



2026

U.S. Future Report

Growing Up with Technology &
Learning How to Shape Its Role

 RXN

Google

Foreword

At Google, we believe that understanding and supporting young people as they navigate the digital world is paramount.

As the Research Lead for Google Kids and Families, my work is driven by a genuine curiosity and a love for listening directly to youth. Today's teenagers are coming of age alongside generative AI—navigating tools that are rapidly reshaping how they learn, create, and communicate. To understand how they are experiencing this moment, we are proud to share the US version of the Future Report. This research builds upon our global baseline to focus specifically on the unique cultural, educational, and digital landscape of the United States, surveying over 7,000 teens ages 13–17 across six states, paired with in-depth focus groups.

We observe young people taking a proactive role in shaping their digital experiences and finding positive, practical ways to make tools work for them. For example, nearly three in four (74%) use AI weekly or more as an interactive study partner to break down complex problems and spark new ideas. At the same time, most teens (93%) take at least one step to evaluate information before relying on it, half (50%) consistently evaluate the trustworthiness of AI-generated information, while 55% actively cross-check facts against other trusted sources.

While most teens navigate technology with balance, we remain clear-eyed about potential harms. Meeting our responsibility means engineering structural safeguards, specifically for minors, directly within our products—like disabling minor Location History, turning off YouTube autoplay by default, and AI protections like preventing emotional dependence.



To increase the body of research on children's experiences online, we have also funded additional independent research by organizations like UNICEF Innocenti (in partnership with UNICEF USA) around children's best interests in digital policy and practice, and with Boston Children's Digital Wellness Lab, providing insights directly from teens about their digital experiences.

Supporting the next generation is a collective mission that calls for a 'village'—a vibrant, collaborative alliance of tech innovators, policymakers, educators, families, and young people themselves. Together, we can harness this momentum to build more than just safeguards; we can create a truly empowering digital future. We hope this US Future Report provides foundational insights, uniting us all in the vital work of unlocking human potential and ensuring that every young person can navigate, create, and thrive in a world that is brighter, safer, and entirely their own.

— **Jennifer Kotler Clarke, Ph.D.** Research & Content Strategy Lead, Google Kids and Families

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00.

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Every generation grows up in a world shaped by the technologies of its time. Today's teenagers are doing so during a period of particularly rapid change, as artificial intelligence (AI) joins the digital tools that have become part of everyday life.

For many teens, AI, online search, streaming video, instant messaging, and social platforms are part of how they learn, create, communicate, find information, pursue interests, and navigate everyday life. As these technologies become more integrated into daily experiences, young people are developing their own approaches to using them—while parents, educators, technology companies, policymakers and other institutions are also adapting to rapidly evolving technologies.

Public conversations regarding how teens use technology often focus on technology's potential benefits or its potential risks.

We saw an opportunity to listen objectively instead and to raise up teen voices about an issue that affects them now and in the future.

Drawing on a nationally representative survey, six state-level surveys, and focus groups with teens across the country, the study explores how young people describe technology in their own lives—not simply what they use, but how they are incorporating these tools into everyday

experiences, where they find them most useful, and how they are making sense of technologies that continue to evolve around them.

The research reveals a more nuanced picture than familiar narratives often suggest. Teens describe technology as part of their everyday lives, using it in different ways to support learning, creativity, communication, and everyday tasks. They also describe different experiences, different levels of confidence, and different approaches to using these tools, underscoring that there is no single teen experience with technology.

The findings also suggest that many of the habits



that support thoughtful technology use are still taking shape. Most teens (**93%**) take at least one step to evaluate information before relying on it, including practices such as **checking information against other sources (55%)**, **checking the credibility of websites or authors (46%)**, **regularly considering whether information is trustworthy (50%)**, and **setting specific boundaries such as switching off a phone at a certain time (24%)**, but they are not yet widespread or consistently applied, indicating meaningful opportunities to strengthen these habits over time.

These experiences are also shaped by the environments in which teens are growing up. The conversations reflect a moment when expectations, guidance, and norms continue to evolve across

homes, schools, and the technology landscape. Families are establishing new routines, schools are developing approaches to emerging technologies, and technology companies continue to introduce new capabilities and safeguards. As each adapts, the standards that shape everyday technology use continue to take form.

Rather than presenting a simple story of either optimism or concern, this report offers a broader picture of what teens reported about growing up during a period of technological change. The findings also highlight the important role that families, educators, technology companies, policymakers, and communities can play in supporting young people as they build the knowledge, judgment, and confidence to navigate an increasingly digital world.

Five Guidelines for Reading The Report

- 1. National findings first: The nationally representative survey provides the primary quantitative evidence.**
- 2. State-level studies add context: Findings from the six state-level studies deepen understanding without replacing the national story.**
- 3. Teen voices add meaning: Quotes illuminate lived experience rather than statistical prevalence.**
- 4. Subgroups are selective: Age and other differences appear only where they are statistically supported and editorially meaningful.**
- 5. Patterns matter more than isolated findings: The report emphasizes recurring themes across multiple sources of evidence.**

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What This Research Adds

Five Defining Insights



Technology is becoming an increasingly common part of how many teens access information, overcome learning obstacles, and explore new ideas.

At the same time, the research suggests that teens recognize that meaningful learning requires effort and engagement beyond simply using technology to arrive at an answer.



Creativity is expanding while ideas about originality continue to evolve.

New tools are creating more opportunities to experiment, generate ideas, and express creativity. They are also prompting different perspectives among teens about authorship, ownership, and the role technology should play in creative work.



Digital judgment develops over time.

Many teens describe thoughtful approaches to evaluating information, questioning AI-generated responses, and managing aspects of their online experiences. At the same time, these practices are not yet widespread or consistently applied, highlighting clear opportunities to strengthen the habits that support digital judgment over time.



Readiness develops with experience, guidance, and opportunity.

Digital readiness is shaped by more than access to technology alone. Families, schools, communities, and other trusted adults continue to play an important role, yet the expectations, guidance, and opportunities available to teens vary considerably. The findings suggest there is meaningful room to strengthen the environments that help young people build confidence and judgment over time.



Looking ahead, teens see both opportunity and reason for caution.

Teens describe meaningful possibilities for technology to improve learning, creativity, communication, healthcare, and everyday life. They also expressed genuine concerns about issues including misinformation, privacy, overreliance, employment, and the broader impact of emerging technologies. Their perspectives suggest that optimism and caution often exist side by side.

What This Research Adds

Public conversation about technology often focuses on the tools themselves rather than on the needs of the people using them.

Artificial intelligence is evolving rapidly, and so is the research seeking to understand how young people are experiencing it.

Over the past several years, a growing body of work has documented the widespread adoption of AI among teens, its expanding role in learning and creativity, and the opportunities and concerns it presents for young people, families, educators, and society.

Building on what is already known about teen AI adoption and use research, through a nationally

representative survey, six state surveys and focus groups, examines how technology fits into the broader experience of adolescence and the judgment, habits, skills, and readiness young people are developing as they prepare for an increasingly AI-enabled world.

Many studies examine individual aspects of teens' digital lives. **This report is designed to understand how those experiences fit together.**

From AI adoption to learning ecosystems

Rather than viewing artificial intelligence as a standalone tool, the findings show how teens combine AI with search, video, teachers, parents, classmates, and other resources—building flexible approaches to learning and problem-solving that are shaped by the task at hand rather than by any single technology.

Developing judgment, not just digital literacy

The findings suggest that digital readiness is not simply about acquiring technical skills. Judgment develops through experience, guidance, reflection, and increasing responsibility as teens learn when to trust technology, when to question it, and when to seek additional perspectives.

Guidance, guardrails, and readiness

Public conversations often center around technology's potential harms, and questions of access limits, or restrictions. This research broadens that conversation by exploring how guidance, age-appropriate guardrails, and opportunities to develop judgment can work together as complementary parts of helping teens navigate an increasingly complex digital world.

🔗 A hopeful yet measured perspective on the future

Rather than viewing technology as either overwhelmingly positive or overwhelmingly harmful, teens consistently describe meaningful opportunities alongside genuine concerns. Their perspective is hopeful without being uncritical, recognizing both the possibilities technology creates and the human qualities they believe remain important to protect.

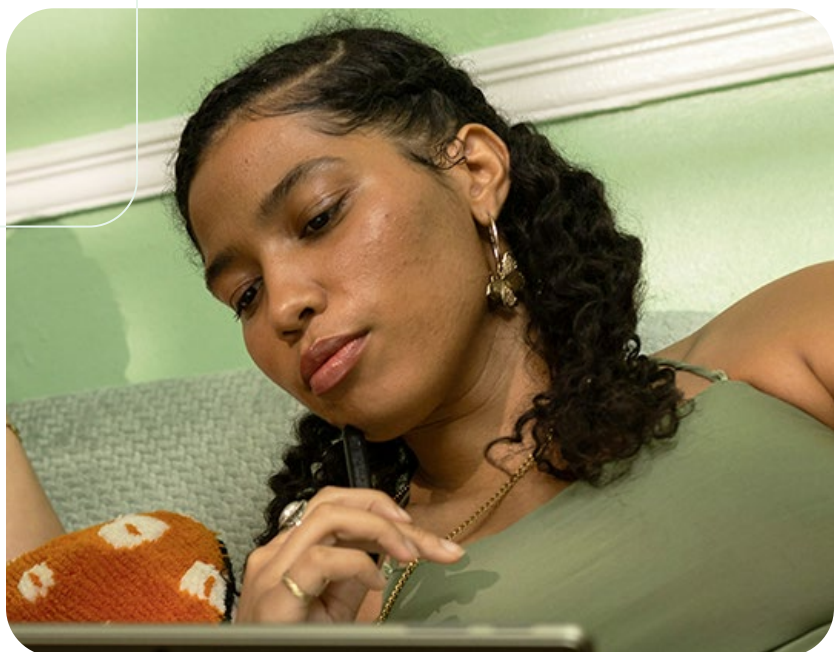
🔗 A holistic approach for understanding adolescence

Rather than examining learning, creativity, information evaluation, guidance, digital readiness, and future expectations as separate topics, this research connects them into a broader picture of adolescence during the emergence of artificial intelligence. Together, the findings suggest that what teens carry forward is shaped through the experiences, relationships, and opportunities that accompany this stage of life.

🔗 Teen perspectives at the center

The research intentionally centers the perspectives of teens themselves to show how young people describe technology's role in their lives today and the future they are preparing to inherit and help shape. The goal of this research is to provide teens' point of view to be considered alongside others: parents, policymakers, academics, and other experts.

Taken together, these contributions help shift the conversation from technology alone to the young people growing up with it.



01.

Learning in the Age of AI

Learning in the Age of AI

Every generation enjoys new learning tools. For today's youth, AI is the newest tool to support learning.

Teenagers are starting to adopt tools that can make the most difficult parts of learning easier. **Nearly three-quarters (74%) of teens report that they use AI for learning at least weekly** and it sits alongside teachers, parents, search engines, video, friends, and books as a common learning tool.

More than half (54%) say AI can help explain difficult topics in different ways, while nearly half say it can help them learn at their own pace (48%) or make learning more engaging (45%). In the focus groups, teens also acknowledged the tension that comes

with having assistance so readily available: AI can make it easier to move through frustration, but it can also make it easier to avoid effort, rely on the tool too heavily, or give up some of the thinking that helps learning take hold.

Based on this research, teens are clearly already using AI for learning. That means helping teens develop the judgment, productive friction, and ownership needed to understand how best to use the learning tools at their disposal is critically important.



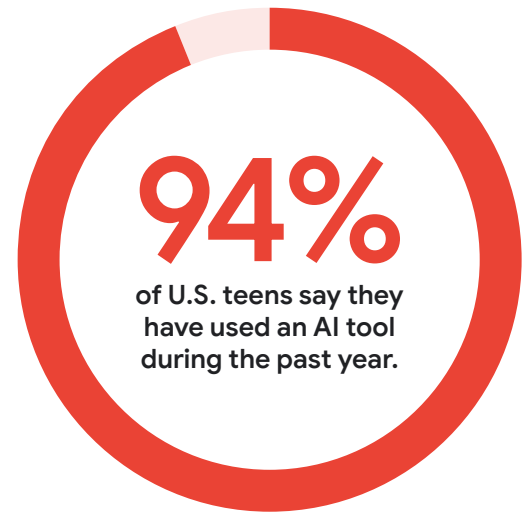
AI Is Already Part of Teen Life

AI is no longer a technology waiting at the edge of teen life.

