

The FOSI Guide to ChatGPT

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What is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT is a conversational artificial intelligence tool from OpenAI that answers questions, explains topics, and helps with tasks like brainstorming, writing, coding, language practice, and studying—all through simple, human-like chatbot responses.

According to the [Pew Research Center](#), in 2024, about 1 in 4 U.S. teens (26%) used ChatGPT for schoolwork, which is double 2023's 13%. Nearly 8 in 10 (79%) have heard of it. Use is higher among Black and Hispanic teens (31% each) than White teens (22%), and among 11th–12th graders (31%) compared with 7th–8th graders (20%). Teens were most comfortable using it to research new topics (54%), but far fewer are comfortable using it to solve math (29%) or write essays (18%).

ChatGPT launched publicly on November 30, 2022 and quickly became the fastest-growing consumer app in history, reaching an estimated 100 million monthly users in two months. ChatGPT is free to use, with optional paid plans. The platform offers several modes: the default chat for everyday Q&A; the recently launched Study Mode for guided, step-by-step help that asks questions instead of giving answers; Temporary Chat when you don't want a conversation saved or used to improve the AI; plus optional tools like voice (talk and listen), web search (for up-to-date info with links), file & image help (analyze PDFs, charts, screenshots), and custom GPTs tuned for tasks like vocab or coding.



ChatGPT

ChatGPT's Parental Controls

ChatGPT does not currently offer parental control features within the site or app specifically for caregivers to use, but there are still guardrails you can set up to ensure the safest experience for your child.

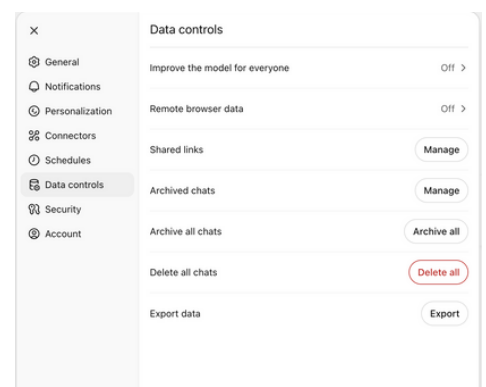
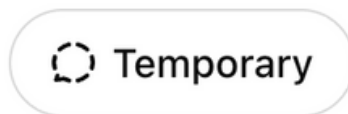
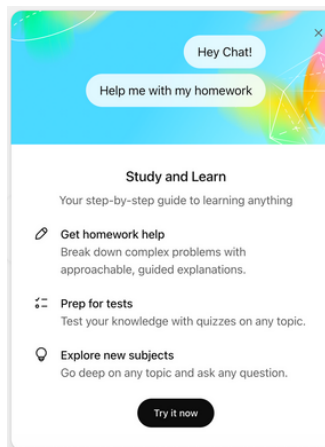
OpenAI states ChatGPT is not meant for children under 13. Ages 13–17 require parental consent. If ChatGPT is used in an educational context with children under 13, the adult must conduct the interaction (i.e., kids shouldn't type directly). For teens, set expectations up front: what it's for (learning support) and what it's not for (plagiarizing work).

Within ChatGPT's settings, you have several privacy and data controls available to you. Within the app, if you go to Settings, then Data Controls, and switch off "Improve the model for everyone", you can disable ChatGPT from using your new conversations to train its models.

For extra privacy, you can enable **Temporary Chat**. Temporary Chats are not used to train models, don't save to history, and are deleted from OpenAI systems after ~30 days (retained briefly for safety/abuse monitoring), making these great defaults for kids to use.

Outside of ChatGPT's site and app, parents can also enable controls at a device level by pairing in-app data controls with device settings. For example, on Apple devices, Screen Time lets you set app limits, downtime, and Content & Privacy Restrictions for your child's device. On Android/Chromebook, Google Family Link lets you approve installs, set daily and app-specific limits, manage permissions, and set schedules.

As with any platform or device controls, these are not 100% foolproof. Talk to your kids about AI early and often. Sit with your child during first uses, try **Study Mode** together, and model habits like asking for sources and double-checking facts. Pair these conversations with your family's device rules so AI becomes a study aid, not a shortcut.



How do kids use ChatGPT?

