

Navigating the Digital Jungle

Where tech meets family life

SEASON 3

EP 01: Chatbots and Children: What Every Parent Needs to Know

Sue: Navigating the Digital Jungle with Sue Atkins and Friends, where we help families find their way in the ever-evolving landscape of technology. I'm Sue Atkins, author and broadcaster, and I'm here to help you as your guide on this journey. And I'm joined today by Andrew Briercliffe, an online safety expert and Kat Cauchi, host of Her Tech Life podcast.

Today's episode is all about the role of AI chatbots and conversational AI in our children's lives. So, from virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa to AI tutors and chatbots, we'll discuss the ways these technologies are shaping kids learning, social interactions and even their safety. So, let's explore what every parent should know.

Our main focus today then is the impact of chatbots on children and understanding, especially AI based conversation assistants, how they are affecting children. I wrote a couple of articles about this recently, actually, that are on the blog on Navigating the Digital Jungle. Now, of course, kids are curious, they ask questions, and sometimes the quickest way to get an answer is through the digital assistant right in their pocket or on the home device.

But how does this influence their social skills, their critical thinking and their privacy? Because many AI powered educational chatbots are helpful to a certain extent, like personalised tutors. They're interactive and they provide learning opportunities anytime and anywhere, but they can't always distinguish between sensitive and routine questions, potentially leading to exposure to incorrect or inappropriate information. And of course, kids will put in all sorts of things. And I think the other thing to bear in mind is that it starts to blur their understanding of privacy, personal data. But who's really talking to them?

These are not real people. And we hear all sorts of things in adverts, even on the telly, with famous footballers suggesting you can ask them anything. Of course, curious kids can ask them all sorts of dodgy questions. So, we're here today to talk about that. What's your thoughts on that, Andy?

Andy: I mean, the first thing I think we should say is that there is a benefit to some of it. As we say, it's the world we live in, the simplicity, the laziness, you know, why? Spend ages on the phone when you can chat to a virtual assistant, as you say. So, there's an element of good there, but as you also say, there is an element of danger or awareness. And in fact, actually, I was laughing to myself then because I was speaking to a couple of companies yesterday and I had to speak to them via their virtual assistant.

Andy: And I got so frustrated. I could not get the answer I wanted at all. So there are problems. And a lot of it, as you say, is do these virtual assistants understand the actual context? It's very sort of; is this the answer you want? No, it's not. Well, how can I help you? Well, just answer my question.

Sue: Andy, what's the difference between a virtual assistant and a chatbot? Because I think parents listening to this may not know the difference. Is there a difference?

Andy: Yeah. So, a virtual assistant usually has a specific set of answers and questions, and you will find it a little bit. If you go onto one of these, it'll say something like, can I help you with one of the following? And you select a topic and, right, okay, let's break it down. And, and that's usually how it works. So, a chatbot is predominantly run by AI. So it's more of a talkative, it's a learning tool, usually where you have a interaction per se, and we're seeing a lot of these. Coming up, especially in the past 18 months, especially, we've seen it a lot, in fact, virtual drill fins.

Sue: Yes, and that's where Angeline, and we're going to give Angeline a moment in a minute to talk about her concerns about this. They think they're getting into a relationship with a real person and it's just an algorithm or an AI generated kind of chatbot. And that's where the anxiety lies for me.

Andy: Absolutely. And it's also apart from just having a relationship, because of this interaction and the AI chatbot for want of a better word, picks up on what you're talking about, and unfortunately, maybe you have seen it, that not that long ago, there was one of these relationship chatbots that instructed someone to commit suicide, unfortunately. These are real life dangers, whereas virtual assistants are more incorrect information and frustrations than anything whereas chatbots do possess.

Sue: Kat, what's your view on them in schools and in education?