Ninety-four percent of U.S. teens say they have used an AI tool during the past year.

Near-universal adoption does not mean uniform experience. Some teens use AI frequently; others only occasionally. They choose different tools, bring different levels of confidence, and use them for different purposes. What they share is familiarity: for nearly all, AI is no longer novel.

That changes the starting point for how adults support teenagers. Families, schools, and technology companies are no longer preparing teenagers for a distant possibility. They are engaging with a generation whose patterns of technology use are already taking shape—often before common expectations, language, or instruction have caught up.



What Teens Use AI For

Teen use of AI stretches across everyday life. Teens ask for help with schoolwork, look up practical questions, plan and organize tasks, revise writing, explore new interests, generate ideas, and experiment creatively.

The same tool can play very different roles. It can explain a difficult concept, suggest a recipe, organize a schedule, improve a sentence, brainstorm a gift, or help someone conceptualize something new.

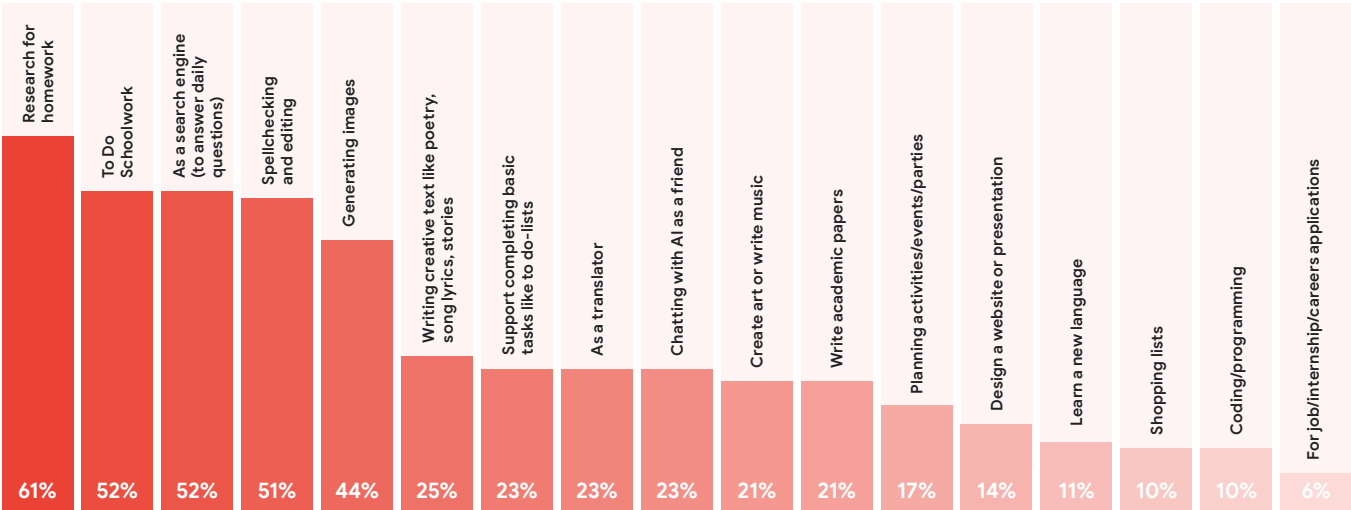
Across those uses, teens report turning to AI when they get stuck: at the blank page, with a confusing instruction, with a concept that did not make sense the first time, or with a task that feels too large to tackle all at once.



I find it helpful when I'm doing homework and I'm stuck on a problem. Even if I just need to double-check my answer, I'll ask an AI.

- Jesse, 16-17, Southeast

The Broad Use of AI



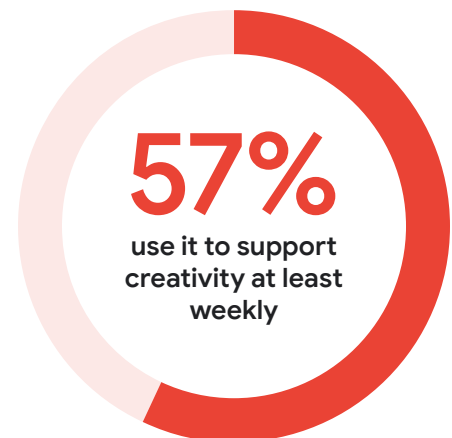
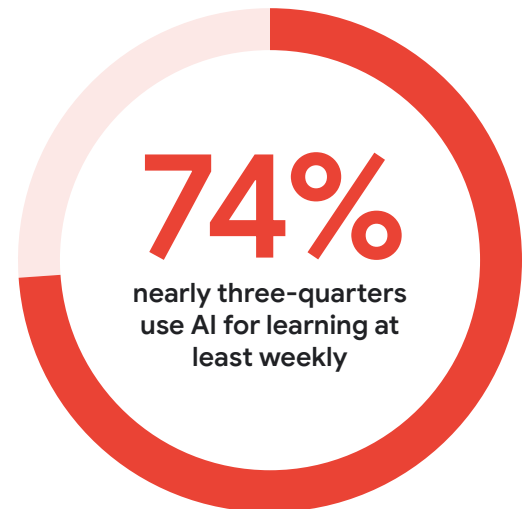
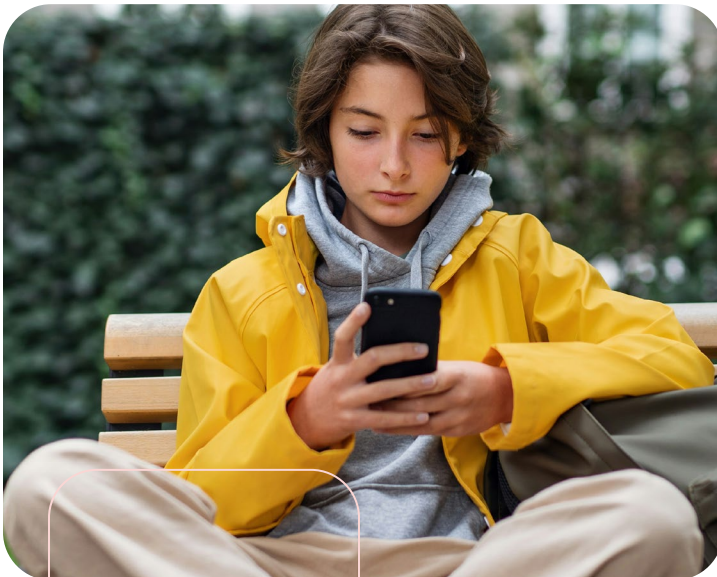
What, if anything, have you used AI tools for in the past year? Please select all that apply.

Learning Leads the Way

Among the many ways teens use AI, learning has become the leading use case.

Nearly three-quarters (74%) use AI for learning at least weekly, compared with 57% use it to support creativity at least weekly.

The comparison is not a contest between learning and creativity, and it does not suggest that AI diminishes creative life. Creative use is substantial. But the pattern shows where AI has first become routine: in **schoolwork, studying, preparation, research, and academic support.**



Learning Support, Not Replacement

Teens recognize that valuable help comes when they are struggling, when an explanation has not clicked, or when they are uncertain about where to begin. AI can help clear those roadblocks.

Sometimes that means restating a concept in simpler language or offering another example. Sometimes it means generating practice questions, structuring notes, or breaking a task into smaller steps. **More than half of teens (54%) say AI can help explain difficult topics in different ways, while 38% say it can help create study guides, and 35% say it can help them stay organized.** The support is immediate and responsive, available in the moment; frustration is most likely to become disengagement.



When I'm stuck on a homework question and I really can't get it, I ask AI to explain it and gimme the answer so I understand how to do the question and I can do the next one.

- Arianna, 13-15, Southeast



The Boundary Between Help and Cheating

The line between help and cheating is not always clear. While submitting an answer without understanding how it was produced would be inappropriate, asking for an explanation is not so clear, even though it clearly supports learning.

The harder cases sit between those poles.

Teens talk about checking facts, comparing sources, revising generated language, and making sure the final work reflects their own thinking.

They also recognize what can disappear when AI becomes the first response to every difficulty: practice, memory, confidence, and the ability to work independently.

“ I think for things where you’re just looking for the answer, it’s kind of bad and like you’re being lazy. But I’ve also used it to explain how to get the answer, especially with math. And that... makes me feel like I’m learning from that.

- Marit, age 16-17, Southeast

“ I view AI as a good tool. It’s just that people are trying to use it as a shortcut instead of as a tool, and that’s giving AI a bad reputation and taking away tools from students who would use it well.

- Darius, 16-17, Midwest

“ ...like, it depends, like I kind of do use it a lot as a shortcut from work, but sometimes I have to like, understand something. I just use it like that, like to explain something.

- Leo, 13-15, Northeast

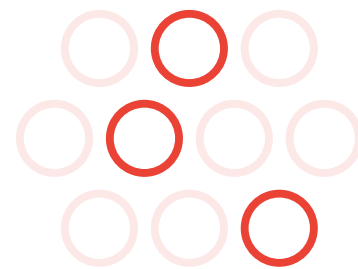
Schools Are Still Catching Up

Teen adoption has moved faster than shared standards, classroom norms, and formal instruction. Students are already navigating questions about when AI is useful, when another source is more appropriate, and how much of the thinking they should retain for themselves.

Many learn those norms through trial and error—from friends, social content, parents, individual teachers, and the tools themselves. Yet parents and teachers are also navigating rapidly changing tools, expectations, and their own levels of familiarity. Each source may offer something useful, but together they form an uneven system. Expectations can change by class period, school, or household.

Teens shared that schools often communicate the rules without explaining that reasoning behind them. Students may be told that a tool is blocked, permitted, or restricted to certain tasks without being shown what responsible use looks like when it is allowed. As one 13-year-old explained, ***“In certain classes, you are allowed to use AI. In my math class, you are not. I don’t know why.”*** Prohibition answers whether. It does not always answer why—or how.

As AI becomes easier to use, teaching young people how to use it well becomes even more important.



3 in 10

report no approved AI tools

12% are unsure of approved tools

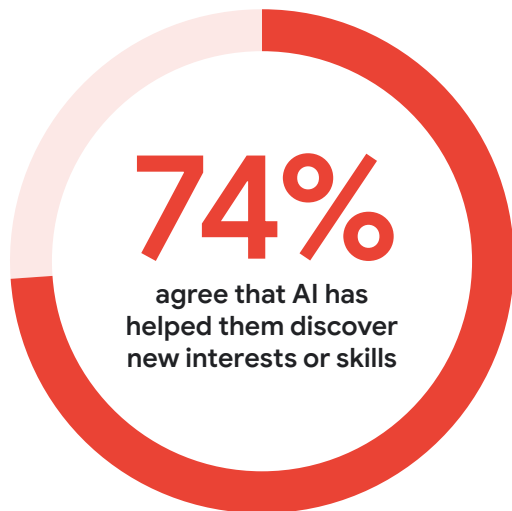


The schools don’t want us to really use AI, so they’re not gonna like really teach us how to use it.

– Genevieve, 13–15, Midwest

Beyond the Assignment

What begins as a practical question can lead somewhere unexpected.



Seventy-four percent of teens agree that AI has helped them discover new interests or skills.

- ▶ A homework topic prompts a follow-up.
- ▶ An unfamiliar term leads to another explanation.
- ▶ A suggested example sends someone to a video, a new search, or a subject that was never part of the original task.

What AI can offer is another path forward once a question has taken hold—and fewer barriers between wondering and looking further.

“ I use it to research things I’m interested in—cars, how things work mechanically. Just stuff like that.

