💬 Conversation Scripts

How to talk about AI without conflict or guilt

UNICEF Guidance 3.0 makes one thing clear: children learn best when adults talk **with** them, not **at** them. Rebecca Winthrop, Director of the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution, confirms this after speaking with hundreds of students, teachers, and parents worldwide: family AI literacy is one of the most powerful — and most overlooked — levers we have.

One evening, one of my daughters said: "You don't understand anything about AI." I almost snapped. Instead I said: "You're right — I'm not the expert. But I know when something is replacing learning instead of supporting it." She listened.

These scripts won't eliminate every conflict. But they give you the **words** to guide, not just forbid.

Why these conversations really matter

Brookings Institution research (2026) reveals a silent crisis: 50% of teachers say they no longer trust that the work their students hand in is actually their own. And 50% of students say they no longer trust their teachers. Two generations looking at each other with suspicion — in a relationship built on trust.

The family is the first space where that trust can be built — or lost. Every script below has the same goal: keep the conversation open, before mistrust takes hold.

Source: Winthrop, R. — "A New Direction for Students in an AI World", Brookings Institution, 2026

🎯 How to Use These Scripts

These aren't meant to be read word-for-word like a robot. They're frameworks showing you WHAT to address and HOW to balance authority with dialogue.

💡 *Remember: Your tone matters as much as your words. Stay calm, curious, and firm.*

1. Your child uses ChatGPT for homework (you find out)

❌ **AVOID:**

"You cheated! I'm taking everything away!"

✅ **TRY:**

"I see you're using ChatGPT. Tell me: what did you ask it? Did it help you **UNDERSTAND** or **DO** the homework?"

💡 *Why this works:*

You open a conversation instead of accusing. Your child explains their use → you understand better → you adjust the rule together.

Note: according to the Brookings Institution (2026), when children delegate their thinking to AI rather than using it as support, the risk isn't merely "skipping steps" — it's never developing critical thinking skills in the first place. That's exactly what the first question ("UNDERSTAND or DO?") is designed to surface.

2. Your child asks permission to use AI

❌ **AVOID:**

"No, figure it out on your own."

✅ **TRY:**

"Good question! What exactly for? If it's to check spelling or explain a concept, OK. If it's to do the homework for you, no. Want to check together?"

💡 *Why   this   works:*
You   validate   asking   first.
You   set   limits   without   judgment.
You   offer   support.

3. The teacher punished your child for AI use (they feel it's unfair)

❌ **AVOID:**

"That's ridiculous, the teacher doesn't understand anything!"

✅ **TRY:**

"I understand why that feels unfair. Explain how you used AI. Did you mention it in your homework? Did the teacher give clear instructions?"

💡 *Why   this   works:*
*You   listen   **before**   taking   sides.*
You   help   analyze   the   situation.
You   can   then   contact   the   teacher   with   facts.

4. Your child says: "Everyone uses ChatGPT except me"

❌ **AVOID:**

"If everyone jumped off a bridge…"

✅ **TRY:**

"You *can* use ChatGPT too — but as a tool, not a crutch. The difference? Others copy-paste. **You learn.** In five years, who do you think will have the skills?"

💡 *Why this works:*

You allow AI use (they feel heard) — but with the right method. You project long-term benefits.

Note: according to UNICRI (2025), outright bans are often ineffective for children aged 13 and up — they make the tool more tempting and push children toward secret use. The Brookings Institution (2026) adds something striking: what students fear most isn't losing their jobs to AI — it's losing their ability to think independently. That fear is a lever. Use it.

5. Conflict about transparency

(*"Why do I have to tell the teacher I used AI?"*)
❌ **AVOID:**

"Because I said so!"

✅ **TRY:**

"Imagine you borrow a book to write a presentation. You cite the book, right? AI is the same. If you hide it, it becomes cheating — even if the use was OK. Transparency protects you."

