# Experts warn of AI misuse risks for children despite existing safeguards



Concerns about the misuse of artificial intelligence (AI) technology in exploitative and harmful ways have been voiced by experts, highlighting the potential dangers that AI can pose to children and teenagers when used maliciously. Speaking to Computerworld, cybersecurity expert Barnhart underscored the disturbing reality that AI, despite having some safeguards or "guardrails," can nevertheless be manipulated to create illegal and harmful content.

Barnhart explained, “Yes, AI has guardrails. However, it’s open source and can be taught how to create child sexual abuse material (CSAM). AI can also be used in the art of sex extortion.” She further detailed how children and teenagers are at risk of financial exploitation through AI-generated images. In these cases, perpetrators create fabricated images of minors and use these images to demand ransoms, instilling fear in victims which may lead them to comply with extortion demands or, in more tragic instances, harm themselves.

The expert emphasised the importance of proactive communication between adults and children regarding the potential threats associated with AI technology. “Parents and teachers should talk to children about AI early and often, and those conversations should be age-appropriate and based on a child’s maturity,” Barnhart advised. She noted that educating children to recognise suspicious behaviour both online and offline plays a critical role in ensuring their safety. This education is just as vital as teaching children about physical safety.

Highlighting the realities of modern technology use, Barnhart pointed out that providing children with digital devices inherently exposes them to risks, often from individuals who disguise themselves as peers or friends. She concluded, “Bottom line, we can’t fear technology. We cannot keep our children from technology. We need to learn how to communicate with them about online safety so that their world is not impacted when a threat comes their way. The more you talk to your kids and the more open you are to what they are doing and living — and what they are looking at online — the safer your family will be.”

The Computerworld report adds a significant perspective on the intersection of AI technology and online safety, particularly concerning young and vulnerable users, urging a balanced approach of awareness and communication without refraining from engagement with digital tools.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ncmec.org/theissues/generative-ai> - This page from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children discusses the risks of generative AI, including the creation of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and the use of AI for sextortion, aligning with concerns about AI's potential misuse as highlighted by cybersecurity expert Barnhart.
2. <https://www.weprotect.org/thematic/artificial-intelligence-and-gen-ai/> - The WeProtect Global Alliance's article details how offenders use generative AI to exploit children, create CSAM, and engage in sextortion, supporting the article's emphasis on proactive communication between adults and children regarding AI-related threats.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/nov/24/ai-increasingly-used-for-sextortion-scams-and-child-abuse-says-senior-uk-police-chief> - This Guardian article reports on the increasing use of AI for sextortion and child abuse, highlighting the need for proactive communication between adults and children about online safety, as emphasized by cybersecurity expert Barnhart.
4. <https://www.ncmec.org/theissues/generative-ai> - The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's page on generative AI discusses the creation of CSAM and the use of AI for sextortion, underscoring the importance of proactive communication between adults and children about online safety.
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