AGES 6 THROUGH 18 · NO LECTURE REQUIRED

KITCHEN-TABLE SCRIPTS

What to say when your kid says "but ChatGPT said..."

I'll go first. One exhausted night, I let an app tell my son Rohan his bedtime story. It was smooth and perfectly structured, and he loved it. The next morning he asked if "the robot" could tell it again.

Not long after, my eight-year-old daughter told me, with real awe, *"Mommy, it knows everything."*

When I was a kid there was a gap between the question and the answer. I filled it with the encyclopedia, or a parent, or my own guessing. **Inside that gap is where we learn to wonder.** Our kids are growing up with the gap closed.

These scripts are how we open it back up, one dinner at a time.

— Erica

CURIOUS, NOT FURIOUS

When a kid quotes AI, they're not being defiant. They're showing you what they trust. Start there.

ASK, DON'T LECTURE

One good question beats ten minutes of warnings. Let them do the thinking. That's the whole point.

GO FIRST

Say your own guess out loud, get it wrong and laugh about it. Kids copy what we do, not what we say.

FOUR QUESTIONS BEHIND EVERY SCRIPT

R
REFLECT
"What did *you* think before you asked?"

I
INTERROGATE
"How could we find out if it's wrong?"

D
DISCERN
"Does that sound like a real person, or a robot being polite?"

A
BE ACCOUNTABLE
"If it's wrong, whose name is on it?"

6–10
THE WONDER YEARS

Your job here isn't to know the answer. It's to keep the wondering alive a little longer before anyone reaches for a screen.

THEY SAY
"Can we just ask the robot when the dinosaurs died?"

TRY *"We can! But first, what's your guess? Picture a rock as big as a mountain falling from the sky. What do you think happened next?"*

Why it works: it opens the gap between question and answer. The answer can wait five minutes. Their imagination can't be rushed.

THEY SAY
"Can the robot tell my bedtime story tonight?"

TRY *"Let's make one up together. You pick a character, I'll pick a place, and we take turns, one sentence each."*

Why it works: the story was never really the point. The point was the two of you making it up. (Our best one so far is a ninja named Scoop who turned into a pirate for no reason.)

THEY SAY
"It knows everything."

TRY *"It knows a lot of words. But it's never smelled cookies baking or had a best friend. What do you know that it doesn't?"*

Why it works: it gently corrects "the machine's answer is the right answer" and reminds them they know things too.

THEY SAY
"The robot says I'm wrong."

TRY *"Maybe! Computers make mistakes too. They just sound really sure about them. How could we check?"*

Why it works: it teaches early that sounding confident and being right are two different things.

THEY SAY
"I'm bored. Can AI tell us what to play?"

TRY *"I can't wait to see what you figure out."*

Why it works: then walk away. Boredom is where creativity comes from. Let them sit in it until they invent a game.

PLAY: SPOT THE ROBOT

Read two short paragraphs out loud at dinner. One is from a real person, one is from AI. Everyone guesses. **Robot clues:** super polite, perfectly neat, words like "vibrant" and "delve." **Human clues:** real feelings, strong opinions, "I'm not sure, but…"

READ: THE STRUGGLE SHELF

Pick stories where the hero fails and nothing is solved by magic: *The Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires and *Beautiful Oops!* by Barney Saltzberg. Stop in the middle and ask: **"What if a robot flew in and fixed it?"**

11–14
THE WHY YEARS

They're old enough to argue and that's great. Give them better questions to argue with, and let them see you change your mind.

THEY SAY
"ChatGPT said it, so it's true."

TRY *"Sounding sure isn't the same as being right. What would have to be true for that answer to be wrong? Let's find one other source and see if they agree."*

Why it works: AI is a fluency machine, and we're wired to trust things that sound smooth. This turns them from a passenger into a detective.

THEY SAY
"Everyone uses AI for homework."

TRY *"Maybe. In our house, you show me your thinking first: your own outline or your first messy paragraph. Then we can talk about the tool."*

Why it works: it's the Calculator Rule. We don't give first graders calculators. Build the muscle first, then the tool makes you faster instead of weaker.