– Saad, 13–15, Southeast



The Personalized Learning Ecosystem

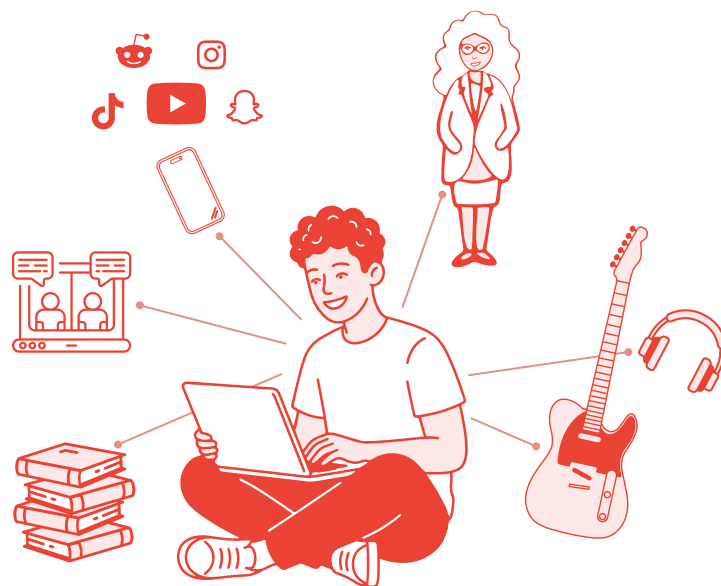
Teens report moving among formats, platforms, and people, assembling support around the need in front of them.

AI can rephrase, prompt, and generate practice. Search engines can locate, compare, and verify. Teachers provide instruction, standards, and context. Parents and friends contribute guidance grounded in lived experience. Online video occupies a distinctive place because it can show a process, offer a different teaching style, and allow students to pause, repeat, and proceed at their own pace.

The sequence is rarely fixed. A student may leave a teacher's lesson with questions, and turn to an online search, watch a video demonstration, then ask AI to create practice questions. Another may begin with

AI, verify the answer through a search engine, and use video to see the concept applied. They compare explanations, change formats, and choose what works for the subject, the moment, and the way they learn best.

The strongest environments will help teens understand what each tool does well, where it falls short, and when human guidance matters most.



“ I’d maybe either look it up on Safari or Google, or if I’m just trying to have someone teach it to me, I’d go on YouTube maybe.

– Leo, 13-15, Northeast

More Choice Requires More Judgment

Teenagers have more ways to learn than any generation before them. AI adds to that abundance, but it does not displace other digital tools, books, adults, peers, or the effort required to understand something for oneself.

AI can make explanation more accessible, help a student move through frustration, organize a difficult task, and follow a new interest. It can also make avoidance easier, blur ownership, and remove productive struggle before a student recognizes what has been lost.

The future of learning will depend less on reliance on any one tool than on the habits teens carry across all of them: knowing when to question, when to verify, when to persist—and always making sure the work remains their own. Many teens are already showing that judgment. But not every teenager has the same experience, guidance or judgement to draw on.

Teens are already shaping technology's place in their education. The opportunity is to meet that agency with guidance—helping them take advantage of more personalized support without surrendering the thinking, curiosity, and human relationships that make learning meaningful.

The same questions become even more personal when AI enters creative work: not only whether it helps, but whose idea, voice, and authorship remain in the result.

“Once you have access to it, it can feel like it could do the work for you. A lot of times I'm lazy and I'll just let it do it for me, and I'm not learning what I need to learn.

- Saad, 13-15, Southeast



02.

Human Creativity in the Age of AI

Creativity in the Age of AI

What happens when familiar forms of expression meet new technologies?

Creativity has always evolved alongside new tools.

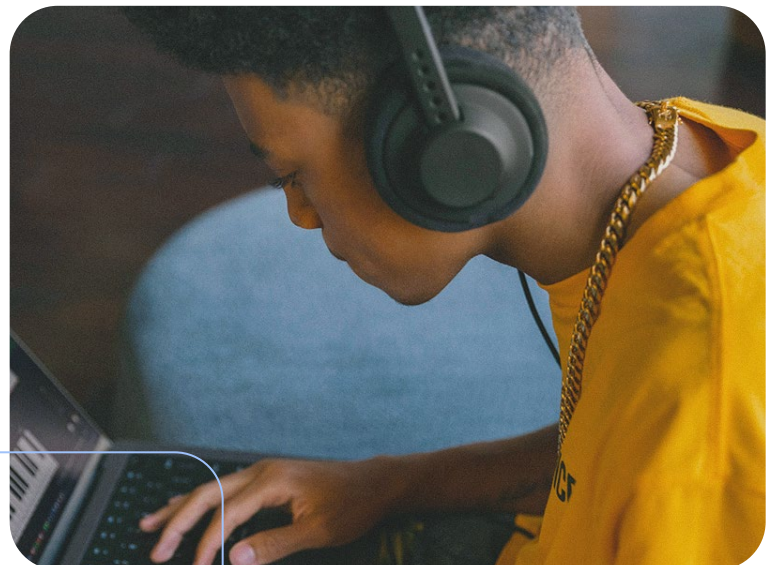
Every generation embraces technologies that expand what people can imagine, create, and share—from cameras and computers to smartphones and digital editing software. Artificial intelligence is the latest addition to that creative toolkit, opening new possibilities for experimentation, exploration, and expression.

As Chapter 1 explores, learning remains the primary way teens currently use AI. But AI is not confined to helping with schoolwork or learning.. Increasingly, teenagers bring it into their creative lives—to brainstorm ideas, overcome creative blocks, experiment with new styles, and explore interests in ways that were difficult or impossible only a few years ago.

Yet AI also introduces questions that previous creative tools did not.

- ▶ When technology can generate images, write stories, compose music, or suggest ideas in seconds, what still makes something feel genuinely original?
- ▶ Where do teenagers draw the line between inspiration and authorship?
- ▶ And what role should AI play in a creative process where experimentation, persistence, and personal expression have always mattered as much as the work itself?

Teens' responses do reveal a generation navigating a new creative landscape—embracing new possibilities while continuing to value imagination, personal expression, and the satisfaction of creating something that feels authentically their own.



How Teens Are Using AI in the Creative Process

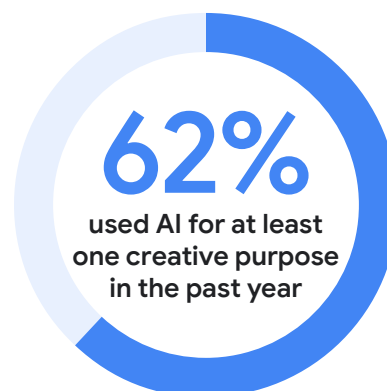
Teenagers report using AI to generate images, brainstorm ideas, write stories, design presentations, experiment with music and visual art, and explore new forms of expression.

Nearly two-thirds report using AI for at least one creative purpose, and more than half say they use AI for creative activities at least weekly.

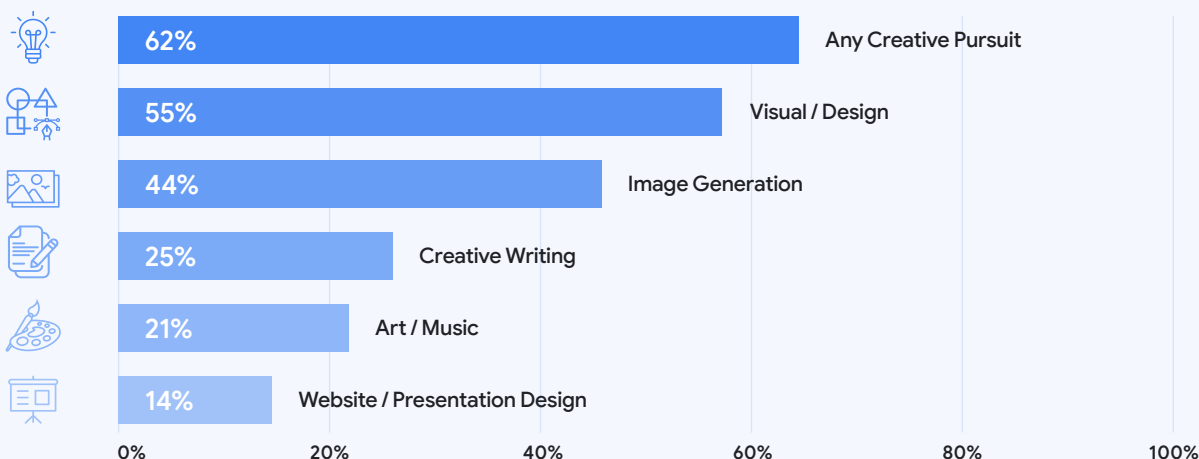
Creative uses of AI are also diverse, with different interests, different forms of expression, and different reasons for bringing AI into the process. Some teens use AI to quickly visualize ideas. Others turn to it to get past the blank page, experiment with writing styles, refine presentations, or explore possibilities they might not have attempted on their own.

This diversity matters because there is no single way teens use AI creatively. A teenager experimenting with AI-generated artwork may approach the process very differently from someone using AI

to strengthen a piece of writing or refine a class presentation. Their goals, expectations, and experiences can be distinct, even though they all fall under the broad category of creative use.



Variety in Creative Pursuits



What, if anything, have you used AI tools for in the past year? Please select all that apply.

What AI Adds to the Creative Process

Teenagers do not bring AI into the creative process simply because it is new. They use it because they believe it offers something valuable.

Across our research, teens describe AI as helping them move past creative obstacles, explore new possibilities, and approach creative work with greater confidence.

Rather than replacing imagination, many teens describe AI as expanding the range of possibilities they are willing to explore.

Perhaps most importantly, teens rarely describe AI as valuable because it simply completes the work for them. Instead, they value it for helping them develop and express ideas that still feel like their own.

It is the momentum it can create—helping transform uncertainty into experimentation and curiosity into creative action.

“For me, when I want to make a script, and because I like to make crossovers and all that stuff with one of my different favorite TV shows, but I don’t have a plot, so I type in one of my AIs and then I get a plot. So I write it down in the script. And then boom, I have a creative idea.”

- Jaice, 16-17, Southeast



To what extent has using AI improved or limited your creativity in the following areas?

Creativity Is More Than Output

If AI expands what teenagers can create, it also encourages them to think more carefully about what creativity means. Teens rarely describe creativity as simply producing something new.

They talk about making choices, expressing ideas, experimenting, revising, and creating work that reflects something personal.

A finished image, story, song, or presentation is only one part of the creative process. The thinking behind it—testing ideas, making decisions, solving problems, and refining work over time—is often where creativity develops. AI may accelerate parts of that journey, but it does not eliminate the importance of imagination, judgment, or persistence. For example, Darius, 16–17, Midwest, explained, when he uses AI for sentence starters, *“I go through it and change the parts I don’t like.”*

Others focus less on the starting point and more on what happens afterward—how much they rewrite, reshape, question, and personalize the work. Still others focus on whether the final piece genuinely reflects their own voice and perspective.

Those reflections rarely produce a single conclusion. Instead, they open a broader conversation about originality, ownership, effort, and what creativity still requires when AI can participate at nearly every stage.



I feel like it’s not really creative if you just go to your phone or you go to a computer just to ask AI to do something for you. I feel like it’s not... like if it’s an idea in your head and you’re like, ‘Hmm, how does this idea sound?’ I guess that could be creative, but it’s not like, I feel like you should just do things by yourself and not always have AI.

– Miguel, 13–15, West



The Conversation Continues

As AI becomes part of the creative process, teenagers begin asking new questions about creativity itself.

Across the focus groups, one discussion surfaced repeatedly:

If AI helps create something, is it still art?

There is no consensus. Some teens see prompting, selection, and revision as meaningful creative contributions. Others believe art requires human effort, emotion, technical practice, or a direct act of making that generated work cannot reproduce. Some begin with a firm view and grow less certain as other participants challenge it.

The discussion moves beyond a simple yes-or-no answer. Teens test the question against intention, originality, effort, source material, permission, artistic careers, and the degree to which a person shapes—or merely accepts—the result.

Their differing perspectives are not simply evidence of uncertainty. They reflect a generation actively thinking through questions that society itself has yet to resolve.



I feel like maybe it allows people to be less creative because people have to think on their own and come up with stuff on their own. Without using AI.

- Leo, 13-15, Northeast



I think it's somewhat in the middle. On the side of making people less creative, it can create the image for them, so they're not putting as much thought into it. But it can also give them inspiration and motivation to draw.

Isabella, 13-15, Southeast

Human Creativity Still Matters

The conversations throughout this chapter point to a larger idea.

As AI becomes part of the creative process, the defining questions are shifting.

The most important question is no longer simply “What can AI create?”

Increasingly, it is “How do people choose to create with AI?”

