

Safe AI for Kids

A Child-Centered Framework for AI Literacy, Digital Safety, and Responsible Participation in the Age of Generative AI

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From *USAKA - The Child of Internet Age* to SafeAIForKids: moving from digital-parenting awareness toward practical AI literacy, family safeguards, school readiness, and age-appropriate participation.

Scholarly integrity note: This paper is a conceptual policy and design framework. It does not claim clinical outcomes or experimentally validated effects. The international policy section distinguishes laws already in force from proposals, consultations, and emerging regulatory models.

Abstract

Children are entering an online environment shaped not only by social media, search engines, and games, but increasingly by generative artificial intelligence, conversational agents, synthetic media, algorithmic recommendations, and AI-enabled learning tools. At the same time, governments are reconsidering whether conventional age gates and platform self-regulation adequately protect minors. Australia now requires age-restricted social-media platforms to prevent under-16s from holding accounts, while several other countries are pursuing different combinations of age assurance, parental consent, platform duties, and youth-design protections. This paper proposes the Safe AI for Kids Framework (SAFK), a child-centered model that treats protection and participation as complementary rather than opposing goals. The framework connects five layers: age-appropriate access, AI literacy, privacy and identity protection, healthy digital design, and trusted adult and school support. It also positions entertainment and story-driven learning as practical delivery mechanisms for AI safety education. The paper draws a developmental line from the author's earlier book *USAKA - The Child of Internet Age: Balancing Career and Parenting Cybersmart Kids* to the SafeAIForKids initiative and its NovaVerse Adventures learning universe. The central argument is that the next generation of child online-safety policy should move beyond a binary choice between unrestricted access and blanket prohibition toward age-aware, rights-respecting, explainable, educational, and safety-by-design digital participation.

Keywords: child online safety; AI literacy; generative AI; social media age restrictions; digital parenting; age assurance; digital wellbeing; online privacy; SafeAIForKids; NovaVerse; youth AI safety

1. Introduction: The Child of the AI Age

The internet age changed childhood by placing information, entertainment, social interaction, and risk inside the same device. Generative AI intensifies that transformation. A child can now ask a system to explain homework, generate an image, imitate a voice, write a story, answer a personal question, or recommend what to watch next. The same capabilities that expand creativity and learning also create new questions about privacy, manipulation, misinformation, dependency, age-appropriate design, and the boundary between assistance and substitution.

The author's earlier book, *USAKA - The Child of Internet Age: Balancing Career and Parenting Cybersmart Kids*, framed digital parenting as an active responsibility rather than a passive reaction to technology. SafeAIForKids extends that premise into the AI era: children need more than restrictions; they need the skills to understand what AI is, what it can get wrong, what information should remain private, how algorithms influence attention, and when to ask a trusted adult for help.

This paper therefore asks a broader question than 'Should children use social media or AI?' It asks: What conditions make digital participation developmentally appropriate, safer, educational, and accountable?

2. From USAKA to SafeAIForKids

USAKA focused on the family challenge created by connected childhood: working parents must help children become cybersmart while balancing careers, time, trust, and supervision. That challenge has not disappeared. It has widened. Parents now face AI chatbots, synthetic media, deepfakes, personalized feeds, AI companions, automated recommendations, and schoolwork generated or assisted by models.

SafeAIForKids is designed as a practical response to this expanded environment. Its public mission is to help families understand AI, digital safety, and future skills, while its NovaVerse Adventures concept uses story-driven entertainment to teach AI literacy, STEM, digital safety, friendship, creativity, problem-solving, and teamwork. The platform presents parent-oriented AI safety guidance, a family cyber-safety checklist, printable STEM activities, and planned school/homeschool resources.

SafeAIForKids element	Purpose in the framework
AI Safety Guide	Translate AI concepts, safe use, and boundaries into parent-friendly language.

SafeAIForKids element	Purpose in the framework
Family Cyber Safety Checklist	Turn privacy, password, device, and online-behavior expectations into household routines.
NovaVerse Adventures	Use characters and stories to make AI literacy and digital-safety concepts memorable for children.
Printable STEM Activities	Connect entertainment to hands-on learning and problem-solving.
School / Homeschool Resources	Extend family guidance into structured educational settings.

3. Why Social-Media Age Restrictions Matter to AI Safety

Social-media regulation is relevant to AI safety because the modern youth platform is increasingly algorithmic. Recommendation systems determine what children see; generative systems can create or transform what they consume; automated moderation decides what is removed; and age-assurance systems increasingly mediate access. The policy debate is therefore no longer only about 'social media.' It is about how automated systems shape childhood.

Australia provides the clearest example of an enacted national minimum-age regime. From 10 December 2025, age-restricted social-media platforms must take reasonable steps to prevent Australians under 16 from creating or keeping accounts. The Australian framework places the compliance obligation on platforms rather than on children or parents and focuses particularly on services with recommender systems, infinite scroll, feedback features, and time-limited features.

