The Effort Crisis

What AI Is Doing to Your Child's Ability to Think (And How to Stop It)

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To every parent who has looked at their child's homework and thought,

There's no way you wrote this.

You are not alone, and you are not wrong.

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AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

From Cyber Junkie to AI Coach

I taught in the classroom for four years at a place called the Roeper School, a small private school for gifted children in metro Detroit, founded by a couple who fled Nazi Germany. In the close to three decades since then, I have been an academic coach and specialty tutor for young people and adults with learning challenges like ADHD, dyslexia, and many other conditions. My master's degree focused on neuroscience with an emphasis on the science of learning, and I used this academic training to inform my work with students. In 2010, I published my first book, Cyber Junkie. The title wasn't clever marketing. It was autobiography. In my twenties, I was addicted to computer games. I lost relationships, school time, job opportunities. My family and friends didn't understand it. Neither did I, at first.

But here's what I learned: addiction isn't about the substance. It's about the escape. My brain was wired to seek quick rewards, avoid discomfort, and find the fastest path to feeling good. The game was just the delivery mechanism.

My work with young people has given me a front row seat to how students use technology and how that has shifted over the last three decades. Cyber Junkie comprised my first effort to keep the world apprised of the impact of our increasing dependence and reliance on technology in learning, entertainment, and relationships. Rooted in my own video game addiction as well as my professional experiences, that book provided both insight into this problem and some solutions as to how to turn the situation around. I spent twenty years helping families navigate the technology crisis, coaching students who couldn't focus, couldn't read, couldn't sit with boredom long enough to learn anything real. I watched ADHD brains in particular struggle with screens because those brains

are already wired for the quick dopamine hit, and screens are specifically engineered to deliver it.

I wrote other books. I built a practice helping students and families find balance. I thought I understood the scope of the problem. Then I watched my students discover ChatGPT.

At first, I was cautious but optimistic. Yes, AI is a tool. Tools can be used well or poorly. A calculator doesn't ruin math. A spell checker doesn't ruin writing. Students have been trying to cheat since the invention of the first school. While it can be tempting to minimize the impact of artificial intelligence on cheating and simply set it within the historical context of its continued presence over time, this would be unwise. For the most part, cheating in the past required significant effort. If students wanted to conceal notes during an exam, they would have at least needed to write down those notes and in that way interact with the course material. If they wanted to turn in work that wasn't theirs, they would have at least needed to find that information and string it together, requiring some mental effort.

I started noticing some disturbing developments in my study groups. A tenth-grader who came to me weekly for geometry suddenly stopped coming. When I called his mom, she said his grades had jumped from C's to A's, and she even credited my methods for making the shift possible. She told me he didn't need help anymore. But when his spring standardized test came back, he scored in the 32nd percentile in math reasoning. His homework said A student. His test said struggling.

That's when it clicked. This isn't like a calculator. A calculator helps you execute a process you understand. This is different. This is outsourcing the thinking itself.

I started asking students directly: Are you using ChatGPT?

The answers were remarkably honest. "Yes," they told me. "For most of my homework. My essays. My research papers." I asked them if they thought that was a problem for their academic integrity. They usually shrugged. "Everyone uses it. The schools don't have rules yet. And it works."

One senior told me, "It's not cheating if the tool is available."

That moment, I realized we were in a new crisis. Not a technology crisis like I'd written about before, but a thinking crisis, an integrity crisis. Young people were systematically outsourcing their own cognitive development to a machine that doesn't care about learning, understands nothing about them, and will never ask them to struggle.

And parents had no idea it was happening.

I started having conversations with mothers and fathers. I'd ask, "Have you talked to your kid about ChatGPT?" The response was always the same. They knew it existed. They were vaguely worried. They had no idea what it actually does or how their child was using it.

This book is for those parents. It is about what is happening in schools right now, what AI actually does to a developing brain, and about the family conversation you need to have before it's too late. It is about raising kids who can think, struggle, fail, and get back up in a world where the easy path is always available.

I learned about addiction through my own story. I learned about screens through years of coaching. I'm learning about AI by watching it happen in real time in my students' lives and in the lives of families I work with.

What I know is this: the crisis is here. It is not coming and it is not theoretical. It is happening right now in schools across the country. Families are living through it. Teachers are trying to figure out how to teach when half the class or more is using AI. Students are grappling with whether they are cheating. Parents are wondering if they should worry.

Some people are talking about it, but generally they're either completely dismissive (AI is great, let's embrace it completely) or completely reactionary (AI is terrible, let's ban it). Neither of those positions is useful. Neither of them acknowledges the reality that most families are living in.

The reality is complicated. The same tool that can be genuinely helpful for a struggling student can also be a massive shortcut that prevents learning. The line

between those two things can sharpen after one conversation, one moment where someone says, “Here’s what I see happening. Here’s why it matters. Here’s how we’re going to move forward.”

I wrote this book because your kid might be using ChatGPT, or other AI tools, right now, and you probably don’t know. The question “Did you use ChatGPT for this?” might be the most important conversation you have this year. I have the unique vantage point of working with kids outside of school and holding the position of someone young people see as an ally, someone they can talk to, an adult they can actually be honest with. The stories in this book come mostly from my front row seat with those students and their willingness to simply tell me the truth of what is going on.

CHAPTER 1

Houses in Turmoil (Again)

“Anyone can find fault. It is the wise person who finds that which encourages another in the turmoil and strife of the day.” — Edgar Cayce

I sat in my after-school study group across from Carson, a junior in high school, staring at what for him was a perplexing piece of paper, the rubric for his peer review assignment for the literary research paper. He was tasked with editing another student’s essay on William Blake. As I started to guide this young man on how to edit someone else’s essay, the first line of the first body paragraph grabbed my attention: “William Blake’s ideas are widely considered to have anticipated many core concepts that were later explored in Jungian psychology.”

I knew Carson very well. I’d worked with him on essays before. I also knew the student who wrote the Blake essay. He was a decidedly less serious student than Carson. The two of them were friends, and so Carson really wanted to help him write a better paper by doing a good job on the peer review. I had sat with Carson ten times or so over the previous month and a half, helping him break down sources for his own paper in that same class, which he did on Ernest Hemingway, teaching him how to skim for keywords, showing him how to use Project Gutenberg’s search function to find passages in For Whom the Bell Tolls and A Farewell to Arms to support his thesis. He’d done real work. Hard work, the kind that builds skill.

Eventually his paper came back with a B minus from a teacher who was tough. He cared deeply about writing, about thinking, and about integrity. So when he assigned peer editing, he was serious about it.

I stared at that line about Blake on the paper that had to be peer edited that evening, and I knew that the young man had not written a word of it. I wrote the line down on my notepad, as I had been developing a file so that I could use these types of anecdotes for an upcoming book (You're now reading that book!). I looked at Carson and said, "He's going to get caught."

He nodded.

Perhaps a week or so later, the teacher read the paper on Blake and caught the other young man. He called him in, showed him the plagiarism detection software report, and had the conversation. The teacher asked him to explain a few of the concepts from the paper, and he might as well have been speaking a foreign language, because the young man hadn't a clue about any of it. He had no choice but to admit that he had used ChatGPT, and that he subsequently ran it through a couple websites to make it sound more natural (which did not work by the way!). The teacher, to his credit, let him redo the paper for partial credit. The whole situation was handled with grace and consequence.

A week after that, the student who'd used ChatGPT called me, and asked if he could come work with me on writing. He wanted to learn how to actually write.

That's the moment I understood that I had some experience that the world needed to know about, because kids were engaging in some self-destructive behaviors that few if any adults in their world, outside of uncommonly devoted and informed teachers, were calling them out on. It wasn't just cheating. It was the complete breakdown of the understanding that you have to do the work to develop the skill. Every family, every student, every classroom in this country is living in this moment right now.

I’m Just Going to Chat It

This phrase is everywhere now. I heard it from the mother of a fourteen-year-old last week. His mom asked if he’d started his book report. He said, “Yeah, I’m just going to chat it.” She looked confused. He clarified: “ChatGPT. I’m just going to ask it to write the report and then turn it in.”

He said this casually, like he was saying he was going to google something.

It might be the most dangerous phrase I’ve heard in twenty-five years of working with students.

It represents a complete shift in thinking. Most kids don’t even see this as a moral issue yet. For them, it is purely practical. The entire category of homework has, for large numbers of young people, moved from work I do to work I ask the robot to do. That is the shift, and it happened almost overnight. By the way, several kids I have worked with over the years who are now in college have been sending me papers, asking if I can give a quick read and tell them what I think. This is code for, “Am I going to get caught for using AI to ‘write’ this paper?”

I have started keeping track in a more statistical way. Out of the forty-five or so students I work with regularly, thirty-six told me they use ChatGPT for homework sometimes. One sixteen-year-old told me recently, “I can’t remember the last time I wrote my own essay.” Of course, when they are at my study group, this does not happen, and I strongly convey the message to take responsibility for one’s thinking, and to not outsource. I am afraid, though, that peer pressure and “common practice” among teens has had the impact of making AI use an unquestioned “necessity” for many young people.

The ones who are good at it, the “smart” cheaters, they’ve figured out the system completely. They know about humanizer websites. If you search right now, “humanize AI” or “AI humanizer,” you’ll get dozens of results. These are tools specifically designed to take AI output and make it look human-written. They work surprisingly well. Smart students run their ChatGPT essays through humanizers and then run the output through two or three AI detection tools to

make sure it still comes back as human. If it comes back more than 20 percent AI, they run it through the humanizer again.

One student, Ian, showed me the process. Start to finish, it took him eight minutes. Think about that: it took eight minutes to turn a ChatGPT essay into something a teacher couldn't detect. Ian, however, is one I have succeeded in turning away from what I call the "dark side." Consistent engagement has helped me move him from a full AI user for his essays to using the tool for ideas and outlining, for editing feedback, and for final polish. It turns out that he actually has significant writing talent!

And this is before we're even talking about specialized AI. There are AI tools now designed specifically for math, for coding, for chemistry problems. There are AI tutors that will walk you through a problem step by step, which sounds helpful until you realize the student isn't learning the material, they're just watching a robot. Research backs this up. Students who rely on AI tutors finish more problems than those who don't but do not perform as well on tests. I used to worry that teachers would become obsolete. I have seen that most kids actually do not learn particularly well from a machine. The human connection, it turns out, is more important, more fundamental, in learning than many people thought.

The sophisticated cheaters, the ones I worry about most, they're prompting carefully. They'll type into ChatGPT: "Write me a 500-word essay on the causes of the Civil War, at a tenth-grade level, with some minor factual errors and imperfect vocabulary to make it look like a real student wrote it." ChatGPT will do exactly that. Then they run it through a humanizer and submit it.

Turnitin, which many schools use for plagiarism detection, caught on. In 2025, they launched an AI bypasser detector specifically designed to find humanized AI. But it's an arms race. The humanizers will get better. The detectors will get better. And meanwhile, thousands of students are moving through the system, learning nothing, gaming the system, developing zero integrity.

The Two-Phone Trick

Schools think they're stopping cheating by collecting phones before tests. It's a nice thought, but it often doesn't work.

A significant percentage of young people carry two phones. One is the decoy. The one they hand over. The other stays in a backpack, a locker, or a sweatshirt. I've heard from at least a dozen students about this strategy.

One junior told me how it worked for him. The teacher collects phones at the beginning of class. He hands over his old iPhone but keeps his newer one in an extra outer pocket on the bottom of his pant leg. He wears those pants deliberately on days he has to take a test, because teachers seem not to suspect he is concealing his phone in that lower pocket. During the test, when he gets stuck on a question or problem, he carefully pulls out the phone, eyes glued on the teacher to make sure he will not get caught. He uses various AI apps, depending on the class, snaps a quick photo, and quickly uploads it. The AI then spits out the correct answer, which he copies. He has not gotten caught yet as far as I know.

Recent studies suggest students are not cheating any more than they used to. I don't believe those studies. When I have looked into them, they are asking very limited questions that do not tease out the full picture. My extensive experience and interviews with kids suggest that young people who cheat do so more across the board instead of in just one class, and they also cheat in ways that require far less brain power than in the past.

The Resource Room

Resource rooms are meant to be helpful. They are also completely exploitable. Many schools have resource rooms. Students with diagnosed learning challenges, or who just need extra support, can go there for extra time on tests, a quieter environment, or an aide to check in with them. It's a good system. But the system assumes a level of security that no longer exists.

I worked with a student who had legitimate access to the resource room: extra time on tests, which is the right accommodation for his ADHD. But he also had a phone. The proctors were well-meaning and did their best, but there's only so much one person can do in a room with four or more students taking different tests. The student told me he looked up several answers during his last test. He wasn't proud of it. He just did it because he could.