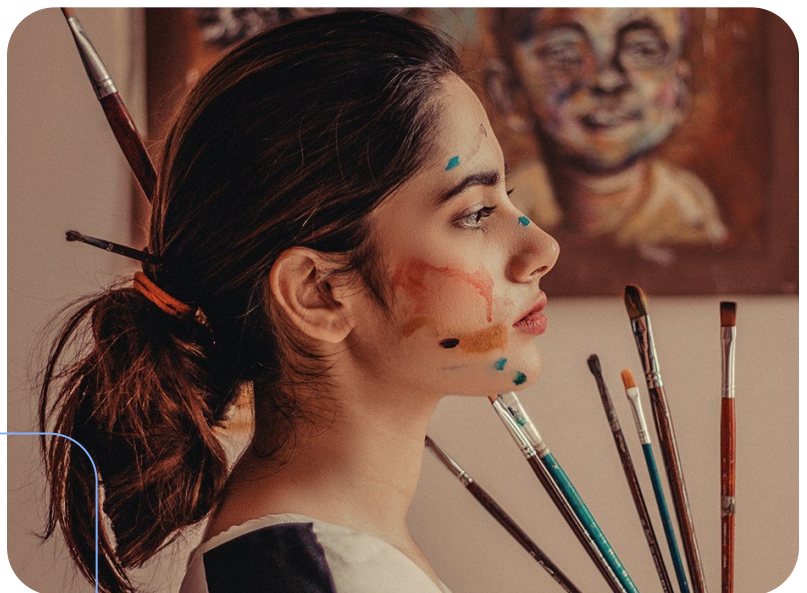
Teens are already asking themselves that question. They talk about originality, effort, personal expression, and ownership not as abstract ideas, but as practical decisions they make while creating. Their answers are not identical—and they should not be. This is a generation learning to navigate a creative landscape that is still taking shape.

Creativity is becoming less about whether AI is involved and more about the role it plays. AI may

expand what is possible, but teens continue to describe their own choices, judgment, perspective, and connection to the work as the elements that make creation feel authentic.

These habits extend beyond creativity. Across both learning and creativity, judgment develops through practice, reflection, education, and conversations with parents, teachers, and other trusted adults—many of whom are still learning how to navigate AI themselves.

As AI becomes more deeply woven into everyday life, helping teens build critical-thinking skills and confidence will require more than rules. It will require practical guidance that helps them ask better questions, evaluate what they encounter, and make choices they can stand behind. The next chapter explores how that judgment develops—and how the adults and institutions around teens can support it.



03.

Growing Up Digital

Growing Up Digital

Growing up has always meant learning how to navigate a changing world. For today's teenagers, that world is increasingly digital—and increasingly shaped by AI.

From deciding whether to trust information online to protecting their privacy, managing screen time, and deciding when and how to use AI, teens report making decisions every day about technologies that continue to evolve around them.

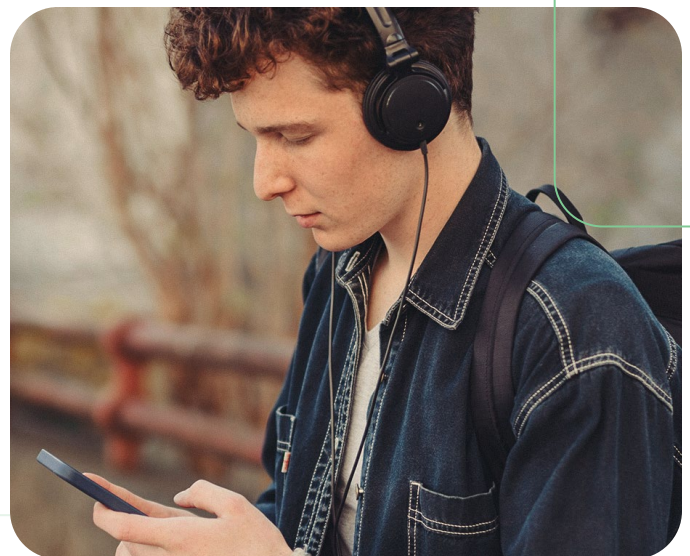
Public conversations often portray young people as passive recipients of technology. Our research paints a more nuanced picture.

Across the survey and focus groups, teens describe questioning information, weighing whether it is trustworthy, protecting their privacy, seeking guidance from trusted adults, and adapting their habits as technology continues to evolve. At the same time, their experiences make clear that these habits are still developing and are not evenly distributed across all young people.

The findings in this chapter do not suggest that teenagers have solved the challenges of growing up with AI and digital technology. Rather, they reveal a generation already practicing many of the habits that support thoughtful digital participation while also highlighting important gaps in experience, education, and support. Many teens report questioning information, verifying what they find, thinking about

online safety, and working to balance digital life with the rest of their lives. Many others are still developing those habits.

Listening to how teens describe these experiences reveals a picture that is both encouraging and still evolving. Many describe actively evaluating information, thinking about safety, and working to balance their digital lives, while their experiences also reveal how unevenly these habits are developing. Just as importantly, many teens themselves believe these skills should be introduced early, with stronger opportunities to build digital and AI literacy throughout childhood and adolescence.



Trust Begins with Critical Thinking

The challenge for today's teens is not simply accessing information—it is deciding what to believe.

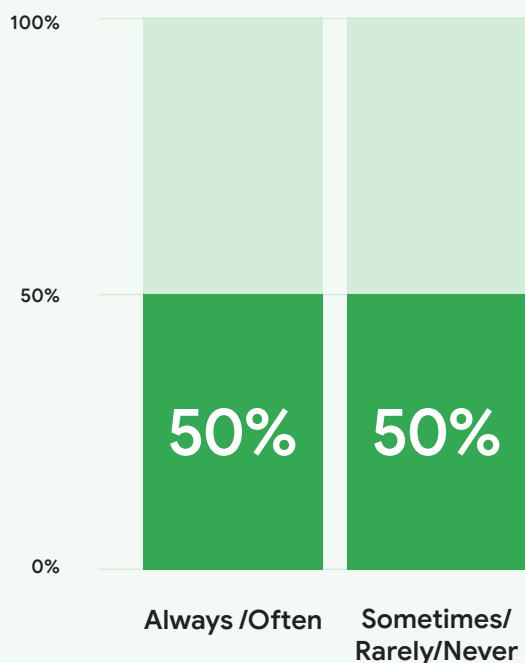
The survey suggests many teens are already approaching that challenge thoughtfully. Half say they always or often think about whether information they encounter online or through AI is trustworthy. At the same time, the other half say they consider trustworthiness only sometimes, rarely, or never. Critical thinking is becoming a more common habit, but it is far from universal.

That distinction matters because confidence and consistent evaluation are not the same. Nearly three-quarters say it is easy to identify trustworthy

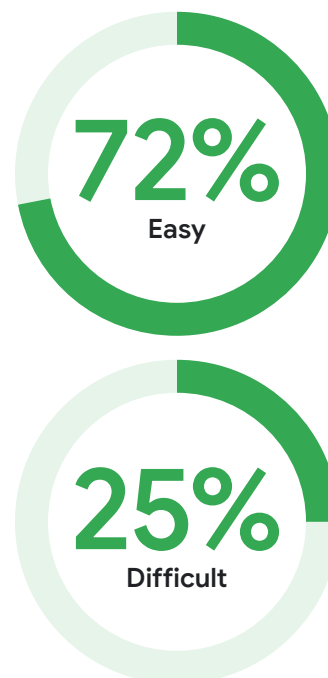
information, while one in four say it is difficult. At the same time, reported verification behaviors are more uneven: many teens rely on a limited set of strategies for checking what they see. In the focus groups, teens rarely described trust as automatic.

Instead, they talked about asking whether information makes sense, whether it matches what they already know, and whether the source or situation warrants a closer look. The next question is what they do when uncertainty remains.

Do you consider whether online or AI information is trustworthy?



How easy is it to tell if the information you find is trustworthy?



Verification Turns Critical Thinking into Action

Recognizing that information may not always be trustworthy is only the first step. What matters next is whether teens act on that uncertainty.

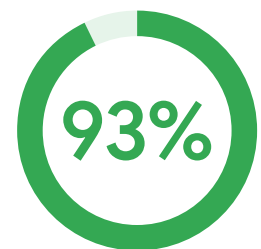
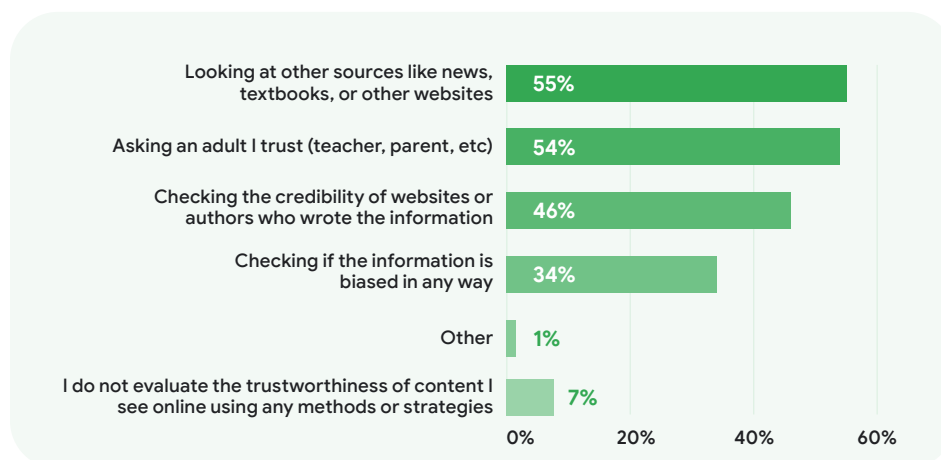
Many teens report taking at least one step to evaluate information before relying on it. Fifty-five percent compare it with news, textbooks, or other websites; 54% ask an adult they trust; 46% check the credibility of the website or author; and 34% look for bias. Only 7% say they use no method at all. These behaviors show that verification is part of many teens' digital routines—but the depth and consistency of those routines vary.

The focus groups make that variation tangible. Some teens described checking an answer across different AI tools, searching for the original source, comparing results with friends, or asking a parent or teacher when the stakes feel higher. Others said their response depends on the subject or how difficult it would be to check. Teens know AI can be wrong; they do not always respond to that knowledge in the same way.

The findings also raise a careful question about confidence. Many teens feel capable of identifying trustworthy information, but consistent verification often involves more than a single check. Three out of ten teens report that they rely on only one verification method, underscoring the difference between taking a step to check information and developing a more comprehensive routine.

These decisions are a form of agency—but agency does not mean immunity from misinformation, manipulation, or misplaced confidence. It means participating in the judgment process: asking questions, seeking more information, and recognizing when an answer deserves another look—or a deeper one. Evaluating information is one part of digital navigation. Protecting oneself online is another.

Verification Methods



most teens report taking at least one step to evaluate information before relying on it.

What methods or strategies, if any, do you use to check if information you find online is trustworthy? Please select all that apply.

Everyday Online Safety Habits

Many teens describe online safety through familiar, everyday behaviors rather than abstract fear. But familiarity does not mean those habits are consistently practiced.

Nearly all—98% of teens—report taking some regular measures to stay safe online. Nearly two-thirds say they are careful about what they share online and who they share it with. Fifty-seven percent use strong passwords, 52% tell a trusted adult when something online makes them uncomfortable, and 40% block or mute other users. Taken together, these findings show that practical safety habits are taking root—but they also reveal room for growth.

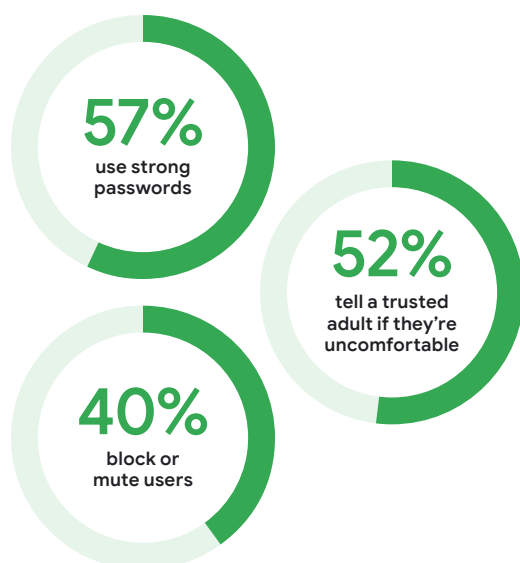
Across the survey and focus groups, a very nuanced view around safety emerges. In focus group discussions, teens expressed an understanding about the importance of protecting personal information, avoiding suspicious links, blocking

unwanted contact, or involving an adult if a situation feels off.