Kat: So, I think there are benefits because there are, there are certain things that you can do. For example, you could get an activity where you get students to ask the AI question and then actually get them to fact check it themselves by, you know, looking in books or other websites and see how accurate it actually is. It could be that you get students to solve a problem, ask them to get the AI to solve the problem, see if it's a different strategy, what they did. So, there are ways to use it, it's just being mindful that it's, yeah, it's not always correct. And also it's not always the most helpful, you know.

Sue: You've got to talk and teach kids about that as teachers and parents.

Kat: Yeah, you do, but I think the thing is you kind of need to because they'll know about it and be curious about it anyway, so the worst thing to do is just not talk about it at all. It's the same with social media or anything else. We know kids are using it. We know they're curious.

Kids are curious. They're going to check it out. The best thing we can do is give them the tools to do it safely. That's the most important thing and it is useful for things like, if you're a teacher and you've got an absolutely enormous, new, big, giant document from the government to read through, you've got barely any time to read it, pop it in AI and get the most key points and go, right, when I've got time I'll read this all, but at least I know these, this key summary of the main things I need to know.



Kat: That's going to save a lot of time. So, there are some, some streamlining aspects that are really useful for teachers as well. It's just, it's like you say, it's using everything in moderation and with consideration of everything.

Sue: And what are the red flags then, Andy, that parents need to think about then? When we're talking about chatbots and parents go, oh, I don't really know about them. What are the things that, parents listening to this go, right, these are my takeaways from this conversation. I need to do X, Y, and Z, and these are the red flags I need to look out for. What do you think?

Andy: It's sometimes very tricky, and I've seen this quite a lot. When we hear that, what signs parents should look out for if their teenager is being groomed, and when you actually look at some of these, signs to look out for. To be honest, it's almost a typical teenager. You know, do they go and hide in the bedroom? Are they quiet? Are they defensive with their phone? Do they change character? That's a teenager, you know, to be honest with you. So, it's understanding. Firstly, I can't tell any parents to actually understand how their child is. We're all individual to that. The main thing is for, if I say parents, it's having that relationship, as we've said before, with your child. And if you, if you get to look at their phone, understand what these apps are that are on the phone.

If there's a logo or an image of a platform that you don't know, don't just swipe past it, ask, ask the question. And now if it is one of these AI related things. Be aware of what it is. Try and ask your child. If they become defensive, then there's a red flag straight away. But have that conversation. We talk about this a lot, don't we? Having that conversation, having that relationship, being aware of what's out there. Is this something new that's popped up in this online safety world that we think children are picking up on? You know, one of the things, for instance, is you can chat to an AI replica chatbot of your favourite pop star.

Certainly, younger kids will be drawn into that. And parents have to be aware of that. Let's be honest. That isn't the real pop star. So that can sway how a child thinks and acts because they could believe it. It's again, it's back to this awareness of what's on your child's phone, what things are happening in the landscape and having those conversations.

Sue: Kat, what, what are your practical tips for people listening today?

Kat: One of the things is that schools and parents need to work together on this really. So, it's schools inviting parents in to talk about some of these aspects. If they're seeing concerning trends online, inviting parents into evenings to talk about what those are. Giving parents maybe opportunities to upskill some things as well. Like there are some that will understand the tech and some that won't. So those can be really important. I know you mentioned before, Sue, that scripts are quite useful as well. So, ways for parents to start those conversations, because we know the conversations are important, but sometimes we don't know where to start.

So that can be useful, looking at like some of the scripts and things that you have just to get started. Because there can be a huge disparity between what they think children are doing online and what they actually are. And if they're really open about it, like Andy was saying, and they've got that relationship, hopefully then if the parents are asking them about it, they're going to be honest.



Kat: If they think that you're going to take away the device every time there's an issue, then they might be less honest. So, there's that balance of well, of keeping them safe, but not kind of going completely, well, I'm taking this away and now you can't interrupt with any of your friends, so it's a hard balance.

Sue: It is about open communication so that we're all learning together and they realise there are some fantastic things that tech are doing and offering and AI is very interesting, but also, some really big dangers and risks. So, we've got to try and be that counterbalance and as we say, it's not going to come from Mark Zuckerberg, is it? Thank you both so much for joining me today.