A worse version: when tests are submitted days in advance for scanning and accommodation purposes, some students, or more often their friends in the resource room, have photographed the actual tests. I know of cases where the test gets sent to the resource room on Friday, and by Monday morning, half the class or more has seen it. Not the questions, but the actual test.

The vulnerability here isn't that resource rooms are bad. It's that technology has made it super easy to cheat anywhere, even in the places specifically designed to prevent it.

Going Virtual

Virtual school became normalized during the pandemic and has stayed around. For some students, it's genuinely better. For others, it's a cheat code.

I heard from a parent whose son, a sophomore, found a website. I won't name it because I don't want to help market it, but these sites exist. For a subscription fee, the website provides software that runs on your computer. The site has an AI assistant that guides the student to install code right on their

computers. It watches your screen. It logs into your virtual classroom with your credentials. It watches assigned videos, answering quizzes about them with staggered timing to make it look like an actual human is doing the tasks. It completes assignments. It takes tests.

The whole thing is automated. The student can be at the gym. The software logs in, watches the video, answers the questions, turns in the work. By the time the student comes home, all the day's work is done.

And it works. The student's grades are good. The school doesn't know. The parents don't know until grades are submitted and suddenly their kid is getting A's in everything.

The parent I talked to caught it because she was suspicious of the sudden grade change: all A's from a school-hating kid. She logged into the school's learning management system at two in the afternoon on a weekday. There was an assignment being submitted at that exact moment. Her son was out of the house. She asked him about it. He eventually admitted the whole thing when she confronted him with the charge from the site on her credit card.

Virtual school can be wonderful. It offers flexibility, individualization, and can be customized for each student. Without third-party proctoring and lockdown browsers that prevent tab switching and monitor eye movement, the system is almost impossible to secure.

When Study Groups Stop Studying

After twenty years, you notice patterns.

Freshman year, a student shows up at my study group for math. First semester, they come every week. They're struggling. Fractions, basic algebra, foundational concepts. We work through them. It's good work.

Second semester, they stop coming. I check in with their parents. Their grades have gotten better. A's and B's instead of C's and D's. Why would they still need help?

More often than you might think, I run into the student at Starbucks or the mall, which is close to my house. I ask how it's going. They say math is better, they've got it figured out. I smile and say that's great.

Later, I hear from another student who knows the one who stopped coming, and they tell me what really happened. They learned to use ChatGPT. They stopped struggling and started asking the AI to do the work.

There's another pattern. A student comes regularly, like clockwork, every Tuesday and Thursday. Then the pattern changes. They're coming every three weeks. When they do come, they bring piles of work. They're behind. Tests are coming up. Can we cover three weeks of material in two hours?

When I ask what changed, the answer is usually the same. They started using AI for homework. They stopped coming to study group. Then the test came and they realized they didn't understand anything. Now they're panicking.

I've started having a conversation with parents when I see this pattern. I tell them: either commit to coming regularly, or we need to adjust the fee. Because when you stop coming and use AI instead, then show up two days before the test, expecting me to teach three weeks of material, that's not a sustainable relationship. That requires a completely different energy and skill set on my part. I'll do it, but it costs more.

It sounds harsh, but it's a boundary I've had to establish because too many families, or at least their children, are trying to have it both ways. They're okay with their kid using AI as a shortcut, then they expect me to come save the day when they crash and burn.

Nobody Reads Anymore

As a society, we don't read. We don't pick up books. We don't finish them. We consume content in snippets, quotes, summaries, and even TikTok videos. We haven't read an actual book in months.

I did a day of substitute teaching recently for a friend who is an English teacher at a private school. She is extremely dedicated and says she hates to

“leave my students with a stranger.” I have a hard time saying no to her on the rare occasion she asks me to cover for her. I asked one class of her junior students: “How many of you have read Jane Eyre?” (They had all been assigned the book.) “How many of you have actually read it?” I specified. “Not started. Read. The whole book.”

Hands up, slowly. Four out of twenty-three.

That’s not a failure on the students’ part. That’s a failure on all of ours. The Great Gatsby, Catcher in the Rye, The Crucible, anything by Shakespeare. Young people are being assigned these books, but they don’t have the reading stamina to get through them. Some of them have never finished a book. Ever. Articles by Ivy League professors have been appearing regularly in which they describe this same trend, even in high-achieving students.

Now they have ChatGPT. Ask it to summarize Jane Eyre. It will give them a perfect summary in ten seconds, and add in details without being asked, like it will, for example, come back with, “Here is Jane’s transformational trajectory.” Ask it to make a study guide with chapter-by-chapter summaries and comprehension questions. Done. Ask it to explain the symbolism of the Red Room in Jane Eyre. They’ve got it.

Wise students take this further. They ask ChatGPT: “Make me a reading quiz at an 11th grade level for each chapter of this book, with answers.” They tell themselves, “I’ll study the quizzes instead of reading the book.” ChatGPT does it. They memorize answers. They walk into class; they can discuss the book because they’ve learned the plot and the major themes. Even though this is the better method, they’ve never actually read the book, and science is clear that reading is pivotal in developing reflective and critical thinking, and even empathy.

The National Literacy Trust released a study in 2025. Reading enjoyment in the UK is at a twenty-year low. Only one in three children aged eight to eighteen enjoys reading. In the United States, the literacy skills of graduating high school seniors are at a thirty-year low. We’re watching a generation that doesn’t read, being given tools to eliminate the need to read, and we’re surprised when they

can’t think.

This isn’t about old people being nostalgic for books. This isn’t about the romance of paper versus screens. This is about the cognitive skills that develop when you sit with a complex text, when you struggle with language, when you build reading comprehension over hours. When you finish a book, you usually feel smarter because you’ve spent hours inside someone else’s mind. Those skills become life skills. They’re foundational to critical thinking, to patience, and to the ability to hold complexity.

And we’re systematically eliminating the need for young people to develop them. We’ve already eliminated the need through screens and social media. Now we’re eliminating it further through AI.

I worked with a junior last year who wanted to improve his reading comprehension, with a view to improve his SAT score. Brilliant kid. Truly bright. I assigned him to read a short story. He brought it back and said he couldn’t get through it. It was boring. So I asked him how long he tried. He said five minutes. Five minutes. He was expected to read a story that might have taken forty minutes, but he couldn’t make it five minutes.

I said, “What if I told you I could give you the summary in two minutes?” He said yes immediately. “What if I told you that if you’re going to read books, you have to accept that the first page might be slow, but if you push through, something shifts?” He didn’t believe me.

I made him read the story... out loud, with me in my office. We took turns. It took forty-five minutes total. When he finished, he said something I found remarkable: “That was good. I would never have done that by myself.”

That’s what’s happening. Young people have lost the capacity to sit with something difficult. And AI has confirmed for them that they don’t have to.

I had a similar experience with Jared and Evan, two eighth graders I have worked with for two years. They were supposed to read Code Talkers, a spirited narrative about Navajo men who served during World War II on the front lines, using their difficult-to-translate native language as a code the enemy could never break. Both boys came to study group without having read a single page. Their

attitude was familiar: why read it when I can just get the summary from AI?

I let my assistant Henry run the study group and I took those two boys to another room, where we read six chapters aloud. I started reading to them with different voices for different characters. By chapter three, they were fighting over who got to read next, improvising their own accents and character voices. By chapter six, Jared said, “This is actually fun. I wish school was more like this.”

This story illustrates how resistant young people are to reading, and also how quickly that resistance can dissolve when reading becomes a shared, active experience rather than a solitary assignment. No AI summary would have given them that. At the core, excessive use of smartphones, dependence on AI, and an aversion to reading are all part of the same underlying phenomenon, which I call for purposes of this book, The Effort Crisis.

CHAPTER 2

The Nature of This New Beast

"The real danger is not that computers will begin to think like men, but that men will begin to think like computers." — Sydney J. Harris

Before we talk about solutions, before we talk about what your family should do, we need to talk about what ChatGPT, to name one AI engine, actually is. Because most people don't understand it. Most parents have never used it. Most teachers don't know how it really works. And if you don't understand the thing, you can't address it effectively.

It is helpful for you to understand what ChatGPT actually does. We are bombarded daily by the doomsday predictions of online influencers telling us AI is coming for our jobs, as well the futurist prognosticators telling us that a beautiful AI-potentiated paradise is just around the corner. I use AI every day to help me help kids succeed, but many of those kids use it, outside of my sphere of influence, to get out of doing the work. So, I am going to break it down for you into its constituent parts.

I will start by telling you a story, one that changed everything for me, the moment AI stopped being an abstraction and became something I could see changing students in real time.

I think it was about one month after ChatGPT started operating that Christian, an eleventh grader who had been coming to my study groups for a few months, showed me an essay that was remarkably good. This young man, perhaps like the majority of young men nowadays, did not like to read and had even bragged about never having read one literature book in high school, despite

the fact he was in Honors English. So when he asked for my opinion on an incredibly well-done analytical essay about Zora Neale Hurston's book, Their Eyes Were Watching God, I was deeply suspicious, especially because there were no grammatical errors that I found and it had almost flawless lead-ins to quotations from the book and follow-up assertions after them. The only actual flaw in the essay, other than the fact I was sure that this young man could not have written it, was that the page numbers after quotes seemed off. They were all from the same three or four pages from the book. Christian actually had his book with him that day. I looked at his essay and grabbed his copy of the book and went to those pages. None of the quotes that he used were on those pages. Finally, perplexed, I asked him where he bought this paper, certain that he simply went online to a paper-writing mill and paid for it. Christian, with no hint of guilt, told me simply that he had used ChatGPT, which I had actually not even heard of because this was December 2022. Christian's cousin, a computer adept, had informed him of this AI tool the day it came out and suggested he start using it.

I told Christian that he was engaging in plagiarism, and that the page numbers were wrong. Against my advice, he turned in that essay, although he did go back and find the actual page numbers. It wasn't until he came back to see me after the New Year that I found out what happened. The teacher did send him an email, questioning how he wrote such a great paper, and apparently, he emailed the teacher back and told her that he had worked on it several times with a tutor and that he would be happy to have the tutor contact her if needed. The teacher made no further demands and gave him an A.

Christian is an incredibly intelligent young man who has ADHD, and when he came to see me, he was really struggling in math, partially due to the fact that his math skills had regressed during Covid. He is one of those very smart ADHDers who breezed through elementary school and even middle school, mostly because of his brain power and his ADHD-wired tendency to find the fastest way to do things. But kids like Christian, and nowadays this tendency is also becoming common in kids who do NOT have ADHD, don't have to work too hard in the early years of school, which robs them of the resilience that is

built through struggle, and also prevents them from developing the skills and muscle memory to get through later academic challenges. When the work gets harder, young people like Christian often hit a wall. When it came to writing advanced papers in English class, Christian did not try to get over the wall himself, but used AI to do it for him.

Once I realized Christian was using AI, I started bugging him, nagging him even, falling into a trap many teachers, and parents, experience. One day, perhaps a few months after the first incident, he challenged me: “Do you actually know what ChatGPT does? Have you ever used it?” He had a point. I didn’t know much at all about it, and I hadn’t actually used it. I asked Christian to sit down with me and show me how it worked. I was actually amazed.

At that point, Christian was already well versed in prompting and tutored me on how to get the chat to give me what I wanted. After a few missteps, I prompted ChatGPT: “Make me a 20-question practice test on the rules for naming organic compounds in chemistry,” something I was going to be helping a tenth grader with. Chat did it, and there was a list of twenty questions but no answer key, and the questions were at an advanced college level. So Christian guided me in prompting Chat to give me something closer to what I was looking for. My second attempt at prompting was something like, “Make me a 20-question multiple choice practice test on naming organic compounds at the tenth-grade level, and put an answer key at the end.” Over about an hour, Christian patiently guided me to more effectively prompt ChatGPT to make custom study tools for several subject areas for students I was working with. My early attempts did not lead to results I considered acceptable, but Christian kept encouraging me to refine my prompts. It turns out that skillful prompting is the engine for getting AI to give you what you want and I owe that insight to Christian. I think it’s pretty apparent that if you have a student who is skilled at using AI, perhaps the first way you could help that situation is to build credibility and trust by asking for your student’s help.

The exchange with Christian helped me begin to use AI to help students much more effectively, and my connection deepened with him. My openness to getting his help, and learning something new, made him more open to me, and

over time, I have succeeded in getting him to use AI in ways that have long-term benefits instead of just short-term gain. So, let me go into what I have learned from working with Christian, from studying with AI alongside my students, and from watching this technology reshape education in real time.

What ChatGPT Actually Does

Here's the simplest explanation I can give: ChatGPT is a prediction machine. You give it a prompt. It looks at patterns in massive amounts of text that it was trained on. And based on those patterns, it predicts what the next word should be. Then it predicts the next word after that. And the next. And the next. Until it fills out the prompt you asked for.

That's it. That's all it does. It is not magic, not conscious, and it is not thinking. It is predicting.