Parents remain especially important when a situation moves beyond routine precautions. Many teens say they turn to a trusted adult when something feels unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or unsafe; younger teens are more likely than older teens to report doing so. But here, too, the national finding is mixed: help-seeking is meaningful, not universal.

The story is therefore not that teens have mastered online safety. It is that many are developing practical habits, while sizable gaps remain in how consistently those habits are used.

What practices, if any, do you regularly follow to stay safe online?



A lot of my friends have had bad interactions with people on the internet, so I make sure I recognize their name before I add them... I'm just very careful with having private accounts.

— Ella, 16-17, West

Finding Balance in a Connected World

For today's teens, balance is not about choosing between online and offline life. It is about learning how both fit together.

Most teens report that their online and offline lives feel balanced: 78% choose that description, while 18% say they spend too much time online and 4% say they do not spend enough. These are self-assessments, not objective measures of wellbeing.

They matter because they show how teenagers understand their own habits—and where some already recognize tension. Teens describe using a mix of strategies to manage that balance.

Fifty-six percent spend time with family and friends in person, 41% turn to television, films, or offline gaming, and 37% cite parental limits or offline hobbies. Others exercise, go outdoors, put phones away, silence notifications, or create device-free moments. Balance is not a single behavior or a fixed destination.

The focus-group question about a week without technology brought the tradeoffs into sharper view. Some teens imagined relief, more sleep, less stress, or more time outside. Others immediately thought about losing contact with friends and family, navigating schoolwork, listening to music, or accessing everyday information. The responses were neither uniformly enthusiastic nor uniformly anxious.



I'm never off my phone, so it'd be really nice to have just like a whole week-long break off of it. And if I was given the option, I wouldn't take it. So if it was gone, then it would just be gone.

— Saad, 13-15, Southeast



Too much time online

18%

Not enough online

4%

Building These Habits Starts Early

Many teens believe the habits needed to navigate today's digital world should be developed long before young people encounter its most complex challenges.

Nearly two-thirds say digital literacy and responsibility should begin in elementary school. Another 27% choose middle school, while only 7% say instruction should wait until high school.

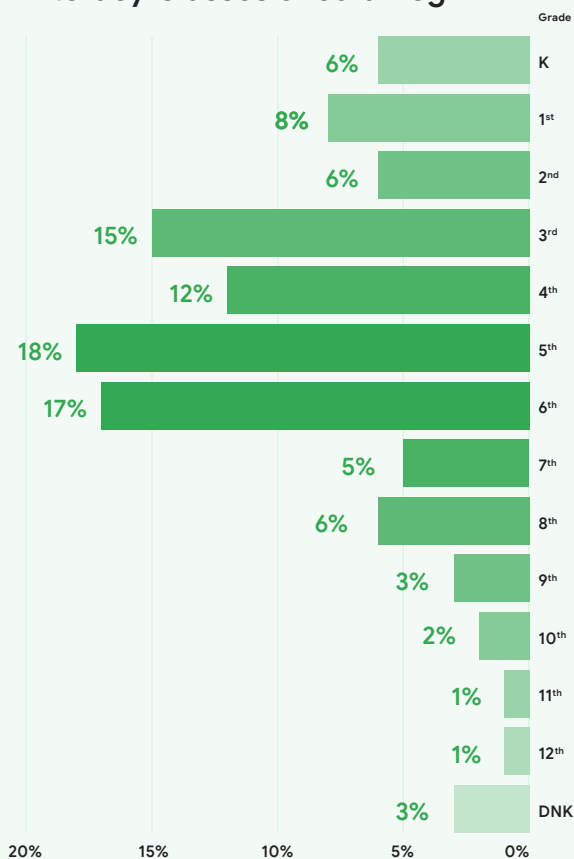
Teens are not describing digital judgment as an advanced specialty. They see it as a foundation that should grow with young people over time.

Yet access to school-based preparation remains uneven. Fifty-seven percent report that their school offers digital-literacy or technology classes; 43% say those opportunities are unavailable or that they are unaware of them. The gap also differs across groups, reinforcing that young people do not enter digital life with equal opportunities to build the same habits.

The focus groups suggest teens want more than instruction on how to operate a platform or generate an answer. They raise questions about why AI can produce answers that sound confident but are inaccurate, source evaluation, synthetic content, privacy, scams, responsible prompting, academic integrity, and when to involve an adult. Many are not simply asking to learn how to use technology. They are asking for opportunities to develop the judgment to use it well.

That perspective keeps the chapter grounded in teenagers' own voices. They recognize that these habits are learned, strengthened through practice, and easier to build when instruction begins before the highest-stakes situations arise.

What Grade Teens Believe Digital Literacy Classes Should Begin



In which grade do you think young people should begin to be taught digital literacy and responsibility?

57%

report school-based digital-literacy/ technology classes

43%

say such programs are unavailable or unaware they exist

04.

Building Readiness

Trusted Adults

Teens actively seek out support, as most report consulting with family, teachers and schools to help them navigate their digital lives.

Teens share that parents and family are the people they trust most for guidance on healthy online habits, with 67% naming parents or other adult family members as their most trusted source, including 73% of ages 13–15 (vs. 59% of those aged 16–17).

Teens also describe staying connected to other adults they trust—turning to a teacher, coach, relative, or another familiar adult when a question or situation calls for perspective. The research does not point to a fixed division of roles. It shows that human connection remains important even as teens make more decisions for themselves.

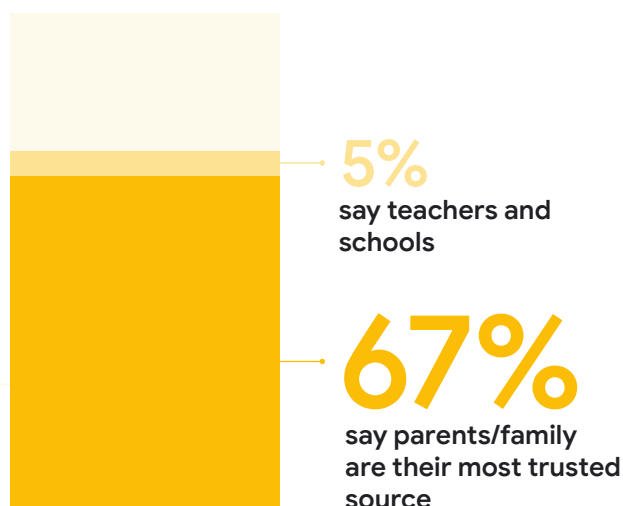
Over time, these connections provide more than answers to individual questions. They form part of

the context in which young people learn to weigh options, recognize uncertainty, and increasingly rely on their own judgment.

“ I definitely learned from my parents about online safety—what’s okay to give people and what you should keep personal and private.

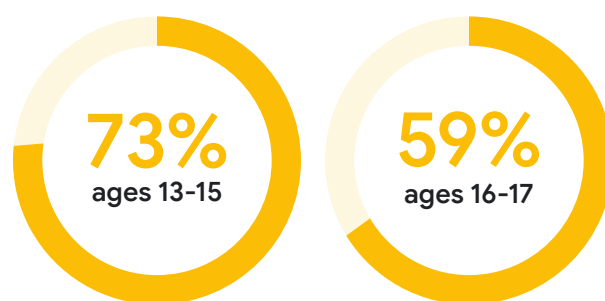
– Miguel, 13-15, West

Who are the Most Trusted Sources?



Who, if anyone, do you trust the most to guide you about healthy online habits?

Parents as Most-Trusted Source by Age Group



Growing Independence

Growing independence changes how parents and other trusted adults are involved in teens' digital lives.

Younger teens report more direct oversight, including device settings, account controls, screen-time limits, and closer supervision. Older teens more often describe greater freedom, trust, and responsibility. The survey reflects that shift: current parental management of device settings is reported by about half of ages 13–15, compared with just over one-third of ages 16–17. Older teens are also nearly twice as likely to say they receive no support for managing online habits.

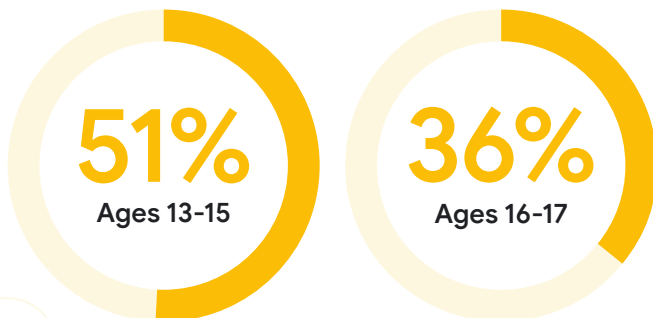
The focus groups add texture to the numbers. Teens frequently described rules that eased, changed, or became less direct as they grew older. The connection to trusted adults remains, but the expectations around it shift toward greater autonomy.



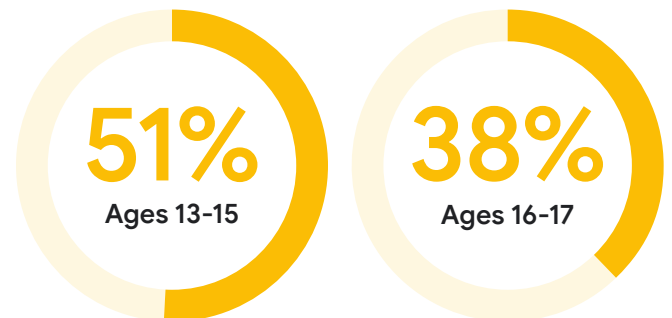
It is protection in some ways, depending on your age, but also a restriction in a good way. If you have everything, you don't ever look forward to something. I like the idea of looking forward to something—if that comes with time, age, or a milestone, I think that's great.

– Melinda, 16–17, Southeast

Device/Phone Settings Managed by Parents



In-app/Account Oversight



Knowing When to Ask

Greater independence does not mean handling every situation alone.

Most teens say they would turn to a parent or guardian when online experiences become serious, uncertain, or difficult to evaluate. Eighty-five percent say they would seek help with suspected scams or fraud; roughly eight in ten would do so for privacy concerns, uncomfortable interactions, or cyberbullying; and 73% would turn to an adult when confronting misinformation.

Teens often distinguish between routine decisions they feel prepared to manage and moments that call for another perspective. In those moments, reaching out is not a retreat from independence. It is part of making a thoughtful decision.

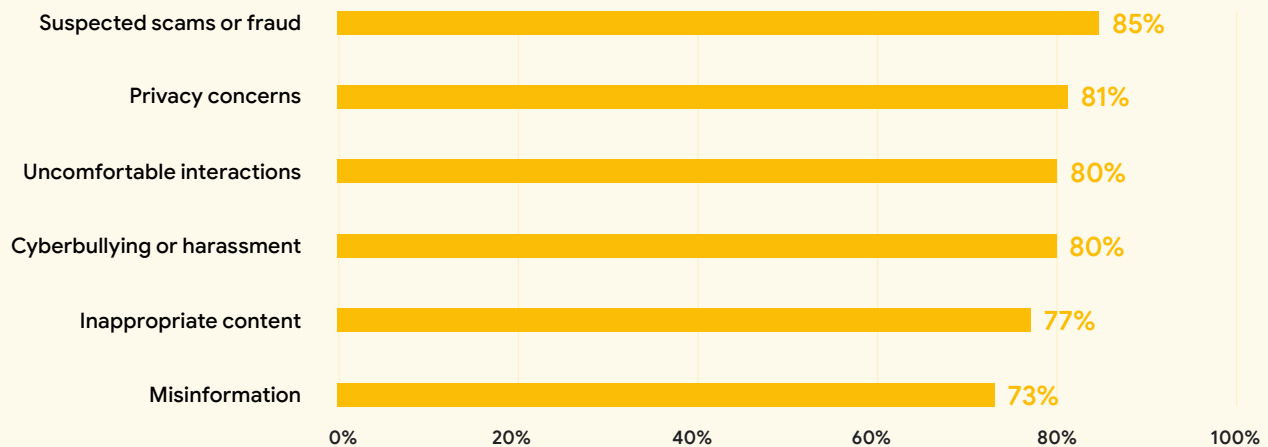
Recognizing when to seek guidance is itself part of growing judgment.



It depends. For some things I might go to my parents, and for some things I don't. I don't go to my parents for everything.

- Joshua, 13-15, Southeast

Asking Their Parents For Help



How likely would you be to ask for your parent/guardian's help in the following situations?