THEY SAY
"Why do I have to learn this if AI can do it?"

TRY *"Because if you never step off the scooter, your legs never get strong. I'm not banning the tool. I want you to have the muscle."*

Why it works: it's honest and it isn't anti-tech. AI is a scooter we adults learned to ride after we learned to walk.

THEY SAY
"I asked AI what to text my friend after our fight."

TRY *"What does it feel like right now? And what do you actually want her to know?"*

Why it works: don't rush to fix it. Letting them stay with a friendship that's unsettled for a while is how they learn to handle not knowing.

THEY SAY
"AI planned our club meeting. It's way better."

TRY *"Better organized, sure. But was it as fun? What would you all have come up with?"*

Why it works: a friend's son put it best after his school counselor had AI name their food drive: *"It wasn't as fun."* Arguing, compromising and dreaming it up together *is* the point.

SWAP ONE DINNER QUESTION

Instead of ~~"What was fun today?"~~ ask "What was hard today?"

A problem you haven't solved yet isn't a failure. It's a project.

READ: THE STRUGGLE SHELF

Hatchet by Gary Paulsen (survival by grit) and *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. Talk about the middle of the book, when the hero is stuck: **"What would happen if a robot just saved them?"**

15–18

THE REAL-STAKES YEARS

Teens will use AI. The question is whether they ride the scooter or it rides them. Talk to them like the near-adults they are.

THEY SAY

"Isn't the point to get the answer?"

TRY *"The essay isn't the point. The thinking you build while writing it is. If you can't explain it without the screen, it isn't yours yet."*

Why it works: a sophomore once said exactly this to his teacher after turning in an AI essay. That's the False Win: you get the result and miss the learning. Writing *is* thinking.

THEY SAY

"AI made my college essay sound way better."

TRY *"Where's the sentence that only you could have written? Put that back in, even if it's a little messy."*

Why it works: a college admissions expert who worked at Yale told me polished AI essays are "completely dead… like reading a press release." Admissions officers are looking for the messy, specific parts.

THEY SAY

"It's still my work. AI just helped."

TRY *"Then say so. 'AI helped with research. The analysis is mine.' Owning it out loud builds trust."*

Why it works: being honest about AI is a skill they'll need at their first job. It moves the conversation from hiding to owning it.

THEY SAY

"When I'm stressed I just ask AI and it calms me down."

TRY *"I'm glad something helps. I've noticed you sometimes ask the same thing more than once. Want to talk it through with me, or a friend? People can push back in a way a bot won't."*

Why it works: a bot is endlessly agreeable, and reassurance on repeat can become a crutch. Real friends offer healthy friction. If the worry feels big or constant, bring in a counselor or doctor.

THEY SAY

"You use AI all the time, Mom."

TRY *"You're right. I'm working on it too. Want to hold me to the same rules?"*

Why it works: I still feel the pull to reach for my phone at bedtime. Saying that out loud gives them permission to struggle, and to hold you accountable.

TEACH THE OPPOSITE ANSWER

Every time they ask AI for an answer, have them ask for the opposite too: **"Give me three reasons this plan is terrible."** Then decide together which reasons are fair.

THE NAKED DRAFT

For anything that matters, write the first version by hand or in a blank doc for 15 minutes before opening AI. **If you can't write it, you don't know it.**

FOR THE FRIDGE

FIVE LINES THAT WORK AT ANY AGE

Can't remember the scripts in the moment? You only need these.

1	***"What's your guess first?"*** Reflect: thinking comes before looking it up.
2	***"How could we find out if it's wrong?"*** Interrogate: sounding sure isn't the same as being right.
3	***"Does that sound like a real person?"*** Discern: perfect and smooth often means fake. Specific and messy usually means real.
4	***"Show me your thinking before the tool."*** Be Accountable: do it by hand first, then use AI.
5	***"I can't wait to see what you figure out."*** Then step back and let them struggle a little.

TAKE THE PLEDGE

Join the families who think together. Sign the pledge and get the Family AI Agreement and the 30-Day Think-for-Yourself Challenge at **momsagainstaiaddiction.org**