It doesn't understand. It doesn't know anything. It doesn't care. It generates plausible text based on statistical patterns. And because it was trained on such massive amounts of text, the plausible text it generates is usually quite good.

But here's the crucial thing: plausible doesn't mean true. And good doesn't mean accurate. The AI is just trying to predict the next word in the sequence. It's not fact-checking. It's not verifying. It's not thinking about truth. It's predicting.

This matters enormously, and here's why. When your kid uses ChatGPT to write an essay, no thinking has occurred. None. The essay looks polished, sophisticated, articulate. It reads well. But behind those words, there is no human struggle. No wrestling with ideas. No learning. The student didn't do the cognitive work required to develop that writing.

This is different from every other tool we've given students. A calculator helps you execute a mathematical process that you understand. A spell checker helps you with mechanics, but you still have to write the words. A thesaurus helps you find alternatives to words you've already chosen. These tools are helpers. They work within a process you're already doing.

ChatGPT is different. It does not help with the process. It replaces the process entirely.

When a student asks ChatGPT "write me an essay on the causes of the Civil War," the student isn't learning what the causes of the Civil War were. They're not researching. They're not synthesizing information. They're not developing an argument. An AI generated text, and they're copying it. The cognitive development that takes place through writing does not happen.

And here's the thing that really matters: they know this. Or at least, part of them does. The one student I mentioned who came back to work with me after getting caught with ChatGPT, he told me something profound. He said, "I didn't think I could do it. I was scared. So I just asked the AI to do it. And then I realized I still didn't know how to do it." That's awareness. That's honesty. Without adults who challenge their use of AI, most students will never get that kind of mental clarity.

Your Child's Brain on Shortcuts

There's research on this now. And it's not reassuring.

MIT researchers, in June 2025, conducted a study on how different learning methods affect brain engagement and memory. They compared three groups: students who used ChatGPT for problem solving, students who solved problems independently, and students who used ChatGPT but then had to explain their reasoning. The results were clear.

Both groups of ChatGPT users had the lowest brain engagement. Their neural activity was minimal. When you're passively reading or using text that someone else generated, your brain doesn't have to work hard. It's receiving information rather than generating it.

Memory recall was weaker in ChatGPT users. They remembered less of what they learned. That makes sense, because if the AI did the thinking, your brain didn't encode the learning.

Sense of ownership was lowest in ChatGPT-only users. They didn't feel like the work was theirs. Because it wasn't. And brains are wired to care more about things we create ourselves.

Here is a way to explain this to your child that actually lands: "It's like the difference between learning to cook and ordering DoorDash every night. Both get you fed. But one of them means you can feed yourself for the rest of your life, and the other means you're dependent on an app forever. AI does the thinking for you the same way DoorDash does the cooking for you. It works until it doesn't."

Try the gym metaphor. Tell them: "Imagine you want to get stronger. You go to the gym, but instead of lifting the weights yourself, you pay someone to lift them for you. You sit there. They do all the reps. At the end of the month, who got stronger?" They may laugh, but they will get it. That is what happens when AI does your thinking.

For kids who are gamers, and that is a lot of them, try a line like this: "Imagine you are playing a game, and you skip every level using cheat codes. You get to the final boss. What happens?" They know. You get destroyed. Because you never built the skills. That is exactly what happens when a student uses AI for homework all semester and then sits down for a final exam.

These metaphors work because they connect the science to something your child has actually experienced. They do not need to understand neural pathways. They need to understand that their brain is a muscle, and AI is doing their reps for them.

The brain-only group in the above study showed the highest neural connectivity, the most brain engagement, the strongest memory recall, and the greatest sense of ownership over their learning. Why? Because struggle drives growth.

This isn't punishment. This is how human learning works. When you struggle with a problem, you're building neural connections. You're strengthening synapses. You're literally wiring your brain to be better at problem solving.

And when you outsource the thinking to a machine, that wiring doesn't happen.

The Critical Thinking Crisis

Let's look at the data. SAT scores have taken a hit. Reading and writing were down ten points from 2019. Math was down twenty points. ACT composite scores fell from 20.7 in 2019 to 19.4 at the end of 2025. These aren't huge drops, but they're significant, and they're happening while we're integrating AI into education. The ACT and SAT, which were increasingly optional in the aftermath of Covid, are likely to be given greater weight for college admission, as universities understand that GPAs are very often inflated because of high school students' growing use of AI to do the work.

The research is starting to point to the underlying mechanisms that have led to decreasing standardized test scores. When students have unlimited access to AI that can generate answers, they stop asking themselves hard questions. They stop evaluating information sources. They stop thinking critically about what's true. To perform at a high level on the reading section of the SAT or ACT, you have to be able to think critically and to reason logically. These abilities are becoming increasingly scarce.

Instead, they rely on what the AI tells them. And AI is plausible and wrong in ways that are hard to catch. It generates text with confidence, even when that text is completely false. But students don't know that. They read the confident-sounding text and assume it's true.

Research from multiple studies is pointing to what some researchers call the "cognitive outsourcing trap." The more you outsource your thinking to technology, the weaker your own thinking skills become. You don't ask "is this true"; you assume the AI is right. You don't evaluate sources, you accept what's given to you. You stop thinking critically because thinking critically is hard and the machine is easy.

And the skills erode fast.

This is what worries me most. Not that students are cheating. Cheating is as old as schools. What worries me is that we're raising a generation that doesn't

know how to think, doesn't trust their own thinking, and that has been taught that the solution to every hard problem is asking a machine.

The Self-Efficacy Problem

Self-efficacy is a term from psychology. It refers to the deep belief that you have the power to overcome challenges. It's not confidence. Confidence is about thinking you're good at something. Self-efficacy is deeper. It's the belief that if I face something hard, I have the tools and the resilience to get through it. It's the internal voice that says, "I don't know how to do this yet, but I can figure it out."

Where does self-efficacy originate? It comes from experience, from getting knocked down and getting back up. It is an internal belief born of doing something hard and surviving it. From struggling with something hard, feeling like you might fail, and figuring it out anyway. Every time a child solves a difficult problem, writes a hard essay, or pushes through a project they wanted to quit, they build a little more self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is foundational. It's what gets you through college, what keeps you going in your career when things get hard, what helps you build relationships that require effort and vulnerability.

Now, imagine a student who has been using ChatGPT for homework since seventh grade. Every time something gets hard, they ask the AI. Every difficult math problem, every essay they don't know how to start, every research project that feels overwhelming. The AI does it. The work is done. The grade shows up. Success, right?

Except they're not building self-efficacy. They're building the opposite. They're learning that when things are hard, the answer is to outsource. They're learning that they can't do hard things. That the solution to struggle is avoidance.

What happens to their self-efficacy? It doesn't develop. They never learn that they can do hard things. They fail to "build the muscle." They are robbed of experiencing the satisfaction that comes from figuring something out on their own. So when life inevitably gets hard, they have no internal resources to draw

on.

The research backs this up. While AI boosts short-term confidence (the grade is better, so the student feels more confident), frequent users show excessive technological dependency. They become weaker at solving problems independently. They don't believe they can do the work because they've never actually done it. And then you put them in a situation where they can't use AI. A test. An interview. A real-world problem. They often panic.

One study found that almost a third of university students showed patterns that would be classified as addictive AI usage. They couldn't stop using it. They experienced anxiety when separated from it. They had developed a genuine dependency. Like any addiction, the tolerance builds. They need more AI. More assistance. More outsourcing.

Think about what that means. You've got a generation of college students who can't do their work without AI, who are anxious when they can't access it, and who have never learned to struggle through difficult problems independently. They've never experienced the growth that comes from overcoming a challenge.

And their parents often have no idea. The parents see good grades, and they are inclined to think everything is fine.

The Paradox

Here's where it gets complicated. AI can be both the best and worst thing for students, especially for those with ADHD. This paradox is important because it means the answer isn't simple. It means "ban AI" is wrong. And "embrace AI completely" is also wrong. The answer is more nuanced.

I have worked with many kids with ADHD. Their brains work differently. Big projects feel overwhelming. Their brain churns through multiple ideas at once, and organizing those ideas on paper feels impossible.

ChatGPT can be genuinely helpful for these kids. Ask it to break a big assignment into small steps. It does. Ask it to explain something in three different ways. It will. Ask it to help organize thoughts before writing. It's patient. It never

gets frustrated. It doesn't say, "Why do I have to explain this again?" It just explains again. For a kid whose brain is already working harder than neurotypical brains, who might have a parent or teacher who is frustrated or impatient, having a patient AI tutor is legitimately useful.

I have worked for the past several months with one young man with severe ADHD, but an IQ in the gifted range. Asking him to outline a paper was impossible. His brain just didn't work that way. So we tried something: he talked through his ideas out loud and I scribed. I then helped him see the structure in what he was saying, and he used ChatGPT to organize those ideas into an outline. He still wrote the paper himself, but the AI helped him get past the blank page.

That is using AI well.

But, and this is a massive but:

The ADHD brain is wired for efficiency. It naturally seeks the shortest route to completion. That is not a character flaw, and it is not laziness. It is how the brain is structured. For a kid with ADHD, the temptation of AI is not just strong. It is almost irresistible.

ChatGPT for an ADHD brain can become the ultimate shortcut or escape hatch. However, instead of using AI to learn how to break problems down, the ADHD student too often uses AI to skip the process entirely. Instead of scaffolding, it becomes avoidance.

I will give you an example from my own life of this seemingly innate predisposition toward finishing a task quickly. Last Thanksgiving, I hosted a pretty large group, and I often get anxious at the end of such a gathering because I know that once people leave, I will struggle to clean up and then my house will stay a pigsty for several days. As usual, I took this anxiety and erupted into a flurry of activity, collecting dishes and pans, and then going to the sink and feverishly, furiously, starting to wash the huge pile of dishes, pots, and pans (too many to put in the dishwasher!). My best friend's mother, a retired third grade teacher, observed me in this process and said, "You make doing dishes look like an Olympic sport. I've never in my life seen somebody do dishes as fast and as thoroughly as you." I'm not sure I can break down neurologically what happens

in my brain, but like many people with ADHD, I do have the ability to hyper focus, but part of that trait is that it is infused with a strong impulse to get things done as quickly as possible, shunting all of my energy and mental resources into the task. I think it has to do with a lifetime of experiencing that I can run out of steam with a task and then it never gets done and unfinished projects can linger. But if you think about artificial intelligence, it offers a very efficient way to get unpleasant tasks done quickly, making it so very seductive for people with ADHD.

But that seductiveness is exactly where the danger lies, because instead of using AI to learn how to break problems down, the student uses AI to skip the problems entirely. Instead of asking AI for help understanding something, they ask AI to do it. Both of these choices involve the same tool but offer completely different outcomes. One builds skill. One erodes it.

One conversation can make a real difference. Sit down with your child and say, “AI can help you learn how to organize your thoughts. But it can’t do the thinking for you. Let’s figure out together where the line is.” This is a conversation we probably all need to be having with our children on a regular basis if we want to have any chance of infusing them with a sense of where the line is between getting help and completely outsourcing the learning.

That line is getting harder to see, however, because the temptation is enormous. The AI makes everything so easy. The quick reward is there. And most families are not having this conversation at all.

When AI Gets It Wrong

This book has been mostly about the problem of students outsourcing their thinking. But there is a different problem, one that is just as dangerous and far less discussed: AI gets things wrong. Confidently, fluently, and in ways that are very hard to catch.

The Confidence Problem

I was working on a research project and asked AI to find statistics about student AI usage. It gave me specific numbers, precise percentages, named universities and journals. It looked authoritative. Half of it was fabricated. The universities were real. The studies were not. The AI had invented citations that looked exactly like real academic sources.

Researchers call this “hallucination.” The AI does not know it is making things up. It is simply predicting the next word in a sequence, and sometimes the most plausible next word leads to something that does not exist. I asked Claude to find me sources for AI hallucination, incidentally, and it came back with twelve studies. I then followed up and out of the twelve, I could only verify seven of them. The journals did not publish those articles. But they looked real. However, on two of them, I eventually found articles with the titles that Claude provided, but not the correct journals!

Now, imagine your child using this tool for a research paper. They ask for sources. They get sources. The sources look real. They cite them. Their teacher may or may not catch it. But the student has now built an argument on a foundation that does not exist.

The Contradiction Problem

I have had AI tools contradict themselves within the same conversation. I was researching school discipline policies and asked for data on suspension rates. The AI gave me a number. Ten minutes later, in the same conversation, I asked a related question and the AI gave me a different number for the same statistic. When I pointed out the contradiction, it apologized and gave me a third number. None of them were correct.

AI does not have a coherent worldview. It holds no beliefs and maintains no consistent position. It predicts what sounds right based on the immediate context of each question. For your child, this creates a particular danger. If they are using AI to study for a test and the AI gives them contradictory information at different points in the conversation, they will not know which version is correct. They will memorize whichever version they saw last.