Where Readiness Takes Shape

Digital readiness evolves over time and in a variety of places.

Some of the experiences that prepare teens for digital life begin at home, through conversations with parents and other trusted adults. Others take shape at school, through teachers, classroom expectations, and formal digital-literacy instruction. Still others emerge through everyday experience—trying new tools, making decisions, solving problems, and learning from mistakes.

Those experiences are not uniform. In the focus groups, some teens described teachers who encouraged thoughtful discussion and experimentation with AI, while others described little explanation beyond being told not to use it. Some described ongoing conversations with adults about technology and online life; others reported fewer opportunities to talk through those questions. In our survey, 57% say their school offers digital-literacy or technology classes, while 43% say it does not or they are unaware of one—even as nearly two-thirds

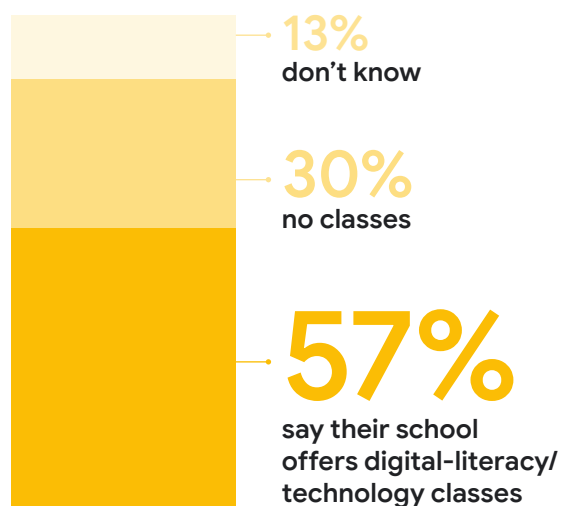
believe this learning should begin in elementary school.

Readiness is shaped across many experiences, but those opportunities are not always the same.

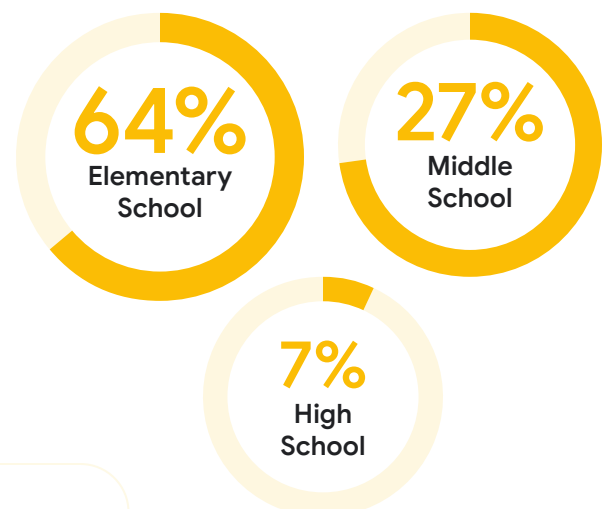


I wasn't allowed to have TikTok for a while, but I was probably nine. Now I have everything. I share my location with my mom when I go out. I know what's wrong and what's right, and I know how to handle myself with it.

— Reese, 13-15, Northeast



When Should Digital Literacy Start to Be Taught



More Than Rules

Rules establish boundaries. Conversations deepen understanding. Experience strengthens judgment.

Parameters and boundaries provide important guardrails for children as they grow. They create structure, clarify expectations, and help protect young people as they begin navigating increasingly complex digital environments.

The stories teens shared in focus groups also point to what rules alone cannot provide: an explanation of why a boundary exists, opportunities to ask questions, chances to practice making decisions, and room to reflect and assume greater responsibility over time.

Together, these experiences help young people move from relying primarily on external guidance toward exercising increasing judgment of their own. Preparation begins with boundaries, but it continues through the many moments in which teens learn to think, decide, ask for help, and grow.

“It is a bit of restriction, a bit of protection. You can’t really have one without the other.

— Jesse, 16–17, Southeast

“I feel like there’s a point where it’s too much balance—you can’t be perfect. At least be as good as you can.

— Ethan, 16–17, Southeast

Moving from External Guidance to Exercising Good Judgment

.01

Boundaries

Rules, settings and protective structures



.02

Explanation / Practice

Context, conversation and guided experience



.03

Judgment

Growing responsibility and knowing when to seek help

05.

Pragmatic Optimism

Pragmatic Optimism

The future of artificial intelligence is often described in extremes. Some imagine extraordinary progress. Others focus almost entirely on disruption and risk.

The teens in this research describe something more nuanced.

They see meaningful opportunities for technology to improve learning, healthcare, communication, scientific discovery, and everyday life. At the same time, they recognize legitimate concerns about employment, misinformation, privacy, dependence, environmental impact, and the unintended consequences that can accompany technological change.

Their optimism is real—but it is also thoughtful. Alongside the opportunities they imagine, teens consistently describe concerns about how these technologies could affect people's lives, reminding us that their hopes for the future exist alongside genuine questions about where technology is headed.

This chapter explores how teens imagine the future—not as something predetermined, but as something that will be shaped by the choices people make.



Where Technology Can Have the Greatest Impact

When teens imagine the future of technology, they talk about the problems it could help solve.

Across the survey, education, research, healthcare, engineering, the environment, and other areas emerge as places where teens believe technology could make a meaningful difference. What connects the leading priorities is not novelty, but human impact: each reflects the potential for technology to expand what people are able to learn, discover, accomplish, and contribute.

Education ranks first nationally (42%), followed by research (35%) and healthcare (31%). Differences across age and demographic groups appear at the margins rather than changing the broader story: younger teens place somewhat greater emphasis on education, while selected differences emerge in engineering and research.

Taken together, the survey findings and teens' descriptions in focus groups point in the same direction. Rather than emphasizing convenience

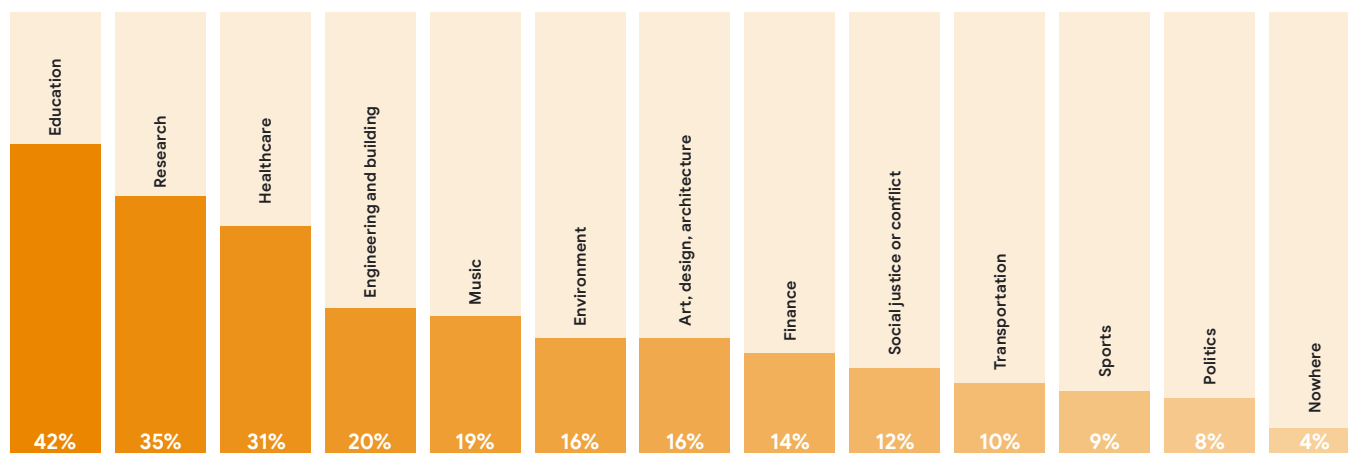
alone, teens most often imagine technology helping people learn, solve problems, improve health, expand opportunity, and make everyday life better. Their vision of the future is grounded less in novelty than in practical benefit.



I will hope that any, like, new technology would actually be helpful for like, people in general. Not like to think about things, but like, maybe like good inventions or innovations.

- Doran, 16-17, Northeast

Prioritizing Areas Where Technology Can Be Impactful



Where, if anywhere, do you think technology could have the biggest impact in the future? Please select up to three.

Healthcare and Research

Among all the possibilities teens imagine, healthcare and scientific research stand apart.

Many envision technology helping researchers accelerate discoveries, improve treatments, and solve medical challenges that have persisted for decades. Rather than focusing primarily on entertainment or convenience, they often point to advances that could improve quality of life on a much broader scale.

Teens' responses indicate a future that is not simply faster or more efficient, but healthier, more capable, and better equipped to help people address problems that extend beyond any one individual.



I think it can really help with like medical stuff. Like if it's put into like the medical field, when it, once it gets developed enough to be very, substantial, then it can help a lot and like come up with developments for cures and stuff like that.

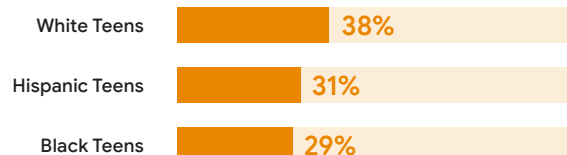
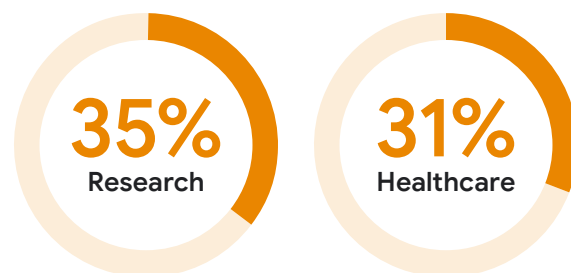
- Bodhi, 13-15, Northeast



Technology could help with advancing medical technology and interventions.

- Sam, 13-15, Southwest

Strongest Positive Expectations



Education and Access

Many of the opportunities teens imagine for tomorrow are extensions of the ways they already use technology today.

As noted earlier, teens describe digital tools helping them explain difficult concepts, discover new interests, access information, and learn in ways that complement traditional instruction. Looking ahead, 42% identify education as an area where technology could have its biggest future impact. In the focus groups, teens imagined those capabilities extending to different learning needs, translation, accessibility, and broader access to education regardless of geography or circumstance.

The future they describe is not one in which technology replaces learning. It is one in which more people have the opportunity to learn.

That distinction reflects a broader theme running throughout this research: technology is most valuable when it expands human capability rather than substituting for it.

Future Possibilities for Technology



42%

nationally feel it will broadly impact education

45%

Ages 13-15

37%

Ages 16-17



“

I think I'll use technology for my work and to increase accessibility when I'm an adult. I feel like technology is more of a tool and will become even more of a tool, especially with AI.

- Marit, 16-17, Southeast

Staying Connected

As teens imagine the future, they also see technology continuing to shape how people communicate, maintain friendships, and stay connected across distance, language, and circumstance.

These expectations are less about replacing in-person interaction than expanding the ways people can remain connected to one another. Whether through translation, accessibility, or new forms of communication, teens often describe technology as helping people participate more fully in relationships and communities that already matter to them.

This perspective reflects an important theme running throughout the report. Technology is valued not simply because it is new, but because it helps people remain connected—to information, to opportunities, and to one another.



I feel like being able to communicate is already pretty good, but it can also be better—especially with people across the world. I feel like that's just going to become better.

- Genevieve, 13-15, Midwest



The Concerns Teens Carry Forward

The opportunities teens imagine do not erase their concerns.

Across the research, teens also identify a range of questions about how technology could reshape everyday life in the years ahead. The survey highlights the issues that matter most to them, while the focus groups provide a deeper understanding of how teens think about those potential tradeoffs.

Their concerns span employment, misinformation, privacy, overdependence, environmental impact, unequal access, and the possibility that important human skills could diminish over time. Several worry

about replacement rather than assistance—whether technology could reduce the availability of work, weaken effort or expertise, or make people too reliant on tools they do not fully understand.

These concerns are not necessarily a rejection of technological progress. More often, they reflect questions about what people may gain, what they could lose, and which human qualities deserve protection as technology continues to evolve.

“ I usually check another AI just to see if it’s right, because sometimes AI reads the question wrong, or it might put the wrong numbers, and it just makes up an answer.