Other countries are moving in the same direction but are not all at the same legal stage. Norway announced in April 2026 that it planned to introduce legislation setting the social-media age threshold from the calendar year a child turns 16, with technology companies responsible for age verification at login. France has pursued an under-15 restriction, but its national legislative effort encountered constitutional obstacles; in September 2026 President Emmanuel Macron was urging an EU-wide under-15 approach. Across Europe, Asia, and the Americas, governments are also considering parental-consent, age-assurance, addictive-design, and platform-duty models.

Jurisdiction	Status as of Sep. 2026	Youth threshold / approach	SafeAIForKids lesson
Australia	In force	Under 16 accounts restricted on age-restricted social platforms	Platform accountability and age assurance can be combined with continued parental guidance
Norway	Government bill planned for 2026	Threshold tied to year child turns 16; platform age verification	Age verification is possible with careful verification and carefully defined exemptions.
France	National approach contested; EU-wide restriction advocated	Under-15 restriction advocated	Child-safety policy must also satisfy constitutional and rights-based scrutiny
European Union	Harmonized youth-access model under deliberative debate	Thresholds under discussion	Cross-border platforms create pressure for interoperable standards.
Other jurisdictions	Mixed enacted/proposed models	Parental consent, age assurance, design duties, and platform duties	No single feature is silver-bullet; policy should distinguish access, design, and platform duties

Important distinction: It would be inaccurate to describe every country in this table as having already 'banned social media for teenagers.' Australia has an operational national under-16 regime; several others are proposing, debating, or revising restrictions. This distinction matters for credible policy analysis.

4. The Safe AI for Kids Framework (SAFK)

SAFK is organized around five layers. The layers are designed to be usable by families, schools, product teams, and policymakers. They do not assume that safety is achieved only by blocking access. Instead, safety emerges from the interaction of age-appropriate participation, literacy, privacy, healthy design, and human support.

Layer	Core principle	Examples of implementation
1. Age-Appropriate Access	Access should reflect developmental readiness	Age assurance for children; age-appropriate content modes; graduated permissions; restricted high-risk features.

Layer	Core principle	Examples of implementation
2. AI Literacy	Children should understand that AI predicts/generates content based on data and is not infallible; synthetic-media awareness	Explainable AI that identifies source blocking, prompt literacy; synthetic-media awareness
3. Privacy & Identity	Children should disclose less, not more, to automated systems; PII; location caution; image/voice consent; minimal retention.	Noted systems; PII; location caution; image/voice consent; minimal retention.
4. Healthy Digital Design	Products should not rely on manipulative engagement patterns for endless use; explainable recommendations; wellbeing	Noted patterns for endless use; explainable recommendations; wellbeing
5. Trusted Human Support	AI should not displace parents, educators, counselors as regularizing parents/teacher guides; reporting; classroom norms.	Noted as regularizing parents/teacher guides; reporting; classroom norms.

5. AI Literacy Before AI Dependence

Children should be taught a simple but durable mental model: AI can be useful without being infallible. A model can generate confident errors, reproduce bias, miss context, and produce content that looks authoritative without being verified. AI literacy therefore includes knowing when to ask for evidence, when to compare sources, when to stop sharing information, and when a human decision-maker is required.

5.1 A Four-Question Child Check

Before trusting or sharing AI-generated content, a child can be taught to ask four questions: (1) Who or what created this? (2) How could I check it? (3) Is it asking me for private information or pressuring me? (4) Should I show a trusted adult? The goal is not to turn children into security analysts. It is to create repeatable habits that scale as technology changes.

6. Privacy, Identity, and Synthetic Media

Generative AI lowers the cost of producing convincing text, images, audio, and video. For children, this creates risks around impersonation, manipulated images, voice cloning, scams, harassment, and reputational harm. A child-centered approach should teach that faces, voices, school names, addresses, live locations, passwords, and private family information are not ordinary conversational data. Product teams should minimize collection, default to protective settings, and make deletion and reporting understandable.

7. Healthy Design and Algorithmic Influence

The Australian regulatory model explicitly focuses on recommender systems and engagement features such as infinite scroll, likes/upvotes, and disappearing stories. This is important because online safety is partly an interface-design problem. A child may understand that a platform is distracting and still struggle against a system optimized to maximize attention. Safety-by-design therefore requires examining not only content but the mechanics that determine frequency, urgency, social comparison, and persistence.

8. Parents: From Surveillance to Guided Participation

Parents need tools that are practical rather than alarmist. The objective is not continuous surveillance of every interaction. It is to establish clear household expectations: which tools are permitted, what information is private, how long devices are used, what to do when something feels wrong, and how to discuss mistakes without making children hide them. This philosophy connects directly to the parenting problem raised in USAKA and updates it for AI-mediated childhood.

9. Schools and Homeschools

Schools need an AI-safety curriculum that sits alongside digital citizenship and STEM. Students should learn how generative systems work at a conceptual level, how to attribute AI assistance, how to distinguish assistance from

academic substitution, how to verify outputs, and how to protect personal information. Teachers need classroom-ready activities rather than abstract policy alone. This is why SafeAIForKids positions printable missions, teacher packs, and story-linked STEM activities as part of its educational model.

