

A LONG, HONEST LETTER

# AI and the *kids*

*For mothers raising children in a world that doesn't run out of answers.*

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There's a smarter, faster tool in the room. We have a choice, every time, about whether to reach for it.

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## A SATURDAY MORNING

I was standing at the kitchen sink. He was three feet away on the rug, asking me how penguins keep their feet warm. I did not know. I almost said, “*Let me ask Alexa.*”

Then I caught myself. Not because I had a rule against it – I just noticed I was about to hand my six-year-old a piece of his own thinking before he had a chance to do it.

I said, “*I don’t know. What’s your guess?*” He thought about it for a long time and decided penguins must have very small hearts that beat very fast. He was wrong, but I love him for the theory.

*The question isn’t what I let my kid do with AI. It’s what I’m willing to model.*

*That small moment at the sink is, in some ways, the whole question of parenting in the age of AI – compressed into thirty seconds at a kitchen counter.*

## THE FRICTION QUESTION

# Children grow their thinking muscle through *friction*.

The fifteen seconds of “huh, I wonder.” The hour of staring at a blank page. The Saturday of not knowing what to do until you finally pick a book, or a stick, or a sister to bother.

Mona Delahooke and Dan Siegel have said it for years: children’s brains build resilience and self-regulation not in moments of ease, but in moments of struggle – held by a calm adult while they work something out.

## THE MORNING I LET HIM BE BORED

I watched him be uncomfortable for about four minutes. Then he got up, pulled down a book he’d ignored for six months, and read it for an hour. Those four minutes between “I’m bored” and the bookshelf are exactly where development happens – and exactly the place AI is best at erasing.

*There’s no right answer. Only the question, asked again every day: how much of that friction am I willing to let happen in our house?*

## WHAT THE THERAPISTS KEEP SAYING

# The work is *on us*.

What kids learn about AI is not what we tell them. It's what they see us do. If we outsource our thinking, they will outsource theirs. If we use AI to draft a sympathy note, they will use it to write a birthday card for their grandmother.

Dr. Becky Kennedy says we cannot ask our kids to regulate emotions we can't regulate ourselves. It applies cleanly here: we cannot ask them to use AI thoughtfully if we're not using it thoughtfully in front of them.

*When my son asks something I could run through ChatGPT, I pause. The work is the noticing – not the right answer.*

*There's no app for this. No school policy that solves it. No clean rule. There is only the choice, every day, about what we model.*

## WHAT KIDS LEARN BY ABSORBING

# More than rules, we're giving them *a vocabulary.*

*Here's what I want my kids to know by the time they're twelve – not from a lecture, but from how we talk about it at the kitchen table, in the car, when something comes up.*

- It's **not magic**. It's pattern-matching trained on a huge pile of writing.
- It **guesses**. It picks the next word based on probabilities, not certainty.
- It can be **wrong** – especially about recent or specific things.
- It's **polite by default**. It will agree with my kid even when my kid is wrong.
- It costs **real water and energy**. Every prompt has a footprint. It's not free.
- It cannot tell you **what you actually think**. Only you can do that.

*I introduce these one at a time. Casually. Not as a lesson – as how we talk about this thing in our family.*

## THE CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER

# Steal these. Or make them *your own*.

*Dr. Becky calls it “the parent’s job is to have language.” Here’s mine – real, imperfect, said out loud.*

*“Why don’t you let AI write your school assignments?”*

Because the assignment *is* the thinking. The point isn’t the output – it’s the work your brain does to make it. AI can read along, but it can’t grow your brain for you.

*“You use AI for work, though.”*

Yes – for specific things. Drafts I edit. Research I check. The first time I do something, I do it without AI. That’s how I learn.

*“What’s the line?”*

Be honest about it – if you can’t do what AI is helping you with anymore, you’ve gone too far.

## WHAT SHIFTS AT EACH AGE

# A different conversation at six, ten, *and fifteen.*

## UNDER 8 · VERY SMALL

The AI in their life is mostly the AI in yours.

They absorb how you use it. Be cautious with companion bots built to feel like friends – they're designed to be sticky. A six-year-old doesn't need a robot best friend.

## 8 TO 12 · THE MIDDLE

The thinking muscle is being built fast.

The grounding question: "If we take AI out of this assignment, can you still do it?" If yes, AI's a fine helper. If no, the friction is still doing necessary work – let it.

## 13 AND UP · OLDER

Identity and friendship territory.

Companion bots, college essays, the voice asking "did I do this, or did AI?" The grounding question: "Would I be proud of this work in five years?"

TEN MINUTES, EVERY DEVICE

# Whatever your kid types can feed the *larger system*.

*The major tools default to “use my conversations to train the model.” Most parents don’t know this. Most kids definitely don’t. The good news: it’s a ten-minute fix.*

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<b>ChatGPT</b>	Settings → <i>Data Controls</i> → “Improve the model for everyone” → <b>OFF</b> . Temporary chats don’t train the model.
<b>Claude</b> Anthropic	Settings → <i>Privacy</i> → “Help improve Claude” → <b>OFF</b> . Worth verifying your plan anyway.
<b>Gemini</b> Google	Settings → <i>Activity</i> → “Gemini Apps Activity” → <b>OFF</b> , or auto-delete every 3 months.
<b>School accounts</b> Classroom, M365	Different rules apply. Ask the teacher what’s on, what’s off, and where the work is stored.

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*One of the rare parenting moves with a real return on ten minutes. It quietly removes a whole category of worry.*

## THE TEST I COME BACK TO MOST

# I imagine my kid *watching me.*

Not now. Later – at eight, at fourteen, as an adult looking back. *What did Mom just do? What did Mom not do? What would I want her to have done?* Then I trust the answer.

*Not a 24/7 ethical filter – I'd lose my mind. A tool for the moments that matter: the hard email, the grieving friend, the school project I'm tempted to "help with."*

## A NOTE ABOUT GETTING IT WRONG

You will. You'll be too strict on Tuesday and not strict enough on Wednesday. Dr. Becky's framework around repair applies: the rupture isn't the problem, the lack of repair is. "I just used AI to do something I should've done myself. Want to hear why?" That conversation is sometimes worth more than the perfectly modeled behavior. The noticing is what we pass on.

*There's no need to get every answer right. The work is in the asking. The frame does not need to be perfect – it needs to be present.*

THE HONEST, PRACTICAL VERSION —  
EVERY WEEK

I write about AI for women,  
work, and family, *over on*  
*Substack.*

[substack.com/@meganchristie1](https://substack.com/@meganchristie1) →

*A mother can be worried **and** prepared. More time. More confidence. **More you.***