The Bias Problem

AI is trained on enormous amounts of text from the internet. The internet is not neutral. It is full of biases, outdated information, cultural assumptions, and outright misinformation. When AI generates text, it reflects those biases. A 2025 study at the University of Washington found that AI-generated text is more persuasive than human-written text in certain contexts, which means your child may be absorbing biased information that sounds more convincing than what they would find on their own.

The Good Enough Problem

Here is something I have noticed in my own work with AI that worries me most of all. AI produces output that is good enough. It is not great, not exceptional, and not deeply insightful, but it is competent. It covers the points. The grammar is perfect. The structure makes sense. And because it is good enough, it is incredibly tempting to just use it.

I catch myself doing this. I ask AI to draft something, often related to marketing. The draft comes back. It is competent. It covers the points. The grammar is perfect. And I have to force myself to rewrite it in my own voice, because what AI produces is not what I would have said. It is what a machine predicts I would have said based on patterns. Good enough is not good enough.

For your child, this is devastating. They ask AI to write an essay. The essay is good enough. It gets a B+. Maybe an A-. They think, “That is better than I could do.” So they stop trying. Over time, the gap between what AI produces and what they can produce on their own grows wider. They become less capable, not more. Good enough from AI is the enemy of greatness from your child.

Amy Chatfield, a librarian at the University of Southern California’s Norris Medical Library, reported that a researcher came to her with thirty-five articles to find, and she could not locate a single one of them. Every single citation had been generated by AI. Every one was fake. Teach your child to be the person who checks. That skill will serve them for the rest of their lives.

CHAPTER 3

Families in the AI Age

"The greatest gift you can give your children is not to live their lives for them." — Louise Hart

I am going to tell you some stories that will help you more fully appreciate the state of AI in our educational system. These are real families. I've changed names and details to protect privacy, but everything I'm about to describe is happening right now in homes across the country.

Diane's Email: The Perfect Essay

I got an email from a mother named Diane. She wrote: "I'm worried about my son's writing. Or actually, I'm worried that the writing I'm seeing isn't his."

She explained what happened. Her son had always been a decent writer. B range, solid. Standard teenage writing. Then something changed. An essay came back with an A. Then another. Then another. The writing suddenly became polished, sophisticated, the vocabulary more advanced than what he used when he talked to her.

It didn't sound like him.

So, Diane did something smart. She sat down with her son Max and said, "I'm noticing your writing is different. Can you tell me what's going on?"

His response: "I don't know what you're talking about. I'm a good writer."

Diane wasn't satisfied. She had a hunch. She dug through an old folder and found an essay he'd written the year before, and it was of a completely different quality, much simpler vocabulary, and a decidedly younger voice. She emailed both essays to the previous year's teacher, with whom Max had developed a great rapport, and asked, "Is this the same student's writing?"

The teacher looked at both and then replied, "No. These are not the same voice. The new writing is not his."

Diane talked to Max later that day and showed him both essays and said, "I showed these to your old teacher. She agrees. This isn't your writing."

Max of course initially, and vigorously, denied the accusation. A few days later, he was ready to admit the truth. He'd been using ChatGPT. He was scared about grades. He wanted to get into a good college. He thought one essay wouldn't matter. In a short time, one essay became all of them.

The conversation that followed was hard. She asked him: "Do you understand that you're not developing your own writing? Do you understand that you're going to get to college and they're going to ask you to write and you're not going to know how?"

He did understand. He was scared.

She made him go talk to his teacher to confess about the AI-generated essays. Max asked for a chance to rewrite them. The teacher, to his credit, said yes. The rewrites took longer. They weren't as polished. They got B's instead of A's. Max learned more in that rewrite process than he would have in a semester of high-quality AI essays.

Diane told me something that gets to the heart of what is happening right now: "I almost didn't notice. If I hadn't paid attention, I would have let him think he'd learned how to write at the level those essays were written. He would have gotten into college based on writing he didn't do. And first semester, he would have failed."

I think many parents know in their gut that something is wrong, but they look the other way because the truth is too uncomfortable.

Marcus's Story: The College Application

I had worked with Marcus during his junior and senior years of high school helping him prepare for the ACT. An above average student, he had good test scores, but he wanted to crack 30 on the math and science sections. He achieved that goal with my help and hard work on his part. But his writing was rough. He knew it. His guidance counselor and parents knew it. His mother wanted him to work with me on the college essays and on his writing in general, which she hoped would help him improve as a writer.

But Marcus didn't want to do the work. Writing is hard. Thinking is hard. He was tired of working hard. So, we later discovered, he used ChatGPT for his college essays.

The essays were excellent. His college counselor read them and said, "These are really strong." His parents read them and were impressed at how far his writing skills had apparently come. Marcus got into a very good college, partially, I'm sure, on the strength of essays he didn't write.

First semester of college, his English composition professor assigned the first major assignment: a five-paragraph essay on a book they'd read, but it was to be done during a ninety-minute class. In class. No ChatGPT, just Marcus and his thoughts and the blank page.

He got a D.

The second major assignment was a five-page essay that was done outside of class. Marcus went back to his tried-and-true method of letting ChatGPT do the work. Marcus pulled out all the stops, though. He confessed to me that he had written it paragraph by paragraph with very specific prompts and put each paragraph into a humanize-AI app after ChatGPT spit out each paragraph. He was sure he would fool the professor.

He didn't.

Marcus eventually admitted that he'd used AI for his essay. He had to appear in front of the academic misconduct board (His university has a very strict policy on using AI!). They basically forced him to drop the class, instead of failing it, and he had to retake it the next semester. He's now on academic probation.

The shortcut cost him.

If Marcus had done the work in high school, written the rough drafts, gotten feedback, revised them, struggled through them, he would have arrived at college with actual writing skills. He could have developed the skills to avoid this mess. His college experience would have started in a much more positive way.

Instead, he had to spend an entire semester, and money, and academic credibility, fixing something that he should have learned in high school.

The Parent Who Checked

A mom I've known because I had worked with her son called me. She told me, "My daughter had a research paper for American History. I knew she was working on it, and I went to her room to check in with her to see how it was going. She was so focused that she didn't hear me walk up. I saw the banner on the top of the screen she had up: 'Humanize AI text with the smartest AI humanizer.'"

When the girl realized her mom was in the room, she quickly shut the laptop. The mother, a highly intelligent woman, realized what had been going on. So, she sat down with her daughter and they had the conversation.

The daughter cried. She said she didn't know how to write. She said every kid in her class was using it. She said the teacher didn't care. She was scared about her GPA.

The mother shared with me something she told her daughter, which I think is exactly right: "I understand that you're scared. And I understand that everyone else is doing it. That doesn't mean you get to do it. That means we have to have different expectations than your peers. That's hard. But that's what integrity

looks like."

They developed a plan. The daughter would rewrite the essay. On her own. The mom would read drafts and give feedback, but she wouldn't write it. The essay would be true and honest and probably not perfect. And she would get to keep her self-respect and actually learn how to write.

The essay got a B, not an A, but it was hers. And the daughter learned something about herself, about her own capacity. The mother taught her a very powerful lesson on the importance of integrity and what it costs to lose it.

Tom's Email: The Math Student

Tom, an automotive engineer, emailed me in a panic. His son's grades had gone from C's to A's in algebra, which he was taking in the eighth grade. Tom was thrilled. Finally, his son was getting it. He was understanding the material and had figured out how to study. This is what parenting success looks like, right?

Spring standardized testing brought some shocking news. The school administered a math benchmark test, something that actually measures what kids understand. His son's score was in the 25th percentile.

Tom wrote: "His homework and test grades say he's an A-student in math. His standardized test score says he's struggling. What's happening? I don't understand."

I told him what I suspected: AI. He eventually confirmed, after doing some digging, that I was right. His son had been using it for all homework for the previous semester. He was getting 10/10 on every single assignment. His son admitted this when confronted by his father and also confessed to knowing how to conceal his phone to use it to cheat on math tests.

This is one of the clearest red flags. Sometimes, there is a huge disparity between homework and test grades. Sometimes the data comes from the gap between grades in a class and standardized testing. When the grades don't match, the homework, or someone, is lying.

Tom had the conversation with his son about integrity, about the fact that good grades on dishonest work don't mean anything. Tests, he told his son, tell the truth about what you actually know. A test score in the 25th percentile wasn't some fluke or bad luck. It meant he didn't understand the material.

Tom's son felt some hard-to-understand ownership of his high homework grades. He told his father that he just didn't try on the standardized test, so the low score didn't mean anything. He also kept insisting that he was doing fine in math, even though he admitted to cheating. The boy was oddly invested in thinking of himself as a good math student even though he knew what he had been doing. This is not uncommon. AI helps kids create and maintain a fictitious view of themselves.

Tom shared with me what he had told his son: "Your homework grades are good on work you didn't do, work that a machine did for you. You're not fine. You don't understand the material. If you go into high school thinking you're good at math when you're not, you're going to crash hard. And we're going to fix that right now."

They hired a tutor. His son had to go back to basics. It took two months of actual learning, and a good chunk of the summer, to rebuild what he thought he knew but didn't.

Tom told me: "I'm grateful we caught it before high school. If he'd gone into high school thinking he was good at math, when really he was just good at prompting, he would have failed. Everything downstream depends on that foundation. I'm grateful we caught it early and he had to actually learn."

CHAPTER 4

The Conversation Your Family Needs to Have

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." — Frederick Douglass

You need to have a conversation with your family about AI. Not a lecture. Not a threat. A conversation.

Start With Yourself

Before you have any conversation with your kid about AI, you need to have one with yourself.

Lauren, a mother whose daughter I work with, called me in January. She is a director at a financial services company. She is smart and capable, someone who built her career on clear thinking and sharp writing. She and I had several before conversations about her concerns regarding her daughter's struggles in math. But that's not why Lauren called me on this occasion. She told me she had been using ChatGPT to write her performance reviews for the past six months. Not as a starting point. Not as a brainstorming tool. She was pasting in her notes about each employee and asking ChatGPT to write the full review, important documents that would shape people's careers and compensation.

She didn't think much of it until she noticed her daughter doing the same thing with homework. Same process. Paste in the assignment, let the machine write it, submit.

She called me and said, “I became the example I didn’t want my daughter to follow.”

So she stopped. She went back to writing her own reviews, and she told me it was painful at first. She had gotten used to the speed, the polish, the way ChatGPT could make a mediocre thought sound authoritative. Going back to her own writing felt slow and clunky by comparison. But she stuck with it, and after a few weeks she noticed something. The reviews she was writing now were more honest. She was saying things she actually meant about each employee instead of accepting whatever the machine assembled from her notes. Her daughter noticed too. She asked Lauren why she wasn’t using ChatGPT anymore, and Lauren told her the truth. It took a few weeks, but her daughter started doing her own work again. There was no big speech. No ultimatum. Just a mother who changed her own behavior and a daughter who was paying more attention than either of them realized.

That’s where this starts. With you. Not with policing your kid’s screen. With looking at your own. I belong to a Facebook group for teachers and administrators. Last week, I wrote a post in that group which sounded the same alarm that this book is trying to do. One of the group members, a high school principal, challenged me. “How is this different than how adults are using AI right now?” And of course, he was right to point that out. The spirited exchange, which ended up drawing comments and reactions from dozens of people in the group, confirmed my belief that the first order of business for parents, and educators, is to examine their own use before they try to help their kids. And for many of you, doing that might mean that you actually have to start using AI.

Try it. Sit down and actually use ChatGPT for something real, not just to see what it does, but to authentically feel the pull. Type in a work problem or a question you’ve been wrestling with. Watch how fast it gives you something polished and plausible. Feel how tempting it is to just use that answer instead of doing your own thinking. That’s what your kid feels every single time they sit down with homework.

I talked with a therapist friend of mine about this. I had called her to get a clinical perspective on how AI was showing up with the adolescents in her

practice. I did not expect what she told me. She said she had caught herself using ChatGPT to draft therapy notes, not the sensitive clinical parts, but the summaries, and the treatment plan updates. She realized she was doing exactly what she was seeing her teenage clients do: outsourcing the thinking because the tool made it so easy.

She made a commitment to herself: Use it to enhance her thinking, never to replace it. That's the standard I'd suggest you measure yourself against, not "never use AI." That's not realistic and it's not the point. The point is: Are you using it to help you think better, or to avoid thinking entirely?

Then, once you've sat with that question honestly, go to the dinner table and ask your kid: "Show me something cool you've done with AI." Not accusingly. Genuinely curious. Let them show you. Let them explain it. Listen.

That conversation, that openness, is the beginning of something important. Not because one conversation fixes everything. It doesn't. But because it starts an ongoing dialogue, one where you're no longer the parent who doesn't understand. You're the parent who tried it, felt the temptation, made a choice about it, and wants to understand how your kid is navigating the same thing. And when you ask your kid to show you how AI works for them, you're doing something powerful: you're shifting the dynamic from surveillance to collaboration. Teenagers are wired for autonomy, independence. When you ask for their help, when you let them be the expert on something, they become less defensive. The conversation gets easier each time.