10. Entertainment as a Safety Delivery Mechanism

Safety education often fails when it feels like a lecture. NovaVerse Adventures uses an entertainment-first model: recurring characters, missions, humor, exploration, and STEM challenges create a narrative context in which digital-safety lessons can be remembered. This does not replace formal instruction; it creates an additional pathway for learning. The SafeAIForKids site describes NovaVerse as a story universe featuring Nova, Luna, Pixel, and Byte and explicitly links the brand to AI literacy, digital safety, STEM, kindness, creativity, problem-solving, teamwork, and future skills.

11. A Practical Family AI Safety Protocol

A family protocol can translate principles into everyday behavior:

- Use age-appropriate services and respect applicable minimum-age requirements.
- Never give an AI system passwords, home addresses, live location, financial details, or unnecessary identifying information.
- Treat AI answers as suggestions that may require checking, especially for schoolwork, health, safety, money, or breaking news.
- Ask permission before uploading another person's face, voice, messages, or private material.
- Pause when a system pressures, frightens, flatters, or asks a child to keep a secret.
- Keep a trusted-adult escalation rule: uncomfortable, sexual, threatening, financial, or identity-related interactions are shown to an adult.
- Use technology to create, learn, and solve problems - not only to consume an endless feed.

12. Product Design Principles for Child-Facing AI

Principle	Design implication
Data minimization	Collect only what is necessary; avoid persistent child profiles unless essential and justified.
Explainability	Use child-readable explanations for why content or recommendations appear.
Protective defaults	Default minors into the safest reasonable settings rather than requiring opt-in protection.
Human escalation	Provide clear pathways to parents, educators, moderators, or safeguarding resources.
No manipulative engagement	Avoid dark patterns, coercive streaks, or attention loops designed around vulnerability.
Age-aware generation	Adapt content, language, and capabilities to developmental context.
Auditability	Maintain appropriate logs, moderation evidence, and governance for safety incidents.

13. Policy Recommendations

The international movement toward youth social-media restrictions demonstrates that governments increasingly view platform design as a child-safety issue. However, minimum-age laws alone cannot create AI literacy. A durable policy model should combine access rules with product duties, privacy safeguards, educational resources, research

transparency, and meaningful support for parents and schools.

- 1 Separate legal minimum-age questions from broader AI-literacy education; children need safety skills even before they are eligible for social-media accounts.
- 2 Require high-risk child-facing platforms to use proportionate age assurance while minimizing the privacy cost of verification.
- 3 Create stronger default protections for minors, including limits on manipulative recommender and engagement features.
- 4 Fund AI-literacy curricula for schools and parent education, not only enforcement mechanisms.
- 5 Require transparency about child-facing recommendation, moderation, and generative-AI features.
- 6 Preserve beneficial access to education, health support, communication, and creativity while targeting demonstrably risky features and contexts.
- 7 Include children, parents, educators, safety researchers, and technologists in policy design.

14. Limitations and Future Work

This paper is conceptual and policy-oriented. It does not measure child outcomes, establish clinical effects, or test the effectiveness of the SAFK framework. The international policy landscape is also changing quickly; legal status should be checked against current government sources before operational or legal decisions are made. Future work should evaluate age-appropriate AI-literacy lessons with educators and families, develop measurable learning objectives, study how children understand AI uncertainty and synthetic media, and test whether story-driven approaches improve retention of safety concepts. SafeAIForKids can also develop open classroom packs, parent checklists, and age-banded AI literacy modules that can be independently evaluated.

15. Conclusion

The central challenge of the AI age is not simply keeping children away from technology. It is helping them enter digital spaces with the judgment, safeguards, support, and rights needed to participate well. Australia's under-16 social-media regime and the policy debates unfolding in Norway, France, the European Union, and other jurisdictions show that societies are rethinking where responsibility should sit. Safe AI for Kids proposes that responsibility be shared: platforms must design responsibly, governments must set enforceable boundaries, schools must teach AI literacy, parents must guide participation, and children must be equipped with age-appropriate skills.

The path from *USAKA - The Child of Internet Age* to SafeAIForKids reflects the same enduring principle across two technological eras: children need adults and institutions to prepare them for the world they are actually entering. In the generative-AI era, that preparation must combine safety with literacy, creativity with boundaries, and innovation with trust.

Protect children. Teach judgment. Preserve curiosity.

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Author Note

Eugene Ezenwa Ebem is a technology practitioner, author, and builder working across data engineering, artificial intelligence, digital safety, and applied technology. He is the author of *USAKA - The Child of Internet Age: Balancing Career and Parenting Cybersmart Kids* and the builder behind SafeAIForKids, a family- and education-oriented initiative focused on AI literacy, digital safety, STEM, and future skills. This paper is an independent technical and policy preprint.