start with everyday ideas children already understand.

Younger children can talk about fairness, where information comes from and why copying without credit feels wrong. Older children and teenagers can explore bias, misinformation and whose voices are amplified or ignored by technology.

Environmental impact is also part of responsible use. AI systems require significant computing power, which has real energy costs. This doesn't mean young people should feel guilty for using AI, but it does mean they should understand that digital tools are not free of impact. Encouraging thoughtful use, rather than constant or careless use, supports both learning and sustainability.

These conversations help children see AI as part of a wider world, not just a private shortcut.

Using AI with homework

Using the 20–60–20 rule to keep humans at the centre

Homework is where many parents feel the greatest uncertainty. Used well, AI can support learning. Used poorly, it can quietly remove the very thinking homework is meant to develop.

A helpful way to frame this is the **20–60–20 rule**, which focuses not on how long AI is used, but on where the thinking sits.

The first **20 percent** is the human work that happens before AI is involved. This is about thinking clearly, setting direction and asking good questions. It includes understanding the task, deciding what help is actually needed and prompting thoughtfully. When this part is rushed or skipped, AI output is usually weak or misleading.

The **60 percent in the middle** is what AI produces. This might be ideas, explanations, examples or feedback. This is the part most people notice, but it is not where most of the value should sit. AI is responding to the quality of thinking it is given.

The final **20 percent** belongs firmly to the human again. This is where young people add their own voice, judgement, experience and understanding. It includes deciding what to keep, what to change, what feels right and what does not. If this stage is missing, the work may look polished, but it will not truly belong to the learner.

Seen this way, good AI use always starts and ends with the human. The tool sits in the middle, not at the centre.

A simple check parents can use is to ask, "What was your thinking before you used AI, and what did you change afterwards?" If a child can answer both parts confidently, AI is likely being used in a healthy way.

Parents may find it helpful to share approaches like this with teachers or schools. Many educators are actively exploring ways to use AI to deepen thinking rather than replace it, and shared language can help everyone stay aligned.

When the homework is to question the AI

Some of the most effective uses of AI in education deliberately flip the usual concern about 'getting the answer'. One teacher recently set a piece of homework where students were told to ask an AI tool for the answer first. The task was not to submit that answer, but to explore it, challenge it and explain where it was wrong, oversimplified or missing important nuance.

This kind of task is powerful because it makes critical thinking unavoidable. Students must read carefully, bring their own knowledge to bear and decide what they agree with and what they don't. AI becomes something to interrogate rather than something to rely on.

For parents, this example is a useful reminder that good AI use is not always about avoiding the tool. Sometimes it is about using it openly and deliberately as something to be questioned. Asking children to explain where an AI response falls short can be just as valuable as asking them to produce an answer from scratch.

A reflection to try at home

The next time your child uses AI for learning, ask them to pick one response and talk you through what they agree with, what they would change and what they think is missing.

The real learning happens when young people are asked to question the answer, not just produce one.

Clear conversations about school expectations, honesty and learning outcomes still matter. But when young people learn that even confident, well-written AI responses deserve scrutiny, they are far less likely to treat technology as an authority and far more likely to trust their own judgement over time.

A note for young people

A challenge worth trying

You might be asked to avoid using AI sometimes, and at other times to use it deliberately. Both have value. One of the most useful challenges you can set yourself is to ask an AI tool for an answer and then actively look for where it is incomplete, oversimplified or just wrong.

If you can explain why you disagree with an AI response, you are showing real understanding. That skill matters far more than getting a polished answer quickly.

Why guidance changes as you grow

If you are a young person reading this, it may sometimes feel as though adults keep moving the goalposts. Rules change, conversations shift and the way parents talk to you about technology can feel inconsistent. There is a reason for that.

When you were younger, adults took on more responsibility because you were still learning what choices looked like and what consequences meant. As you grew, you showed that you could handle more freedom. Guidance didn’t disappear; it changed shape. It moved from control to conversation, and from permission to trust.

This is especially true with AI. When adults ask questions about how you are using it or encourage you to think more carefully about your choices, it is not because they don't trust you. It is because the decisions you make now matter more than they used to. You are building habits that will follow you into study, work and relationships.

Good guidance is not about catching you out. It is about helping you develop judgement while the stakes are still manageable. The more you can explain how and why you are using AI, the more freedom and trust you are likely to be given.

What this looks like in everyday family life

Small moments that make a big difference

Consider a parent helping a nine-year-old with homework. An AI tool suggests a polished paragraph. Instead of copying it, the parent reads it aloud with the child and asks which parts make sense and which don't. Together, they rewrite it in the child's own words. The tool supports learning but doesn't replace it.

Now imagine a thirteen-year-old using AI to plan an essay. The parent doesn't ask to see every prompt, but they do ask how the plan was created and what the young person thinks the strongest argument is. The focus is not on catching misuse, but on understanding thinking.

Finally, picture an eighteen-year-old applying for part-time work. They use AI to help draft a CV. A parent asks what feels true to them in the draft and what does not. They talk about voice, honesty and confidence. The tool becomes a starting point, not a mask.

These moments are small, but they add up. They show young people that guidance is not about stopping them using AI, but about helping them use it in ways that strengthen who they are becoming.

An executive summary for busy parents

What this guide is for

A calm, practical resource to help parents guide children and young people in using AI wisely, safely and honestly.

What matters most

You don't need to be an expert. Your role is to model judgement, ask good questions and keep people at the centre of decisions.

The core messages to remember

- AI is a tool, not a person or authority
- AI can be wrong, even when it sounds confident
- Using AI well supports learning, it doesn't replace it

How guidance changes with age

Younger children need modelling and shared use.
As children grow, conversation replaces supervision.
Teenagers need clarity about values, honesty and fairness.
Young adults benefit most from preparation, trust and confidence in human strengths.

Everyday safety essentials

- Don't share personal or sensitive information
- Check important information using trusted sources
- Remember that emotional support should come from people, not tools

A simple rule that works at any age

The 20–60–20 rule keeps humans at the centre of AI use. Start with clear thinking and good questions, use AI in the middle, then finish by adding your own judgement, experience and voice. AI can help you start and improve, but you should always finish as yourself.

If you only remember one thing

Good AI guidance is not about keeping up with technology. It is about helping young people build judgement that lasts.

You don't need to know everything about AI. You just need to stay present, curious and willing to talk.

About the Author

Rob May is a technologist, thought leader and an award-winning international keynote speaker. Rob is the Founder and Executive Chairman of **ramsac** – the secure choice™, and he sits on several industry and academic advisory boards. He is an AI Ambassador with the Global Council for Responsible AI, and the UK Ambassador for Cybersecurity with the IoD.

Rob is a Leadership Fellow at Windsor Castle, a Fellow of The IoD, Fellow of the Chartered Institute for Further Education, Fellow of The RSA and a Fellow at BSDC where he is also the Patron for Employability. He also has The Freedom of The City of London.

Rob has been at the forefront of the technology industry for the last 35 years and his talks, books and academic sessions reflect this experience.

AI Books by Rob May

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Through all of this, stay curious, but always stay human!