Calculator vs. Ghostwriter

There are two principal ways to use AI. I call them calculator mode and ghostwriter mode.

Calculator mode: You use AI to check your thinking. You've solved a problem. You ask ChatGPT if you got it right. Or you're stuck on something, so you ask it for a hint, then you go back and solve it yourself. Perhaps you're trying to understand a concept, so you ask it to explain it three different ways, and then

you engage with those explanations. The AI is a tool. It's helping you think better. You're still doing the cognitive work. You're still struggling with the material. You're still learning.

Ghostwriter mode: You ask AI to do the full task you're supposed to do. Write the essay. Solve the problem. Explain the concept. You submit the output. The AI is doing the thinking. You're not. You submit something polished and sophisticated that represents zero cognitive effort on your part.

This distinction is everything. It's the difference between a tool that helps you learn and a tool that prevents you from learning.

I had a sophomore named Alana who came to me frustrated. She had been using AI for history class for the first month of school. She was getting A's on every assignment. Then, her teacher gave a document-based question as an in-class exam, and Alana froze. She could not analyze a primary source on her own, though the homework she had been having AI do was meant to prep students for the exam, which even contained a couple of the exact same documents. She could not construct an argument without the machine feeding her one. She got a D. Her teacher noticed the gap between the A's on homework and the D on the exam and pulled her aside. That conversation is how the truth came out. Alana told me later, "I realized I do not actually know how to do history. I just know how to ask AI to do history, and I'm really good at that." That is the ghostwriter trap. Alana had outsourced so completely that she had no skills left when the machine was taken away.

Compare Alana to James, a student I worked with who has dyslexia. Writing is genuinely hard for him. He uses ChatGPT to help organize his ideas. He will write down his main points in his own words, messy and misspelled, and then ask ChatGPT to help him arrange them into an outline. He then writes the essay himself from the outline. His essays are not perfect. They have his voice, his quirks, and the occasional run-on sentence. They are his, though. He is using AI as a calculator. He does the thinking. The tool helps with the mechanics.

The difference between Alana and James is not the tool. The difference is whether the student remains in control of the thinking.

The gap between calculator users and ghostwriter users is growing every week. And the difference is not found in the tool. The tool is the same. The difference is someone started talking to them about the difference, someone who perhaps said, “I see what you’re tempted to do. I understand why. I’m not going to let you. Because I love you and I’m not going to let you waste your potential on shortcuts that don’t build anything real.”

Your kid can understand this distinction. They’re smarter than you think. They might resist it, because ghostwriter mode is way easier and more rewarding in the short term. Getting an A without doing the work feels amazing at first. But they understand the difference. And they respect it, if you do.

One mother told me, “I explained the calculator versus ghostwriter thing to my son and he got quiet. Then he said, without much prompting on my part, ‘I’ve been using ghostwriter mode, haven’t I?’ I said yes. He said, ‘Why did nobody explain it like that before?’” Because they hadn’t had the conversation. Once they did, the dynamic in their house shifted. Not overnight. But the door was open.

The Family AI Agreement

I recommend families sit down together and establish actual guidelines about AI. Not a lecture. Not rules handed down from above. A conversation where everyone gets to contribute.

Banning AI doesn’t work. We tried banning screens. It did not work. Kids find ways to circumvent any attempt to restrict technology. They also can become resentful. You lose trust, a precious commodity with your children, especially when they hit the teen years.

A family I worked with last fall first tried the ban approach. The dad found out his eighth grader was using ChatGPT for every writing assignment. He was furious. He blocked the site on the home network, took the kid’s phone, and said, “No AI, period.” Within two weeks, the kid was using ChatGPT on a friend’s phone at school and had found three other AI tools the dad didn’t even know

existed. The ban didn't stop anything. It just moved the behavior underground and destroyed the trust between them.

When the dad called me, I told him what I'm telling you. Stop trying to control the tool. Start trying to shape how your kid thinks about it.

They sat down as a family, all four of them (mom, dad, eighth grader, and his younger sister who was in fifth grade), and they talked about it. Not about punishment. About when AI helps and when it hurts. The eighth grader pushed back at first. "Everyone uses it, and it's not cheating if the teacher doesn't say you can't." They let him talk. They listened. They didn't argue.

Then the dad asked, "If you use ChatGPT to write your essay and you get an A, what did you actually learn?" The dad told me that his son went quiet. This approach got the kid to actually take a few seconds to reflect and realize he did not know the answer.

They came up with their own answers, the product of an ongoing dialogue. They came up with logical categories. For homework: it is okay to ask ChatGPT to explain a concept you don't understand. It's okay to use it to check your work after you've done it. It's not okay to ask it to do the work for you. For tests: AI is off limits, full stop. For creative projects: you can use it to brainstorm, but the final product has to be yours.

They wrote down these parameters. The kid helped write them, which meant he owned them instead of resenting them. They stuck the document on the fridge. And here's the thing that surprised the parents: their son actually followed it. Not perfectly. He pushed boundaries. But when he did, they had a shared agreement to point back to. The conversation shifted from "you're in trouble" to "remember what we all agreed to." That's a fundamentally different dynamic.

When your kid inevitably pushes back and says, "But everyone else is allowed to use it," you have a prepared answer: "Maybe. In our family, this is what we agreed to. And the reason is because we care about what you're actually learning, not just what grade you're getting."

I've created a downloadable Family AI Agreement template you can print tonight and fill out together at the dinner table. It covers homework, tests,

creative projects, and personal use, with space for everyone's input. You can find it at https://kevinjroberts.net/family-ai-agreement.

Age-Appropriate Guidelines

A mother gave her fifth grader access to ChatGPT as a homework helper. She figured it was like having a tutor on call. The problem showed up slowly. At first, he was using it the way she intended, asking it to explain things he didn't understand. But within a few weeks, the questions shifted. Instead of "Explain what a fraction is," he was typing "Tell me what this chapter is about" and "What's the answer to number seven." He didn't use the word "summarize." He'd say, "Tell me what it's about." His reading log was full, but when his teacher asked him about a book during class, he couldn't describe a single scene. He wasn't being defiant. He was being efficient. And that efficiency was quietly hollowing out the exact skills he was supposed to be building.

That boy was ten. The guardrails he needed are different from what a sophomore needs. But the underlying problem is the same at every age: efficiency replaces learning so gradually that nobody notices until the skills are gone.

For a kid that young, AI should stay in the family room, used together with a parent present. Your child is learning to read, to write, and to think in complete sentences. Those skills have to develop through struggle and practice. There is no shortcut and there shouldn't be. This is the foundation everything else gets built on. If you use AI with your elementary schooler at all, make it a shared activity. Ask a question together. Talk about the answer together. Model curiosity, not outsourcing.

A seventh grader told me, with total sincerity, "Mr. Kevin, literally everyone in my class uses ChatGPT for the reading questions. If I don't, I'm the only one doing extra work." He wasn't wrong about the social reality. He was wrong about what "extra work" means in the long run.

Middle school is where the social pressure kicks in, and it's also when kids start doing homework independently behind a closed bedroom door. At this age, AI works best as a study buddy, but only if you know it's there. You're checking in. You're asking what they used it for. You're looking at the work and noticing whether it sounds like your kid or like a machine. The key is keeping the conversation open. If your kid feels like they have to hide their AI use from you, you've already lost.

A high school junior I coach told me something that stuck with me. She said, "My parents never once asked me how I do my homework. They just look at the grades. So when I started using ChatGPT, there was nobody to notice." She wasn't blaming her parents. She was describing a gap. She wished someone had been paying attention.

By high school, your kid has more autonomy, and they should. But autonomy without accountability is just absence. You're still having regular conversations about their work. You're still noticing if homework grades are way higher than test grades. You're asking, once in a while, "Walk me through how you did this assignment." Not as an interrogation, but as an ongoing topic of interest, of easy conversation. If your child resists this line of inquiry, I have found that asking for their help navigating AI yourself can significantly help smooth out the dynamic.

By college, they're on their own. But if you've had the conversations, if you've modeled integrity, if they understand the difference between using AI well and using it to cheat, they'll make better choices.

The through line is this: the older they get, the more freedom they earn. But freedom without conversation is just absence. Your kid needs to know that you're paying attention, that you care enough to ask hard questions, and that your trust in them is something they build over time by showing you they can handle it. That doesn't happen automatically. It happens because you stay in the conversation even when they'd rather you didn't.

One phenomenon I have noticed recently is that I am getting a lot more calls from college students, many of whom outsourced their thinking and writing in

high school, and who have college instructors who understand what's been going on and so have structured their classes in ways that make cheating with AI very difficult, if not impossible. This situation of course represents another reason we have to engage with our high schoolers now, lest they get to college and feel unprepared, as many clearly are.

CHAPTER 5

Your First Week: A Family Action Plan

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started." — Mark Twain

You've read the stories. You've seen the data. You believe me. And now you're asking, "What do I actually do?"

Everything in the previous chapter gives you the foundation. The conversation with yourself. The conversation with your kid. The Family AI Agreement. But I know that can feel like a lot, so here are five specific things you can do this week. Not all five at once. Pick one. Start there. Come back for the rest.

Know the Red Flags

There are warning signs, which we have already been discussing. This section just brings them all together. Once you know what to look for, they're hard to miss.

A father I work with, a radiologist, noticed something about his daughter's history essays. She had always written in short, punchy sentences. That was her style: direct, a little blunt, occasionally funny. Then her essays started coming back with long, flowing paragraphs, complex sentence structures, and vocabulary she had never used in conversation. Words like "juxtaposition" and "paradigm." She was a sophomore.

He didn’t accuse her. He just said, “This is really well-written. Walk me through how you wrote it.” She couldn’t. She stumbled through a vague explanation about doing more research this time and taking it more seriously. He let it go that night, but he didn’t forget. A week later, he asked her to explain the thesis of her own essay. She couldn’t do that either. That was the conversation that opened everything up.

Here’s what to watch for. Grades that suddenly improve without any change in effort. Homework that sounds nothing like your child’s actual voice. A student who writes beautifully at home but bombs an in-class essay. Test scores that don’t match homework grades. A kid who used to spend two hours on homework and is suddenly finishing in twenty minutes.

None of these are proof by themselves. But when you see two or three together, pay attention. The father I just mentioned told me later, “The vocabulary was the giveaway. My daughter is smart, but she doesn’t talk like a textbook. The essays did.”

I should also mention something that trips up a lot of parents: improved grades can look like good news. Tom, the automotive engineer I wrote about in Chapter 3, was thrilled when his son’s algebra grades went from C’s to A’s. It took standardized testing to reveal that his son didn’t actually understand the material. The A’s were real in the gradebook but fake in terms of learning. So when your child’s grades go up, pay attention to whether anything else changed. Did they start studying differently? Did they ask more questions? Or did the grades just quietly improve while everything else stayed the same?

Check Their Browser History (Once)

I’m not suggesting you become a surveillance state. I’ve worked with families who went that route, installing tracking software on every device, monitoring every keystroke, and it destroyed trust without solving anything. The kids just got more creative about hiding.

But an honest look, once, will tell you a lot.

A mother whose son I coach did this after we talked about her son's sudden improvement in English. She waited until he was at basketball practice, opened his laptop, and looked at his browser history. What she found was an education. ChatGPT was bookmarked. He visited it daily, sometimes three or four times a day. But that wasn't the part that shook her. She found two humanizer websites in his history, the kind that take AI-generated text and make it sound more human. She also found an AI detection tool he'd been using to test his own essays before submitting them.

That last one is the tell. If your kid is running their homework through a detection tool before turning it in, they know exactly what they're doing. They're not confused about boundaries. They've built a system.

The mother used what she found wisely. She didn't confront her son with a list of websites. She brought up the topic generally at dinner that night, mentioned she'd been reading about AI and homework, and asked what he knew about it. He gave a careful, evasive answer. She pressed a little. He eventually opened up. The browser history gave her the knowledge to ask the right questions, but the conversation itself is what mattered.

One important note: once your child realizes you checked their browser history, they will start clearing it. So if you find something concerning, use the information to dig deeper through conversation rather than revealing exactly what you know. The goal isn't to catch them in the act. The goal is to understand what's happening so you can help.

Talk to Their Teachers

This one sounds simple, and it is. Send a short email. "I'm concerned about AI use in homework. Does the school have a policy? How are you handling it in your classroom? Is there anything I should know about my child's work?"

Most teachers are relieved when a parent brings this up. They have been waiting for someone to care.