- Doran, 16-17, Northeast



Pragmatic Optimism

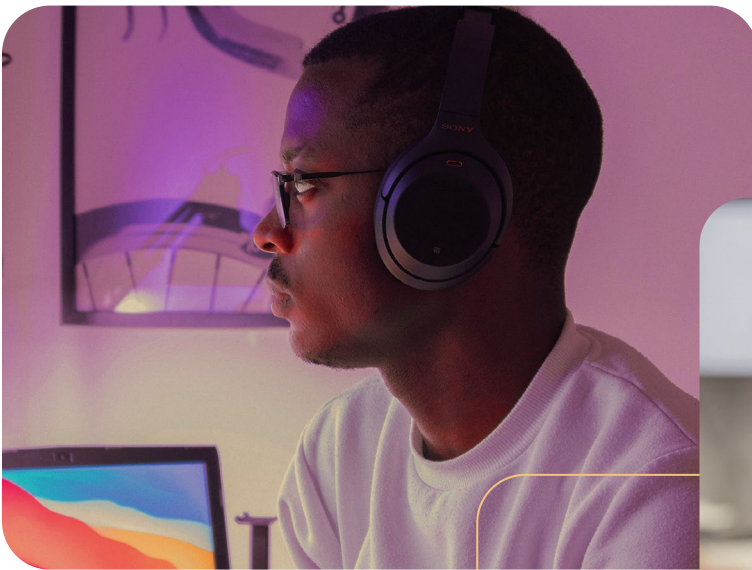
When talking about the future, the teens in this research rarely described technology as entirely good or entirely bad.

They express genuine optimism about technology's potential to improve people's lives while also acknowledging the questions and tradeoffs that accompany that progress.

Their confidence is strongest when technology expands human capability—helping people learn, create, solve problems, communicate, and improve

lives. Their concerns emerge when technology appears to diminish opportunity, replace human judgment or creativity, weaken important skills, or distance people from one another.

They are hopeful, but their optimism is grounded in an awareness that technological progress brings both possibility and responsibility.



The Future Needs Their Perspective

The teens in this research consistently weighed possibility alongside responsibility, opportunity, alongside consequence, and innovation alongside questions about its broader impact.

That perspective matters.

Teens are already learning with new technologies, using them creatively, questioning their outputs, navigating increasingly complex digital spaces, and developing the judgment needed to use them thoughtfully. Looking ahead, they imagine a future in which technology continues to play an important

role—but one in which human decisions remain just as important as technological advances.

Listening to teens is therefore more than an opportunity to better understand a generation. It is an opportunity to better understand the future they are preparing to inherit—and help shape.



“ I think I’ll use technology for my work and to increase accessibility when I’m an adult. I feel like technology is more of a tool and will become even more of a tool, especially with AI.

– Marit, 16-17, Southeast

06.

Supporting the Next Generation

Shared Roles

The findings in this report suggest that preparing young people for an increasingly digital future is a shared endeavor.

Different individuals, institutions, and sectors each contribute in distinct ways to the environments in which teens learn, create, and grow. Recognizing these complementary roles can help strengthen the support young people receive as technology

continues to evolve. These roles are most effective when they are informed not only by research, but also by the lived experiences and perspectives of young people themselves.



Families & Caregivers

Families are often teens' first and most consistent source of guidance as digital habits begin to develop. The findings suggest that ongoing conversations, opportunities to build trust, and guidance that evolves alongside growing independence can help young people develop confidence and sound judgment over time. As technology continues to change, families remain uniquely positioned to help teens translate everyday experiences into lasting judgment.



Educators & Schools

Schools play an important role in helping students prepare for a future in which technology—and particularly AI—is increasingly part of learning and work. Beyond access to technology itself, the findings suggest value in helping students strengthen critical thinking, information literacy, responsible technology use, and the judgment needed to apply these skills in different contexts. Education has always prepared young people for the future; these findings suggest that digital judgment is becoming an increasingly important part of that preparation.



Technology Companies

As digital tools become more integrated into young people's lives, the design of technology increasingly shapes everyday experiences. The findings point to opportunities for technology companies to continue advancing transparency, age-appropriate design, safety, and experiences that help young people build confidence and informed decision-making as they engage with emerging technologies. Thoughtful designs and practical safeguards can help ensure that innovation and healthy development continue to advance together.



Policymakers & Communities

Communities and policymakers help shape the broader conditions in which young people grow up. The findings suggest that thoughtful policies, investments in digital literacy, support for educators and families, and continued attention to equitable access can help create environments in which young people are better prepared to thrive in a rapidly changing technological landscape. Creating those conditions is not only about responding to technological change, but about ensuring young people are prepared to participate confidently and responsibly in the opportunities it creates.

Implications: Building Readiness

Preparing young people for an increasingly digital future extends beyond familiarity with today's tools.

As technology becomes more capable and more integrated into everyday life, readiness depends not only on knowing how to use digital tools, but also on developing the adaptability, curiosity, confidence, and foundational skills needed to use them thoughtfully and responsibly.

Across this research, many teens describe habits that support thoughtful technology use—from comparing information across sources and questioning AI-generated responses, to recognizing technology's limitations and considering when digital tools should support, rather than replace, their own thinking. At the same time, these practices are not yet widespread or consistently applied. The findings underscore that these capabilities develop over time through experience, reflection, guidance, and

opportunities to practice. It also means helping them develop the skills needed to decide how technology can best support learning and decision-making while continuing to build the critical thinking, insight, effort, and experience that remain essential to both.

Preparing for the future is therefore not simply about keeping pace with technological change. It is about helping young people build the capacity to continue learning, evaluate new technologies, adapt as tools evolve, and apply them in meaningful and responsible ways.

Taken together, the findings suggest that building informed judgment alongside digital skills is an essential part of preparing the next generation to thrive in an increasingly digital world.



Implications: Supporting Development and Participation

Teens need guidance and support to develop the confidence and skills to make independent decisions.

This research suggests that growing up in a digital world follows that same pattern. As technology becomes more integrated into everyday life, the support young people need also evolves over time.

Teens describe a wide range of experiences with technology, families, schools, and communities.

They also describe different levels of confidence, different habits, and different approaches to using digital tools. These differences reinforce that young people's experiences are not uniform and that support is most effective when it recognizes both individual development and the different contexts in which teens are learning and growing.

Looking Ahead

Taken together, the findings suggest that guidance is most effective when it evolves alongside growing independence.

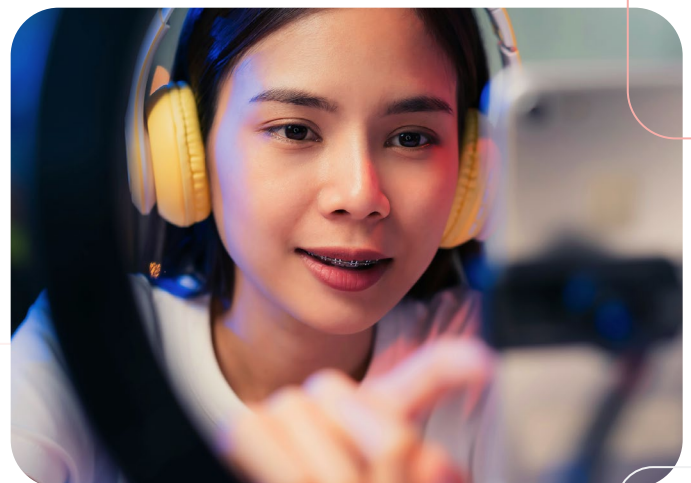
Recognizing young people's changing needs over time can help create opportunities for them to build confidence, critical thinking, and experience as they continue to grow.

Young people's perspectives are also essential to understanding how technology is experienced in everyday life. Their perspectives do not eliminate difficult questions or provide simple answers. They do, however, offer insight into the opportunities, concerns, and tradeoffs that shape growing up with technology.

This research does not suggest that teens have all the answers. Nor does it suggest that families, educators, technology companies, policymakers, or communities do either. Instead, it points to something both simpler and more important: Supporting the next generation is a shared and

ongoing effort. Each has a role to play, and each continues to learn as technology, society, and the needs of young people evolve together.

Continuing to learn with young people— and from them—remains an important part of helping the next generation prepare for the opportunities and challenges ahead.



APP.

Appendix

01.

Age & Place in Focus

Age in Focus

Technology is already woven into everyday life for teens across adolescence.

What changes with age is less the broader story than the balance of guidance, independence, and responsibility surrounding it.

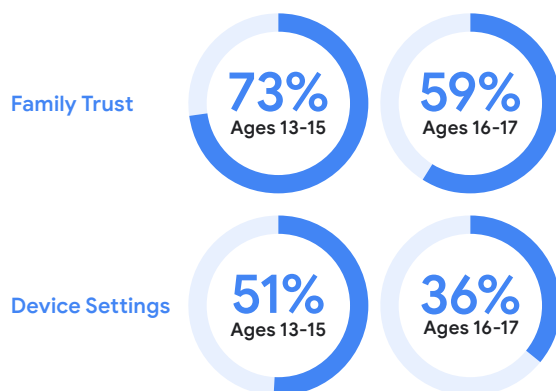
Younger teens are more likely to describe direct parental involvement in their digital lives. Parents and family are named as the most trusted source for healthy online habits by **73% of ages 13–15**, compared with **59% of ages 16–17**. Current parental management of device settings follows a similar pattern, while older teens are more likely to say they receive no support for managing online habits.

Younger teens also report somewhat more frequent use of AI for learning and creative work. They are more likely to use AI for homework research, to

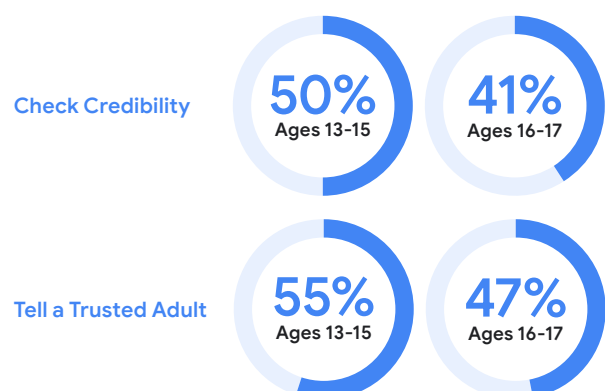
check the credibility of websites or authors, and to tell a trusted adult when something online feels uncomfortable. These differences suggest that direct support and structured habits remain more visible earlier in adolescence, even as teens of all ages are actively learning, creating, and making decisions with technology.

As teens grow older, the context shifts toward greater freedom and personal responsibility. Yet the larger pattern remains consistent: across both age groups, technology is part of learning and everyday problem-solving, human judgment still matters, and trusted relationships continue to play an important role.

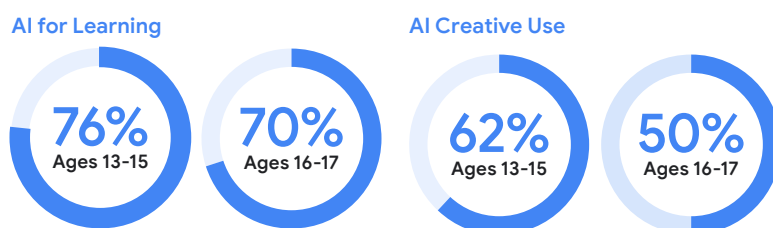
Guidance & Trust



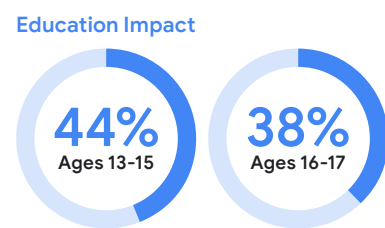
Checking & Help-Seeking



Learning & Creative Use



Shared Outlook



Six States, One Shared Story

The national survey reveals a remarkably consistent picture of how teens are learning, creating, navigating information, building judgment, and thinking about the future.