- **Researching/explaining new topics.** Many teens turn to ChatGPT to break down complex ideas, compare theories, or simplify confusing material before heading into class discussions. It's often used like a study buddy to check understanding, preview new material, or get a second explanation when textbooks or notes don't feel clear.
- **Brainstorming.** From science fair experiments to club proposals, kids use ChatGPT to spark possibilities and organize next steps. The tool is frequently used to map out possibilities, organize first steps, or develop alternative approaches that might not come to mind immediately. Surveys also show younger people lean on AI for idea generation more than older adults.
- **Writing help.** Rather than replacing essays, kids often use ChatGPT to experiment with outlines, draft possible openings, or polish feedback. The tool can be used to test out different styles of writing, overcome writers' block, and more. The focus is on support at the start, not substitution at the end.
- **Math and coding help.** Kids use ChatGPT to walk through equations or code step by step, generate examples, and identify where their logic breaks down. Study Mode enhances this coached approach by prompting kids to show their work before revealing an answer. Learners sometimes use it to spot patterns across problems or to see alternate methods for solving the same equation or debugging the same function.
- **Language practice & translation.** Learners use ChatGPT to rehearse vocabulary, simplify dense readings, translate passages, or even practice speaking through the voice tool. With privacy controls on and adult guidance, it's especially helpful for multilingual learners and students with disabilities.

What are the benefits of ChatGPT?

When used thoughtfully, ChatGPT supports learning in many ways. Here are some of the top benefits:

- **On-demand, step-by-step help.** Instead of copy-and-paste answers, kids can use ChatGPT to ask clarifying questions, get hints, and walk through problems. The new **Study Mode** leans into a Socratic, question-driven approach that nudges students to explain their thinking before seeing solutions.
- **Brainstorming and writing support.** Students can use AI to spark ideas, build outlines, or get revision feedback early in the writing process. Teens themselves say they're far more comfortable using ChatGPT to research or generate ideas than to write essays, aligning with how educators recommend using AI as a partner to supplement—not replace—student effort.
- **Practice and study drills.** ChatGPT can generate quizzes, flashcards, and targeted explanations to help students check understanding or prepare for exams, making it useful for both spaced practice and last-minute refreshers. The U.S. Department of Education notes that AI can support practice like this when paired with adult guidance.
- **Language and accessibility support.** Kids can request plain-language rewrites, translations, summaries, or adjustments to reading level. For multilingual learners or students with disabilities, this can make learning more inclusive and accessible.
- **Personalization and engagement.** Used carefully, AI can adapt explanations and practice to a student's needs and pace, helping some learners stay motivated and on track. With transparency and privacy prioritized, personalization can be a real strength of AI in education.

What should parents look out for as their teens explore and use ChatGPT?

- **Inaccuracy/"hallucinations".** AI can sound sure of itself and still get things wrong, or even make up a source entirely. Think of ChatGPT as a study helper, not the final answer key, and have your child double-check with their textbook, class notes, or a trusted website. Bottom line: every AI needs a human fact-check.
- **Academic integrity risks.** With teacher permission, tools like ChatGPT can be helpful for brainstorming or outlining, but passing off AI-generated work as your own violates most school policies. Students should always follow their school's rules and cite AI assistance when required. It's also important to know that so-called "**AI detectors**" are not reliable—OpenAI itself notes that no tool can consistently tell human writing from AI. That's why educators and families should focus on clear expectations, guidance, and open conversations about when and how AI use is appropriate.
- **Privacy and data use.** Coach kids to keep personal details out of prompts, meaning no full names, school info, contact details, or health information. In ChatGPT, you can reduce data sharing by turning off model training in **Data Controls**, using **Temporary Chat** (so conversations aren't saved or used to improve the model), and reviewing or disabling **Memory** to clear stored facts. Pair these settings with device-level safeguards for extra protection.
- **Age-appropriate use and supervision.** ChatGPT is designed for ages 13+, and teens 13–17 should have a parent or guardian's permission. For younger children in learning settings, an adult should lead the interaction (asking the questions, typing the prompts, guiding the conversation, etc.). Plan to sit alongside your child for early uses, agree on what's OK and what's not, and review your child's class or school policies so expectations are clear.
- **Bias & harmful content.** Even with safeguards, ChatGPT (like any AI) can reflect built-in biases and occasionally generate content that's inappropriate, misleading, or unfair. Keep a human in the loop: teach your child to slow down, double-check claims with trusted sources, and ask a trusted adult for help if something feels off.



Want to learn more about ChatGPT?

The best way to understand how your child uses ChatGPT is to explore it together. Ask your child to show you their prompts, how they verify answers, and what they find helpful. Keep the conversation going—talk about when it is okay to use AI versus when it is not.

Remember to have frequent, open conversations with your kid about their online world to ensure they feel safe and happy when they log on to ChatGPT and beyond.

To learn more about FOSI and our work promoting a culture of responsibility online and encouraging a sense of digital citizenship for all, be sure to check us out on our website at fosi.org.