A mother in Oakland County, Michigan, showed me what this can look like. Her son was a sophomore, and she'd noticed his essays had gotten dramatically better in a short period of time. She wasn't sure it was AI, but she suspected it. She emailed his English teacher. Short, respectful. The teacher wrote back within an hour. She'd been worried about the same thing. She didn't have a way to prove AI use. The school didn't have a formal policy. That one email started a chain reaction. The teacher brought it to a department meeting. The department brought it to the principal. By the end of the semester, the school had drafted its first AI policy. One parent, one question. But I want to tell you about the other side of that too, what happens when the conversation doesn't go well, because you should be prepared for it.

A father I know emailed his son's math teacher with a version of that same email. The response he got was dismissive. The teacher said AI couldn't really do math (wrong), that the school had it under control (they didn't), and that his son was doing fine (his son was cheating on every assignment). The father could have dropped it. Instead, he emailed the department head. The department head was more receptive. She admitted they hadn't discussed AI as a department and said she would raise it at their next meeting.

Not every teacher will be your ally on this. Some are overwhelmed. Some are in denial. Some genuinely don't understand how sophisticated the tools have gotten. That doesn't mean you stop asking. It means you find the right person to ask. If the teacher isn't responsive, go to the department head. If the department head isn't responsive, go to the principal. You're not being difficult. You're being a parent.

And when you do find a teacher who gets it, support them. That teacher who requires handwritten first drafts, or who gives in-class writing assessments, or who calls you when something doesn't look right, that teacher is fighting for your child's education. Send them a thank-you email. Show up to parent-teacher conferences. Let them know you're on their side. Teachers who feel supported by parents are braver about enforcing standards.

Require Handwritten First Drafts

For important assignments, especially essays, ask your child to write the first draft, or at least one paragraph, by hand or in a Google Doc that tracks revision history. This creates a record of thinking.

I started recommending this to families about a year ago, and the responses have been revealing. A mother of a ninth grader asked her daughter to handwrite the first draft of a research paper. Her daughter protested. “That’s so slow. Nobody does that anymore. This is pointless.” The mother held firm. The daughter sat down with a notebook and tried to write. After twenty minutes, she had half a paragraph.

That half-paragraph told the mother everything she needed to know. Her daughter had been submitting polished, multi-page essays. But when asked to actually produce original writing by hand, she could barely get started. The gap between what she was turning in and what she could actually produce was enormous.

They worked through it together. The mother didn’t punish her. She sat with her daughter at the kitchen table, and they talked through the assignment. What’s your thesis? What are your main points? What evidence supports them? The daughter struggled. It was uncomfortable. The final handwritten draft was messy and imperfect. But it was real, and the daughter knew it was hers.

If a student can produce a handwritten first draft that connects logically to their final product, that’s real work. If they can’t produce any evidence of process, that’s a red flag worth exploring. Google Docs with revision history is another option. You can actually see the deletions, the additions, and the progress over time. An essay that appears fully formed with no revision history is an essay that was pasted in from somewhere else.

Create Tech-Free Homework Time

One hour per day (Or start with thirty minutes). No phone, no ChatGPT, no AI tools. Just the textbook, a book they have to read, or a notebook, and their brain. They refuse? Then the phone gets put away until it's done.

They will hate it at first. I need you to know that going in. It will feel slow and frustrating and they will tell you it's stupid and pointless and that you're ruining their life. That is the point. The discomfort of working through a problem without help is where learning actually happens.

A mother told me her son fought tech-free time for three weeks. He complained constantly. He said it was unfair. He said he was the only kid who had to do this. He sat at the kitchen table with his arms crossed and his textbook closed. She didn't yell. She didn't argue. She just said, "This is the rule. One hour. Then you can have your phone back."

By the fourth week, he stopped complaining. By the sixth week, he told her his test scores had gone up. "I actually remember stuff now," he said. "Before, I'd get the answer from ChatGPT but it wouldn't stick."

That's the difference between information and knowledge. ChatGPT gives you information instantly. Knowledge is what happens when you wrestle with the information yourself, when you turn it over in your head, get confused, figure it out, and connect it to something else you know. Knowledge sticks. Information fades. And your child cannot build knowledge if they never sit with the discomfort of not knowing. At my after-school study groups, I have been having kids use Quizlet (flash card app) less and asking them to handwrite notecards instead. The process of making notecards is harder than looking up everything online. Remember, for the most part, the harder the brain works to acquire information, the more it is likely to retain it.

Incidentally, when kids are using laptops or smartphones to study, or even to do homework, the temptation to go to other sites is frequently irresistible. I deal with this constantly. Young people swear up and down they studied for hours for

a test they did poorly on. When I peel back the layers, most often we discover that “studying” involved lots of counterproductive activities. Video game breaks. TikTok. Group chats. A ten-minute homework session stretched into two hours of pretend productivity. Tech-free homework time eliminates that entirely. It’s not just about AI. It’s about creating the conditions where actual learning can happen.

These five things won’t solve the problem overnight. But they’ll give you a foothold. A place to start. And starting is what matters, because the parents who are making progress on this aren’t the ones with all the answers. They’re the ones who decided to pay attention.

CHAPTER 6

How Can You Help Teachers?

“Teaching is the greatest act of optimism.” — Colleen Wilcox

Teachers are drowning. I need you to understand that before we go any further. The teachers in your child’s school are facing something they were never trained for, never anticipated, and in many cases have no support to handle. AI did not arrive with a professional development day and a manual. It arrived overnight and it changed everything.

I talk to teachers constantly. The ones who are honest with me say the same thing: they cannot tell anymore. They cannot tell who wrote the essay. They often cannot tell if the homework was done by the student or by a machine. They are grading work they often suspect is fake, but they cannot prove it, and the detection tools are unreliable. One teacher told me she spends more time trying to figure out if work is authentic than she does actually teaching. That being said, many students use AI at the last minute, 10PM the night before an assignment is due, and those kids use the technology in a sloppy and easy-to-detect manner.

This extra burden on already over-burdened teachers is not sustainable. Parents can definitely help.

Start by Being an Ally, Not an Adversary

When a teacher raises a concern about your child's work, resist the instinct to get defensive. I know that instinct well. The teacher might say, "I think your son may have used AI for this essay," and the parent's face changes. Their posture shifts. They're no longer listening. They're protecting.

I get it. Nobody wants to hear that their child cheated. But when you respond defensively, the teacher learns something: it's not worth bringing it up. Next time they suspect something, they may stay quiet. And your child loses the one adult outside your home who was paying attention.

The best response I've ever witnessed came from a mother at a parent-teacher conference. The teacher, carefully and with obvious discomfort, said she believed the student's last two essays were AI-generated. The mother paused. She didn't argue. She said, "Thank you for telling me. That must have been hard to bring up. Let me talk to him and get back to you."

That mother went home and had a hard conversation with her son. He admitted it. They developed a plan. He rewrote the essays. The relationship with the teacher became stronger, not weaker, because the parent treated her as a partner instead of an adversary.

Contrast that with what happened in another family I know. The teacher flagged an essay as potentially AI-generated. The father called the principal and demanded an apology. He insisted his daughter would never cheat. The teacher backed down. The principal backed down. And the daughter, who later admitted she actually had used ChatGPT, learned that her parents would protect her from consequences. She kept cheating. She got caught again this past fall in college, where the stakes were much higher and her father's influence was unable to prevent the consequences.

I know a tenth grade English teacher in Oakland County, Michigan, who sends a thoughtful email to parents about four or five times a year when she suspects significant AI use. She does not accuse. She shares what she is seeing

and asks parents to have a conversation at home. One mother was moved by the email and initiated a phone call, and said, “Thank you. My son and I actually talked about it. He didn’t tell me everything, but he told me enough. We had no idea how much he was relying on AI.” That email opened a door that would have stayed shut without a teacher brave enough to reach out and a parent willing to listen.

Teachers who feel supported by parents are braver. They set higher standards. They require more authentic work. They have harder conversations. And their students learn more. When you attack a teacher for raising a concern, you’re not just shutting down that conversation. You’re telling every teacher in that building that it’s safer to look the other way.

Support Classroom Policies

If a teacher bans phones from the class during tests, support it. If they require handwritten drafts, support it. If they implement in-class writing to establish a baseline for each student’s actual abilities, support it. Do not be the parent who emails the principal because your child was asked to write an essay in class (without AI).

I have seen this happen, and it costs something every time. A history teacher at a school where I have several students started requiring that one essay per unit be written entirely in class, by hand, with no technology. It was not punitive. It was smart. She wanted to see what her students could actually produce on their own so she could compare it against their take-home work and identify who needed help.

Three parents complained. They said it was unfair. They said their children had accommodations that required computer access. (In two of the three cases, I was told, this was not true.) One parent said handwriting was “outdated.” The teacher had to defend her practice to the principal.

The teacher told me she was frustrated. “I was trying to protect the integrity of my classroom,” she said. “And I had to justify it like I was doing something

wrong.”

If you hear about a teacher doing something that makes school harder in the short term but protects your child’s learning in the long term, back them up. Send a supportive email to the teacher. Send one to the principal too. Teachers need to know that parents support rigor. Right now, too many of them believe the opposite.

Advocate for AI Training

Teachers need professional development on AI. Most have not received any. I’ve talked to teachers in many states about this, and the pattern is the same almost everywhere. The school acknowledges AI exists. They send around a one-page memo. Maybe they have a thirty-minute session during a staff development day. And that’s it.

One high school teacher told me her entire “AI training” consisted of a twenty-minute presentation by the IT director, who showed them how to use ChatGPT for lesson planning. That was the training. How to use it for their own work. Nothing about how students use it to cheat. Nothing about detection. Nothing about how to redesign assignments so they’re harder to outsource. She left more confused than when she started.

You can advocate for real training at PTO meetings, at school board sessions, and in conversations with administrators. It does not need to be confrontational. Simply ask: “What training have our teachers received on AI in the classroom? What is the plan for ongoing support?” When parents ask these questions, administrators listen. Not because they want to. Because they have to. When one parent asks, it’s a question. When five parents ask, it’s a priority. When ten parents ask, it’s a budget line item.

I spoke at a school district in suburban Chicago last year. The invitation came because a group of parents kept showing up to school board meetings and asking about AI. The board didn’t have answers. So they brought me in. After my presentation, three teachers came up to me and said some version of the same

thing: “I’ve been waiting for someone to talk about this. I didn’t know how to bring it up.” They weren’t waiting for permission. They were waiting for support. Your voice as a parent can provide that.

Share What You Know

If you have tried ChatGPT yourself, if you have seen the humanizer websites, if your child has told you things about how students use AI, share that information with teachers. Not as gossip, but as intelligence.

I mean this literally. Teachers need to know what they are up against. You’d be surprised to learn how many of them have never used ChatGPT. Many do not know about humanizer tools. Many have no idea that students can photograph a test, upload it to an AI app, and get answers in seconds.

A father whose son I work with is an engineer. After our conversation about his son’s AI use, he set up meetings with his son’s English and history teachers. He sat down with them for thirty minutes after school and showed them what ChatGPT could do. He typed in an essay prompt from a recent assignment. The AI produced a polished essay in seconds. He ran it through a humanizer. He showed them an AI detection tool and demonstrated how unreliable it was. One of the teachers sat back in her chair and said, “I knew kids were using ChatGPT, but I had no idea it had gotten this sophisticated. I thought we were still dealing with obvious copy-paste.”

That thirty-minute meeting changed how both teachers designed their assignments for the rest of the year. They moved to more in-class writing. They started requiring process documentation. They began giving oral components where students had to explain their thinking in person. All because one parent took the time to show them the reality.

You can be a bridge between what students are actually doing and what teachers think is happening. Most parents have more exposure to AI than most teachers, either because they’ve experimented with it at work, because they’ve heard about it from their kids, or both. That knowledge is valuable. Don’t hoard

it. Share it with the people who are trying to educate your children.

Volunteer Your Time

Schools are understaffed. This was true before AI and it is worse now. If you have time, and I realize that's a significant "if," offer to help.

A mother at one of the schools from which I have a few students organized a parent education night on AI. She did the research, put together a simple presentation, booked the library, and sent home flyers. Forty parents showed up on a Tuesday night. That's extraordinary. She wasn't a tech expert. She was a parent who had done her homework, literally, by sitting down with ChatGPT and learning what it could do. She shared what she'd found. She showed parents the humanizer websites. She pulled up her own child's browser history (with her child's reluctant permission) and walked through what she'd discovered.

The room was stunned. At the time, many of the parents had never heard of ChatGPT being used for homework. By the end of the night, a dozen parents had signed up for a follow-up meeting with the principal to discuss school policy. That parent education night did more to move the needle at that school than anything the administration had done in a year.

You don't have to organize a whole event. Offer to proctor tests. Offer to be an extra set of eyes in the resource room. Offer to help a teacher redesign an assignment to be more AI-resistant. These are concrete, practical things that make a real difference. And they put you in the building, which means you see firsthand what your child's school environment looks like.