💡 **Why this works:**

Simple, clear analogy. You explain that hiding things makes the situation worse.

Foundation: UNICEF Guidance 3.0 (2025) explicitly identifies academic integrity — including transparency about AI use — as a core component of AI literacy. The Brookings Institution (2026) adds: the trust crisis between students and teachers feeds directly on mutual secrecy around AI. Transparency isn't an arbitrary rule. It's what keeps the learning relationship intact.

6. Your child uses AI late at night (homework due tomorrow)

❌ **AVOID:**

"This is your fault, you left it until the last minute!"

✅ **TRY:**

"OK, tonight we'll use AI to help you finish. **But** tomorrow, we talk about how to organize better so this doesn't happen again."

💡 **Why this works:**

You handle the emergency (pragmatic),
then address the root cause (educational).
No moral lecture during a crisis.

7. The school has no clear AI rules

❌ **AVOID:**

"The school doesn't care — do whatever you want."

✅ **TRY:**

"Since the school doesn't have clear rules yet, we follow our family AI charter. If a teacher gives specific instructions, those come first. If in doubt, ask the teacher **before** using AI."

💡 **Why this works:**

You provide structure while waiting for the school.
You build responsibility.

8. Your child says: "AI is wrong all the time, it's useless"

❌ **AVOID:**

"Then stop using it."

✅ **TRY:**

"Exactly! That's why we always check. AI isn't a calculator, a calculator did your maths, not your essays, not your reasoning, not your judgment. AI pretends to do all of that. Your job is to stay in the driver's seat."

💡 **Why this works:**

You validate their observation. You teach critical thinking.

Technical precision: according to the Oxford AI Programme (Saïd Business School), language models produce statistical outputs by design — they predict the most probable word, not the most accurate one. The error isn't a fixable bug. It's a structural feature.

And the calculator analogy doesn't hold. Rebecca Winthrop (Brookings, 2026) puts it plainly: "The calculator didn't do your English homework. It didn't create music. It didn't talk to you like a person." General-purpose AI does all of that. This is a difference in kind, not degree.

🔑 5 Key Sentences to Keep in Mind

To defuse tension:

1. "I'm not against AI. I'm for you really learning."
2. "Explain to me **how** you used AI" (not "Why did you cheat?")
3. "We adjust the rules together if something doesn't work."

4. "If you can't explain your answer, you haven't learned it."
5. "Transparency protects you. Hiding things makes it worse."

🗣️ What to Say at 8 vs 14 vs 17

Words matter.

Scenario 1: "Mom, can I use an AI tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude...) for my homework?"

Ages 6–10:
"Yes, but together. AI helps you understand, not do it for you. And first — tell me where you're at with this topic. What you already know is the foundation. AI is just a tool to go further."

Ages 11–14:

"It depends what for. If it's to understand a concept, yes. If it's to do the homework for you, no. Show me what you want to do."

Ages 15–18:

"You know the rules. Ask yourself the 3 questions before using any AI tool: Am I using AI to understand, or to avoid understanding? Could I explain this answer to my teacher? Have I disclosed my use of AI? And cite AI in your homework if you use it."

Scenario 2: "I copy-pasted an answer from an AI tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude...)."

Ages 6–10:

"I know it's tempting. But copying is like lying. Let's start again: ask AI to **explain**, then write it in your own words."

Ages 11–14:

"You know that's cheating. The problem is you don't learn anything. If you can't explain it, you didn't understand. Let's redo it together."

Ages 15–18:

"We've already talked about this. Consequence: you lose AI access for two weeks, and you redo the homework. That's non-negotiable."

Scenario 3: "All my friends use an AI tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude...)."

ALL AGES:

"I understand. But in this family, we have our own rules. AI isn't forbidden — it's supervised. Your friends can do what they want. You're learning to use it *smartly*."

💡 *Tip: Print this page and keep it nearby. In the middle of a conflict, having the right words changes everything.*