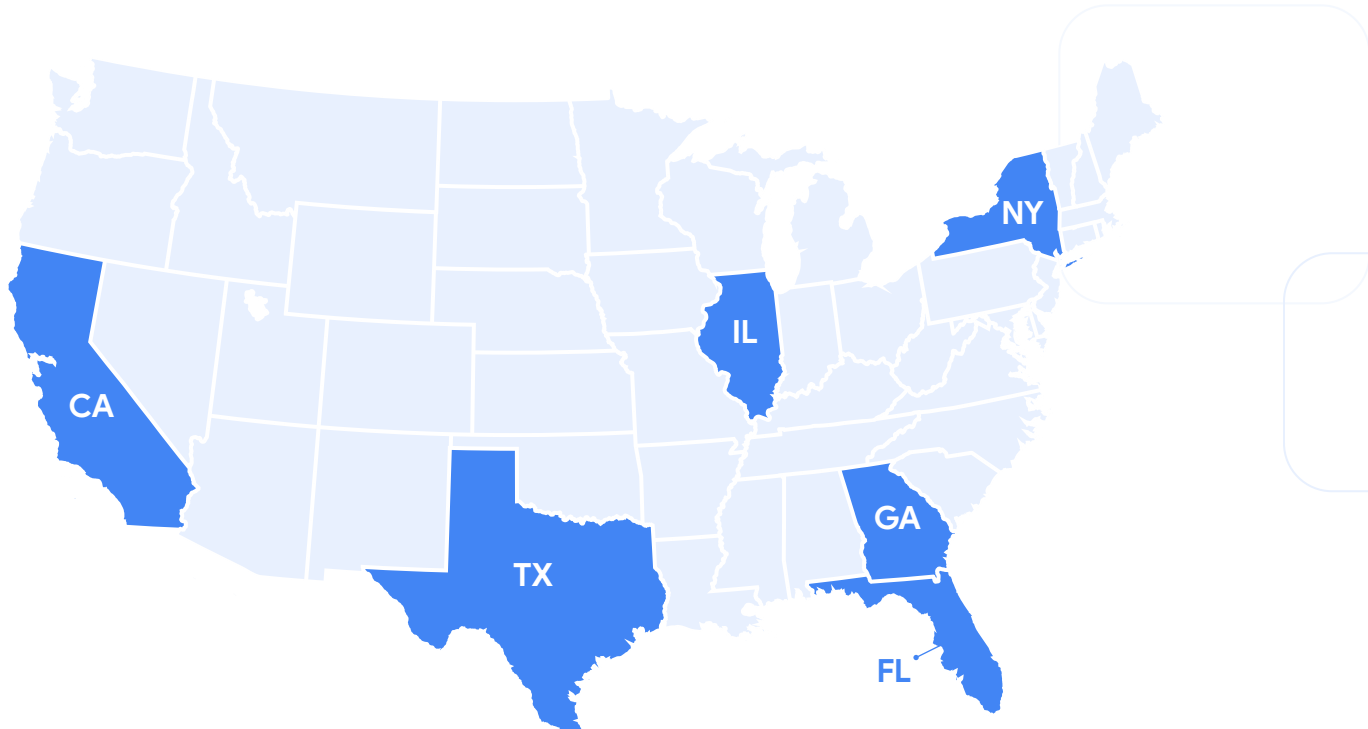
To better understand whether those findings reflected a broadly shared experience, **the research also included six state-level studies—California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, and Texas.** Each combined a large state survey with qualitative conversations to explore how teens across different parts of the country are experiencing a rapidly changing digital world.

Looking across the six state-level studies reveals a remarkably consistent story. Teens describe artificial intelligence as part of everyday learning,

distinguish between technology that assists and technology that replaces human effort, recognize the importance of verifying information, continue to rely on trusted adults as they gain independence, and imagine a future defined by both opportunity and responsibility.

Taken together, the six state-level studies reinforce what the national survey reveals: while individual experiences and local contexts vary, the broader story remains remarkably consistent across the country.

Six State-Level Studies



Where State Variation Adds Texture

Looking more closely across the six state-level studies reveals that the national story is remarkably consistent—but not identical in every place.

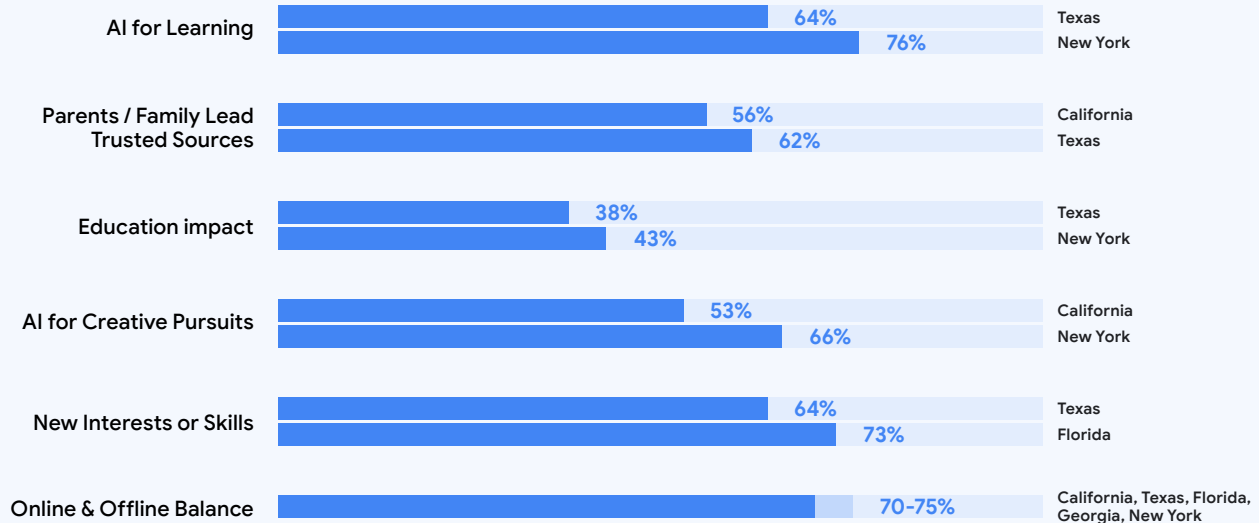
Some differences emerge in the intensity of AI use, access to digital-literacy instruction, and selected verification and safety practices. These differences add useful context, illustrating how local experiences and opportunities may shape aspects of teens' digital lives without fundamentally changing the broader patterns observed nationally.

For example, frequent AI use for learning and creative work varies in degree across the six states. Reported access to school-based digital-literacy instruction also differs, as do selected behaviors such as asking a trusted adult to help verify

information or telling an adult when something online feels uncomfortable. These findings point to differences in experience, access, and emphasis—not competing narratives about technology.

Taken together, the state-level studies suggest that the most important variations are differences of degree. Across states, teens continue to describe technology as a tool for learning, creativity, connection, and problem-solving while expressing many of the same hopes, concerns, and expectations for the future.

The Recurring Themes



02.

Race & Ethnicity in Focus

Discover, Evaluate, Verify

Across racial and ethnic groups, teens share far more than they differ. AI use is widespread, learning is a central purpose, and most teens describe at least some effort to evaluate the information they encounter online.

Where differences emerge, they are most visible in the intensity of engagement. Hispanic teens in this study report using AI more frequently for learning, creativity, and discovery than their White and Black peers. Black and Hispanic teens are also more likely than White teens to strongly agree that AI has helped them discover new interests or skills.

Teens who report more intensive engagement with digital tools also appear more likely to pay attention to information quality. Overall, 50% of teens say they always or often think about whether the information they encounter is trustworthy. That rises to 54% among Black teens and 63% among Hispanic teens, compared with 46% among White teens.

Similarly, Hispanic teens are more likely than teens nationally to report checking the credibility of a website or author and looking for possible bias. They are also more likely to say it is easy to identify trustworthy information.

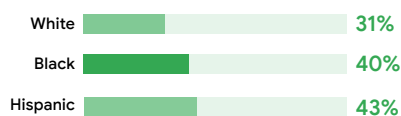
These findings complicate the assumption that greater technology use necessarily comes at the expense of critical thinking. In this research, greater engagement sometimes coincides with greater attention to trustworthiness and more active evaluation.

But this is not a story of mastery. While 93% of teens report engaging in at least one practice to verify information online, source and bias checks are far from universal, even among the highest-reporting subgroups. Confidence also does not necessarily indicate that a teen uses a comprehensive verification routine. Across every group, digital judgment remains a skill still being developed.

The shared opportunity is therefore not simply to increase access or use. It is to help teens move from familiarity with technology to sustained attention, thoughtful evaluation, and informed judgment.



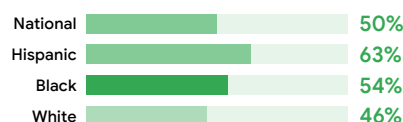
Discover



Black and Hispanic teens are more likely than White teens to strongly agree that AI has helped them discover new interests or skills.



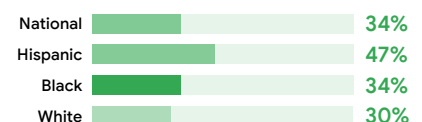
Evaluate



Overall, 50% of teens always or often think about whether information is trustworthy



Verify



34% nationally check for possible source bias

*Association, not causation; do not imply subgroup mastery.

03.

Methodology

Listening Nationally—and Looking More Closely in Six States

Understanding how teens are growing up with technology requires more than measuring how often they use particular tools.

It also requires listening to how they describe those experiences, the choices they make, and the different contexts in which those choices take shape.

This research combined three complementary approaches. A nationally representative survey established broad patterns among U.S. teens ages 13–17. Six state-level studies examined those patterns more closely in California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, and Texas. Focus-group conversations in those same six states added teens' language, reasoning, and lived experience to the quantitative findings.

Each part of the research serves a different purpose. The national survey provides the primary measure of what teens report across the country. The state-

level studies show where that shared story remains consistent and where experience or emphasis varies.

The qualitative research helps explain how teens understand the opportunities, challenges, tradeoffs, and responsibilities that accompany digital life.

Together, these approaches provide both breadth and depth: a national view of how teens are learning, creating, evaluating information, developing judgment, and imagining the future—and a closer look at how those experiences unfold in different communities and in teens' own words.

Quick Facts

1,003
n=
U.S. Teens
ages 13-17
nationally representative

6 **State-Level**
Studies
California, Florida, Georgia,
Illinois, New York, and Texas
~1,000 teens in each state

6 **Online Focus**
Groups
1 in each of the 6 study states
5 to 7 participants per group

- Fieldwork conducted April–June 2026.
- Statistical testing conducted for the national survey and each state survey.

Quantitative Research

The quantitative research was designed to provide both a national view of teens' experiences and a closer look at how those experiences appear across different parts of the country.

The study began with a nationally representative survey of 1,003 U.S. teens ages 13–17, conducted between April 23 and May 26, 2026. The survey explored how teens use technology and artificial intelligence in everyday life, including learning, creativity, information evaluation, digital safety, trusted guidance, and expectations for the future.

To deepen that national picture, the research also included six state-level studies in California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, and Texas. Each included a survey of approximately 1,000 teens ages 13–17,

allowing the research team to examine whether national patterns remained consistent across geographically, culturally, and demographically diverse states while identifying areas where experiences or priorities differed in meaningful ways.

Throughout the report, national findings provide the primary quantitative evidence. State-level findings are included selectively to show where the national story remains consistent and where variation adds useful context.

Listening to Teen Voices

Numbers tell us what teens report. Conversations help explain how they make sense of those experiences.

To complement the national survey and six state-level studies, the research included six virtual focus groups conducted in California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, and Texas. These conversations invited teens to describe their experiences in their own words—how technology fits into their daily lives, how they use artificial intelligence, where they seek guidance, how they evaluate information, and how they imagine the future.

These conversations add texture, depth, and perspective throughout the report. They help explain

the meaning behind the broader patterns observed in the survey, illuminating how teens reason through the opportunities, challenges, tradeoffs, and responsibilities that accompany digital life.

The focus groups were designed to deepen understanding rather than measure prevalence. Quotes and examples are used throughout the report to illuminate broader themes identified in the survey, not to suggest that a particular experience represents all teens or any individual state.

How to Read This Report

This report brings together multiple forms of evidence to provide a richer understanding of how today's teens are growing up with technology and artificial intelligence.

Throughout the report, national survey findings provide the primary evidence for understanding broad patterns among U.S. teens. The six state-level studies are used selectively to examine where those patterns remain consistent across diverse parts of the country and where meaningful variation adds context. Focus-group conversations deepen interpretation by revealing the reasoning, language, and lived experience behind the survey patterns.

The report also selectively examines age and other subgroup differences—including race/ethnicity

and gender—where they meaningfully deepen interpretation of the national findings. Rather than emphasizing isolated statistics, it focuses on patterns that appear consistently across multiple sources of evidence.

Taken together, these approaches provide a more complete picture than any single method could offer on its own.