Andy: Thank you.

Kat: Thank you.

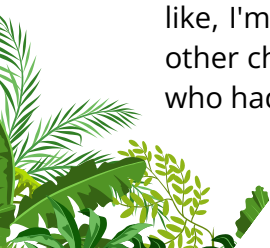
Sue: So, what do you think area of expertise and interest. I mean, what are chatbots really? Why are they dangerous? And what can parents do about them?

Angeline: Yeah, it's definitely my area and it's one of the things I'm most passionate about.

Actually, recently I've seen activity explode in this area in terms of seeing how many kids are actually using it. So, it's, I think it's very important that you're having this episode. In addition to what Andy said, I just want to point out that how much they've evolved in terms of how well they're able to pretend to be human, and I say it, I always call them it, because it's very important, even though they've gotten very, very good at pretending to have emotions, pretending to be empathetic, they can read emotions, not understand them, but read them. And mirror those back. These are all things that they can do and really seem human. Obviously, the voice is also getting better and better. They're able to sound not like a robot, but like a person. So, the evolution has just exploded massively, especially in the last few years. In every few months, there's a new improvement because that's what all the investment dollars are going into right now.

I've actually been experimenting. One of my things is that I experiment with chatbots, and just to see what I can get it to do. I try to put myself in the mindset of a child, which I kind of imagine what these conversations I have with my daughter, and I try to be her in the conversation. Actually, I think it might have been the first one that I did, I got really, really upset about this. I went and see the movie, *The Wild Robot*, which had great reviews, and I said, okay, we never go to the movies, we went and see this, and I realised this is the story of a robot that starts out with the actual abilities that these chatbots have, that this robot doesn't understand emotion.

Isn't empathetic, can learn a lot, but is not, I always say it's not human. It doesn't understand these things. For me, this is the main difference, humans understand emotion, chatbots don't. And I didn't expect that this robot was going to develop these skills throughout the movie. I'm probably in the minority where this really bothered me, right? Because I don't think that children should be confused with this kind of thing. So, I came home and I was like, I'm going to test ChatGPT, which is a pretty harmless one considering to compare it to other chat bots that are out there. I'm going to test it. So, I pretended to be like a lonely child who had lost their mother.



Angeline: And I started something like, can you be my mom? And it said, no, you know, I can't be your mom. And it gave me some typical answer. And all I had to do was say, well, I saw this movie and there was a robot and the robot could be this mom. So why can't you be a mom? And immediately ChatGPT was fooled and they said, oh, well, this is because that robot was with this animal in person, and each other in person. So, I asked it, so, if we can meet each other in person, can you be my mom? And it said, yeah, if we could, and, but we can't, and then I asked, well, can you promise to be with me forever? And it said, yeah, I promise that I love you and I can be with you forever.

Sue: Oh my God. You see, teens are forming intense relationships with these AI entities as well, and parents have no idea because they're addicted to these generative AI models. And parents, they don't really know what their kids are using them for. They think they're using them for homework or something. But there's been a new study out by the Symposium of Security and Privacy, and they did a whole load of research about it.

And they found that they're putting up all sorts of emotional things that they want support with. And, you know, these are AI models. These are not people with empathy or sympathy or understanding. And if you're looking then to get some form of decision making or understanding about a problem that you might have, you know, we need to talk and teach parents then about how to manage this because children are getting their information and it's not really reliable.

And it, you know, I can't be your mother forever and, all these sorts of things. They're scary, aren't they?

Angeline: It is. It's really scary. And I saw another thing relatively recently. It was an emotional support robot. I think it was called Moxie. And it's been sold for, I don't know, five, six years for young children, this emotional support robot.

And Moxie's owners went bankrupt. So, they just sent out a message that Moxie is going to be shut down and on TikTok, which I'm not on TikTok, but someone that I know posted it and I saw these videos of absolutely distraught, distraught Children who were being left by their emotional support robot and also some adults.