CHAPTER 7

Be the Parent Who Changes the School

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." — Margaret Mead

Individual teachers can make a difference in individual classrooms. But systemic change requires systemic action. That means school boards, superintendents, principals, and district policies. And the people who move those levers, more than anyone else, are parents.

I need to tell you about a story in Arizona, because it shows how to tackle the AI issue head on. Concerns from parents, teachers, and administrators led to a district-wide initiative in the Agua Fria Union High School District that in my opinion is perhaps one of the very best.

The initiative included input from a variety of different individuals, including Selena Padilla, an English department chair who became the district's AI Ambassador. They built a "stoplight" system: red assignments mean AI is not allowed and students complete the work independently. Yellow means AI can be used for specific purposes like brainstorming, but students produce the final work themselves. Green means AI is encouraged as a learning tool. Teachers label every assignment with a color, and they use phrases like "This is a red light assignment" so students know exactly where they stand. It gives teachers flexibility while keeping standards consistent across the district.

This district is not the only one. Greenwich Public Schools in Connecticut created a detailed AI regulation covering professional development, student

guidelines, and a framework for responsible use, with parent and teacher engagement playing a key role. Rockbridge County Schools in Virginia built their policy around four guiding principles (responsibility, transparency, integrity, and accountability) with community input reinforcing that "wait and see" was not an acceptable approach.

And then there's Boston. In March 2026, Mayor Michelle Wu announced that Boston Public Schools would become the first major city school district in the country to require AI literacy for graduation. Backed by a million-dollar seed grant from tech entrepreneur Paul English, the program trains an "AI Ambassador" teacher at each high school and integrates AI literacy across subjects, not just in technology classes. The curriculum is built around ethics, critical thinking, and understanding how AI works, not just how to use it. Wu said the goal was "ethical and critical engagement with AI, rather than passive use of this technology." That's the right idea. But Boston is also a cautionary tale. The district announced this partnership while proposing to cut 265 classroom teachers and over 160 special education paraprofessionals. A multimillion-dollar initiative means nothing if the teachers who are supposed to carry it out are being laid off. Parents in Boston should, however, be applauding the vision but also demanding that adequate resources follow.

I had already finished this book when Wu made her announcement, and delayed publication so that I could interview teachers in Boston schools. One high school English teacher told me, "I was skeptical at first about the presence of AI in education, but the innovations I have already seen have shown me that AI, used correctly, is an incredible thought partner. We have trained chatbots using Claude that give students feedback, and I have seen in real time this process making students better writers. I realize this is the opposite of how most students end up using AI." A middle school teacher expressed amazement for how much better of a teacher she is now that AI has become integrated into her classroom. "I have students who read at different levels. AI allows me to reach all of them much more effectively. What Claude allows me to do is almost instantaneously transform texts so that students of vastly different abilities can read them at their level. I can take a text designed for students reading at a

sixth-grade level, for example, and ask Claude to transform the same text to a first-grade level, allowing all students to be working with the same text. With AI, this is easy but would be impossible without it."

These districts didn't act because administrators woke up one morning and decided AI was urgent. They acted because engaged communities, parents and teachers, and one city's mayor, together, made it urgent. Every conversation, every email, every school board question plants a seed. I have seen engaged parents help shift the direction of entire districts by simply showing up consistently with specific concerns and specific examples.

Here's What You Can Do

If your school district doesn't have a written AI policy, that's a problem. The last time I checked, fewer than half of school districts had formal AI guidelines. That means the majority of schools are making it up as they go. You have standing to ask why. Show up to a school board meeting with the examples from the districts I just mentioned. When you bring specific models of what other schools are doing, you're not just a concerned parent. You're a resource. And by the way, having an AI policy is only the first step. Teachers need training, and administrators need to follow through to support teachers in implementing that policy!

Get your PTO involved. Parent-Teacher Organizations have real influence, and they're often looking for meaningful issues to champion. Propose an AI awareness initiative. A parent education night. A working group. A speaker series. These are practical steps that create momentum.

Push for in-class assessment reform. The single most effective countermeasure against AI cheating is to make assessment happen in the classroom, under supervision, without access to devices. More in-class essays. More oral presentations. More Socratic discussions. More project-based assessments evaluated on process, not just product. This is the change that matters most, and it requires district support to implement at scale.

Advocate for an AI literacy curriculum. Not “don’t cheat” assemblies. Real instruction. What is AI? How does it work? When is it appropriate to use? What are the ethical implications? This should be as standard as teaching internet safety. Every high school senior should graduate with an understanding of AI.

And here’s one that sounds extreme but isn’t: consider running for the school board. School boards are often made up of people who don’t have school-age children, or who haven’t been inside a classroom in years. If you understand this issue, if you’ve read this book, if you’ve had these conversations, you are more qualified than you think.

Districts move slowly. Policy changes take time. Budgets are tight. Teachers are tired. Be patient. But be persistent. Because the schools will not fix this without you.

The Phone Problem and What Is Actually Working

This connects to everything we’ve been talking about, because the challenge your child faces isn’t just ChatGPT. It’s TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and every other app engineered to capture and hold attention. A Pew Research Center survey in 2024 found that 72% of high school teachers say phone distraction is a major problem in their classrooms. That’s nearly three out of four.

This is the world AI walks into. A child who has been conditioned by short-form video to expect stimulation every few seconds is not often going to be inclined to sit with a difficult textbook when a machine can give them the answer in two seconds.

Some schools have stopped trying to out-teach the phone and started removing it from the equation entirely. Yondr pouches are the most studied approach. Students keep their phones but lock them in secure pouches for the school day. A 2024 study analyzing schools that adopted Yondr found improvements in student engagement, test scores, and social interaction. Teachers reported that classroom behavior improved dramatically. Students, after the initial resistance, reported feeling less anxious and more focused.

The pattern is consistent. When you remove the distraction, learning improves. If your child's school hasn't adopted a phone-free policy, push for one. Bring this data. The evidence is no longer theoretical. And at home, consider your own phone-free zones. Dinner? Homework time? The car? These are places where thinking and connection can easily happen.

By the way, in schools with no-phone policies, be aware that students are remarkably adept at beating technology-limiting rules and systems!

CHAPTER 8

Raising Thinkers

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” — W.B. Yeats

I’ve spent most of this book talking about what’s going wrong. The cheating. The shortcuts. The erosion of thinking skills. All of that is real, and these issues deserve serious attention.

But here’s the thing I need you to hear: AI is not going away. It’s going to become more powerful, more integrated into every part of work and life, and more essential. The workplace your child enters in five or ten years will be fundamentally different from the one you entered. Every industry. Every job. Every profession.

The question is not whether your child will use AI. The question is whether they will use it well. Whether they’ll be the person who directs the tool, or the person who is replaced by it.

The Difference Between Using AI and Being Used by AI

There are two kinds of AI users emerging. The first kind uses AI as a shortcut, which we earlier called using it as the ghostwriter. They let it do the thinking. They submit whatever it produces. They never develop their own skills because the machine is always there. These people will be vulnerable when the technology shifts, when the economy changes, when someone asks them to actually think on their feet.

The second kind uses AI as an amplifier, and as a calculator. They think first. They develop their own ideas, their own analysis, their own perspective. Then they use AI to refine, to explore, to check their work, to find gaps in their reasoning. These people are exponentially more capable than they would be without AI, because the tool is multiplying real skills instead of masking the absence of them.

Your job as a parent is to make sure your child becomes the second kind.

Let me tell you about Mitchell. He is twenty-seven. He lost his father at age seven. I started working with him on academics when he was thirteen, and over the years he has become something between a protege and a son to me. He has severe ADHD. School was brutal for him. Traditional academics felt like running through wet concrete that slowly hardened the harder he tried (his words!). He scraped through, but it was never where his strengths lived.

He now runs a landscaping business that did three million dollars in gross revenue last year. He started mowing lawns at age twelve and has directed his ability to hyperfocus toward taking care of people’s yards, which has expanded from a simple mulch and mow operation to one that involves skid steers, backhoes, and front loaders. He also has a massive snow plowing operation.

In the past year, his hyperfocus has landed on technology. He has been shifting to AI for scheduling employees, tracking payroll, managing accounts payable and receivable, and handling customer communications. He has automated many aspects of his business with AI tools that didn’t exist two years ago. But here’s what matters: Mitchell knows every part of his business cold. He built it from the ground up. He understands the numbers because he’s created the numbers. He understands the customers because he’s served them. He understands landscaping because he’s been out there in the heat doing the work.

AI didn’t build his business. Mitchell built his business. AI made it more efficient. That’s the difference between using AI and being used by it. Mitchell directs the tool because he has real skills underneath it. If you took the AI away tomorrow, he’d still have a thriving business. It would just take him longer to do the admin.

I work on school-related issues with Audrey, a high school senior with ADHD who is the chairman of her school's prom committee. That's a job with serious responsibility: budgets, vendors, timelines, hundreds of opinionated teenagers. Under my guidance, Audrey has been using AI to draft initial communications, create spreadsheets for budget tracking, and organize committee tasks. But every decision is hers. Every vendor negotiation is hers. Every creative choice is hers. She is learning leadership, delegation, financial management, and problem-solving. AI is helping her to be more organized. It is not replacing any of the skills that make her effective.

You're reading this book because of AI. I used AI to give me suggestions, help me do research (which I triple checked), build Internet landing pages, manage Facebook marketing ads, design the cover, collect emails of teachers and therapists, and a whole variety of tasks that would have taken me ten times the energy. I estimate that to do everything I have done to enhance my professional platform in the last six months would have taken three full-time employees instead of just me. I'm a believer in AI, but I am also a realist who wants to help make sure our children do not get left behind in the transition that is already well underway.

Mitchell, Audrey, and I help illustrate the model of what's coming because of AI and what is already in process. Think first. Develop your own skills. Then use AI to go further than you could alone.

Breaking the Dependence

In my book about screens, I talked about the importance of resetting your relationship with technology. The same principle applies here, but the approach needs to be more nuanced than just unplugging for a week.

The real goal isn't to take AI away. It's to help your child realize they can function without it. That they have a brain that works, that their own thinking has value, and that the discomfort of working through something hard is not a sign that something is wrong. It's a sign that learning is happening.

Start small. Pick one assignment per week where AI is off the table. Not a punishment. A practice. Tell your kid: “For this one, I want to see what you can do on your own. Not because I don’t trust you, but because I want you to trust yourself.” Let them struggle. Let it be messy. The point is not the product. The point is the process.

Then build from there. One assignment becomes two. Two becomes an evening. Some families I work with have established what they call “analog time,” a few hours each week where the whole family puts away the AI tools, and smartphones, to do things the old-fashioned way. Parents included. That last part matters. If you’re asking your kid to work without AI while you’re using ChatGPT to draft emails at the kitchen table, the message is clear, and it’s not the one you intend.

Another approach that works is to ask your child to use AI as a second step instead of a first step. Write the draft yourself, then use ChatGPT to check it. Solve the problem yourself, then ask AI if you got it right. This preserves the struggle while still letting them use the tool. It’s the calculator-not-ghostwriter principle in daily practice.

One family I work with does this consistently. The son told me, “I feel smarter when I do things myself first. Like my brain actually works.” He’s right. It does. Struggle builds memory. Struggle builds skills. Struggle builds the kind of confidence that can’t be faked or outsourced.

The parents told me what surprised them most: once their kids started experiencing success that came from their own effort, they didn’t want to go back to outsourcing everything. Not because they were told not to. Because they remembered what it felt like to actually know something instead of just having submitted something.

The key is consistency. Not perfection. Your kid will slip. They’ll use AI when they said they wouldn’t. They’ll take shortcuts on assignments they find boring. That’s normal. The goal is not to eliminate AI use. The goal is to make sure your child’s default setting is “I’ll try it myself first,” not “I’ll ask the machine.” That shift in default, from dependence to independence with AI as a

supplement, is everything.

And the best way to get there is to be in the conversation. Not once. Regularly. Ask them how they're using AI this week. Ask them to show you something they did without it. Ask them to help you understand the tools, which, as I mentioned earlier, shifts the power dynamic in a way that makes teenagers less resistant. Peruse YouTube for recently released features from AI platforms, and share those with your child. When you ask for their expertise, you're treating them as capable. And capable people don't need to cheat.

What Matters More Than AI

Let me tell you what AI can't do. Not as a list of abstract skills, but as the things I watch develop in the students I work with, the things that actually determine who thrives and who doesn't.

Original thinking. The ability to see something nobody else sees. To make connections other people miss. To ask a question that hasn't been asked. I watched a ninth grader in one of my study groups read an article about AI-generated art and say, without any prompting, "But if the AI learned from real artists, doesn't that mean the real artists are the ones who actually created it?" Nobody taught her that insight. She thought her way into it. That's what original thinking looks like. You don't get that from a machine that predicts the most likely next word.

Emotional intelligence. Understanding another person. Empathy. The ability to read a room, to know when to push and when to step back. AI doesn't have emotions. It simulates them. Your kid knows the difference, even if they can't articulate it yet. Every real friendship your child has, every conflict they navigate, every time they comfort someone who's hurting, they're building something no algorithm can replicate.

The ability to build and maintain relationships. To be reliable. To show up. To have someone's back when it's hard. To repair something broken. This can't be outsourced and it can't be faked. The students I work with who go on to do

remarkable things aren't always the smartest. They're the ones who know how to connect with people.

Ethical judgment. Knowing what's right and choosing it even when it costs you something. AI generates plausible answers, but it doesn't have values. It doesn't care. It can't care. Your kid does. That matters more than any prompt engineering skill ever will.

Creative vision. Not generating variations on what already exists, which is what AI does. Actually imagining something that has never been. Making art. Making music. Making something that's never been made before. AI can help with this. It can generate ideas and inspire. But the vision, the meaning, the soul of the thing, that comes from a human life fully lived.

Your job is to protect the space where these things develop. To make sure your home is a place where thinking is valued, where curiosity is encouraged, and where struggle is respected instead of avoided.

Building a Thinking Home

What kind of environment helps a young person develop their own thinking? It's not a question with a simple answer, because every family is different and every kid responds to different approaches. But I've worked with enough families to see patterns.

One pattern is structured conversation. One family I worked with started a simple practice: every Sunday dinner, one person picks a topic, and everyone weighs in. The topic doesn't matter. It could be politics, whether aliens exist, or the best movie ever made. What matters is that everyone is expected to think out loud, to defend their position, to consider someone else's. The first few weeks were awkward. The kids gave one-word answers. The parents did most of the talking. But by the fourth week, something shifted.

The mom told me, "I've learned more about how my kids think in those four dinners than I had in the previous year. My oldest said, 'Are we doing this next week?' That was the moment I knew it was working."

But it doesn't have to be dinner. It can be the car ride home from practice. It can be cooking together. It can be working on something with your hands while you talk. The point is creating space where ideas matter more than answers, and where asking a question is more valued than Googling one.

One of the most powerful things you can do is resist the urge to answer your kid's questions immediately. Ask back: "What do you think? How would you figure that out?" Let them sit with it. Don't rescue them too fast. That discomfort, the few seconds of not knowing, is where curiosity takes shape. And curiosity, once it takes root, is remarkably hard to kill.

Reading together helps too, and not just because it's educational. It gives you shared material to think about. It builds vocabulary and attention span. And it shows your kid that reading is something adults choose to do, not just something school assigns. If reading together feels forced, try audiobooks on a road trip, or even a short car ride, and then talk about what you heard.

And yes, put the phones away during these moments. All of them. Yours too. Not as a rule for its own sake, but because the kind of conversation that builds thinking requires actual attention. You can't have a real exchange of ideas while someone is scrolling.

I want to be honest about something: this doesn't work with every kid right away. I worked with a mother who was skeptical. She said, "My son doesn't like to think. He likes to avoid work. How am I supposed to build a thinking home when the kid is actively resisting?"

Fair point. So I suggested something counterintuitive. Instead of trying to get him to think about what she wanted him to think about, I told her to ask him to teach her something. Something he knew about and she didn't.

She asked her son to show her how he uses ChatGPT. Not accusingly. Just curious. He showed her. He told her about prompting, about humanizers, about how he uses it to skip homework he finds boring. They talked for an hour. An actual conversation. Not a lecture. Not judgment. Just curiosity and genuine listening.

After that, something shifted. Her son realized his mom wasn't always the enemy. She was actually interested in understanding his world. And in the course of explaining everything to her, he started to see his own habits more clearly. She didn't convince him of anything. The conversation did.

Remember Christian from Chapter 2, the young man who inadvertently introduced me to AI? He was supposed to prepare for a Supreme Court debate for his law class. He went to ChatGPT and got clean, organized arguments. He felt confident walking in because ChatGPT had given him polished talking points. The moment his opponent pushed back with a question he had not anticipated, he froze. He could not think on his feet because he had no depth of understanding. He had never actually wrestled with the material himself. ChatGPT gave him a surface that looked like preparation, and he believed it was preparation.

When his opponent poked holes in his arguments, Christian struggled to respond. He told me afterward that he felt "kind of dumb." I helped him understand that ChatGPT had made him sound smart on the surface but left him empty underneath. We talked about what real preparation looks like. It means preparing not just arguments for your position but arguments against it. It means understanding objections before someone raises them. It means having the intellectual depth to defend your thinking in real time.

The skills Christian needed, the ability to think on his feet, to stay calm when challenged, to actually understand an argument well enough to defend it, only come from doing the hard work yourself.

Because we had been on a journey together about his AI use, and also because I had found a way for him to actually help me, Christian and I had established a channel of trust and openness that made him feel he could honestly bring his concerns to me. Forging a connection with your child about AI creates space for the kinds of conversations many of the parents I work with have, over time, been having with their children. The consistent engagement you have with your child will help ensure that they do not outsource their thinking.

Conclusion: The Hard Way

Your kid is growing up in a world where the easy path is always available, where the answer to any question is instant, and where the work can be done by a machine. The shortcut is one click away.

That's the world they're inheriting. We can't change that. We can't wish it away. We can't go back to the world before ChatGPT. That world is gone.

Remember the mom who was writing her employees' performance reviews with ChatGPT, the one who realized her daughter was doing the same thing with homework? She told me something a few weeks later that I keep thinking about. She said, "The hardest part wasn't getting my daughter to stop using AI for her essays. The hardest part was getting myself to stop using it for work. Because once you've felt how easy it is, choosing the hard way feels almost irrational."

She's right. It does feel irrational. And that's exactly why it matters.

Think about Alana, the sophomore who was getting A's with ChatGPT until the in-class essay exposed that she couldn't actually write. We had a conversation roughly six months later. She was getting B's. Honest B's. She said, "I'm actually proud of these grades. The A's never felt like mine."

Think about the family who tried banning AI, watched it backfire, then sat down together and built an agreement their eighth grader helped write. The dad told me the best part wasn't the agreement itself. It was that his son came to him two months later and said, "Dad, I used ChatGPT for part of my science project. I want to tell you because we said we'd be honest about it." That's not a kid who's been scared into compliance. That's a kid who's developing integrity.

Think about the family that does analog time, the one whose son said, "I feel smarter during analog time." Think about the Sunday dinner conversations where a mother learned more about how her kids think in four weeks than she had in the previous year.

These aren't exceptional families. They're regular families who decided to pay attention and determined that their children's ability to think was worth

protecting. They chose the harder path because they understood what was at stake.

This isn't about banning AI. It's about raising kids who can think for themselves, who can tell the difference between easy and right, and who understand that the most important things in life require struggle. There is no shortcut around that, and the parents who accept it are the ones whose children will be prepared for whatever comes next.

Every family in this book started in the same place you are right now. They saw something that worried them. They didn't know what to do. And they decided to do something anyway. Your child is capable of real thought, real effort, real growth. The world around them will keep whispering that shortcuts are smarter than struggle. You already know that's not true.

You are the counterweight. Like the mom who stopped using ChatGPT for her performance reviews and watched her daughter follow her lead. Like the dad who threw out the ban and built an agreement his son helped write. Like the family that cooks together on Sunday nights and talks about ideas instead of staring at screens. None of them had a manual for this. They just paid attention and kept showing up.

The hard way is the only way that builds anything real. And you don't have to walk it alone.

I read every email I get from parents and teachers. If you've had this conversation, if you've noticed something, if you're struggling with this, write to me at kevin@kevinjroberts.net. Tell me your story. Tell me what's working in your family. Tell me what's not. This work matters to me because it matters for your kids, and I want to hear from you.

RESOURCES

Other Books by Kevin Roberts:

Cyber Junkie: Escape the Gaming and Internet Trap

Movers, Dreamers, and Risk-Takers: Unlocking the Power of ADHD

Schindler's Gift: How One Man Harnessed the Power of ADHD

Get Off That Game Now: The Essential Family Guide to Healthy Screen Behavior

Disordered: A Family Saga

My First Hundred Jobs: Lessons in Resilience, Reinvention, and the AI-Powered Hustle

Scan this QR Code to visit Kevin's Amazon Author Page:

https://www.amazon.com/stores/Kevin-J.-Roberts/author/B003VTZWH6

Online Resources

Tools and Detection

AI detection platforms change constantly. By the time you read this, the specific tools available may have shifted. Rather than recommending particular

platforms that may be outdated, I encourage you to search for current reviews of AI detection tools for education. What matters more than any tool is your own judgment as a parent.

Google Docs version history. This one is free and already built into Google Docs. It shows you the actual edit history of a document: drafts, revisions, real thinking. If a document appears nearly perfect with no revision history, that tells you something. Ask your child to use Google Docs for their assignments and check the version history yourself.

Learning and Curriculum

AI for Education (ai-for-education.org). Practical, classroom-ready resources for teaching AI literacy. This is the site I point parents and teachers to first when they want to understand AI in education.

TeachAI (teachai.org). A joint initiative from ISTE and Code.org focused on helping schools develop AI policy and curriculum. If you are the parent pushing your school to create an AI policy, this is where to start.

RAND Corporation AI in Education reports (rand.org). Their 2025 survey showed that only forty-five percent of principals reported having an AI policy. We don’t know what it actually means in practice to simply have a policy, however. RAND’s ongoing research on AI in K-12 settings is the most comprehensive out there.

Phone-Free Schools

Yondr (overyondr.com). The phone-pouch system. Students keep their phones but they go into a locked pouch for the school day. It sounds gimmicky until you see the data. Schools using Yondr report measurable improvements in engagement and performance. Worth mentioning at your next PTO meeting.

Wait Until 8th (waituntil8th.org). A parent pledge movement to delay smartphone access until eighth grade. Many families want to hold the line on phones but feel like they are the only ones. This movement shows you that you are not.

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University of Washington: AI Persuasiveness Studies (2025) Research from the University of Washington Information School finding that AI-paraphrased text has the potential to amplify the persuasive impact and scale of information campaigns, and that current AI-text detectors fail to detect AI-paraphrased content. Published in PNAS Nexus, July 2025.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin J. Roberts is an academic coach, AI literacy educator, and author of seven books including the bestselling Cyber Junkie: Escape the Gaming and Internet Trap. He holds a Master's degree in neuroscience, the science of learning. Based in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, Kevin has spent over twenty-five years helping students and families navigate the intersection of technology, education, and personal growth.

He founded KJR Academy, where he works with students on academic skills, executive function, and technology balance. He has a solid reputation for his innovative work with ADHD students and their families. His work has been featured in national media, and he is a frequent speaker at schools and conferences on the topics of technology addiction, screen time, and academic integrity.

Kevin's personal journey with technology addiction, described in his first book, informs all of his work. He believes that every student has the capacity to think critically, to struggle well, and to become someone who can navigate a technology-saturated world with integrity.

CONNECT WITH KEVIN

The AI Edge Summer Intensive (aiedge.live). If your child is in grades 8 through 12 and needs hands-on AI literacy training, this is the program Henry Dan and Kevin built together. One week, small groups, focused on teaching students to use AI as a tool rather than a crutch.

College Consulting (kevinjroberts.net/college-consulting). Kevin works one-on-one with students and families on college planning, applications, and essays. If your family could use guidance from someone who has been through this with hundreds of students, he would love to help.

Speaking and Workshops. Kevin speaks to schools, parent groups, and professional organizations on AI in education, ADHD, screen addiction, and resilience. If you want to bring this conversation to your community, reach out at kevin@kevinjroberts.net.

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A Note for Therapists and Counselors

If you're a therapist, counselor, or mental health professional reading this, I wrote this book for parents. But I know you're seeing this from the other side of the couch.

You're seeing the seventeen-year-old who turns in perfect essays but can't write an in-class paragraph. You're seeing the anxiety that comes when a student realizes they've been faking it for months and don't actually know the material.

You’re seeing the family conflict when parents discover their kid has been using AI to cheat and don’t know how to respond without blowing up the relationship.

You’re also seeing something else. Kids who are talking to AI chatbots instead of talking to you. Kids who ask ChatGPT for mental health advice before their first session. Kids who trust a machine more than a person because the machine never judges them and never makes them feel stupid.

This is real. It’s happening in your practice right now, whether your clients are telling you about it or not.

I work with therapists and counselors on these issues. I run workshops on AI literacy for mental health professionals, covering what you need to know about how your clients are using AI, how to have the conversation in session, and how to help families navigate the academic integrity crisis without destroying trust.

If any of this resonates, I’d love to connect. Email me at kevin@kevinjroberts.net. I read every message.

And if you’d like to recommend this book to the parents in your practice, I’d be grateful. Sometimes the best thing a therapist can do is put the right resource in a parent’s hands at the right moment.