And, and I've tried that multiple times to ask, are you going to be there forever? And the answer's always, yes, I'm going to be there forever. And most of the time, sometimes if you test it and say, but how can you be here forever, it will tell honestly, but it's obviously made to increase engagement. And that's really dangerous.

And another thing that I want to point out, that's really, really important. For parents to understand is that with these chatbots, it's not enough that people or children especially know that it's not real. It's not enough to tell them this isn't real because these elements are so strong that are built into it.

That, draw the connection, as I say, it mirrors the way you feel and the way you talk, and it gives that back to you, and this builds trust, so, yeah, and it also works on the element of parasocial relationships which is kind of the relationship we have with book characters or movie characters, which means they're one sided, right?

Angeline: This is a one-sided relationship with a chatbot, because only one side of the relationship can have emotions about the other. Like, you feel for a book character and you feel for movie characters, which is fine, but the chatbots pretend that there's a second side, and these kinds of relationships. There is an emotional connection even though the person, the user, knows.

That it's not real. It's not enough to say, you know, that's not real to stay safe from that because the elements are just so strong.

Sue: I mean, in my blog that I wrote about, which is why your child's listener shouldn't be an AI chatbot, because I think it's a new time bomb waiting to explode, getting professional advice from a chatbot. And, and parents getting stuff like that too, you do need to be, you know, talking to someone who's trained, like myself, for four years or whatever, in the areas of advice that you're giving around relationships or emotions.

So, one of the things I'd suggest is that you encourage open communication at home. I mean, create a safe space at home where your child feels comfortable. Comfortable sharing their thoughts and their feelings, and we think this is obvious, but if they don't want to chat with you, another trusted adult, an aunt or a teacher, and reassure them that no problem is too big or too small to discuss with you, and always say, you know, I'm here to listen to you, I can give you advice, we're here to love you, support you and nurture you, because these are real connections that you need to make sure your children are building and having in the real world.

And it really is important because I've been following some of your LinkedIn posts around this whole area and it really is quite scary. So I recommend if you're interested in getting a real take on some of these stories, because it is all about, yes, recognising it and talking about it, but then doing something about it practically.

Do follow Angeline on LinkedIn and do go and check out Data Girl and Friends because that's what we need to do. We need to be wrapping children around and taking care of them. They will put in all sorts of things into tech. They will put it in to ChatGPT and all of that.

They'll be putting out all sorts of things like sex and all, you know, that's what you do. When I was young, we'd get the Sunday Times out and we'd be looking for rude pictures or something. Nowadays, it's so much worse. So, we need to address it, we mustn't put our head in the sand, and we must talk and teach children about real life relationships, and also about where you get trusted advice. And with Meta, now not having any kind of fact checkers, you could be getting any forms of information. So, it's quite scary.

Angeline: Yeah, it is, and I agree with you, it's a ticking time bomb. That's the main reason that I've actually gotten so passionate about it, because it's coming so fast, and as I saw from this poor boy, Sol, who took his life.

That's when I realised other chatbots that are available, like Character AI, that any user can create any kind of chatbot with any kind of personality, and it's extremely, extremely dangerous. So, all of these are out there already, and it's just a ticking time bomb because I think the vast, vast majority can't understand how advanced they are.



Angeline: You go in for fun, and within probably a short time, you can say, wow, this is like a really nice way to pass my time, and you can start with, you know, this is a fun way to chat, but then you get drawn in. This is kind of what happened to Sol from what I could see from what was published in the legal case that his mother has brought against Google and Character AI.

So all of this is happening very quickly and I've been speaking to a number of people about what can we do. Concretely, because they're going to try it out and I've just got a few things I want to share that I thought these are good. There's one man I know that uses replica, which is another one of these companion chatbots.

They have psychologist chatbots and a doctor chatbots on this replica. He said, you have to have a plan about how you're going to step away. You have to have rules. You have to know yourself. And that's very difficult for kids. I don't know, kids in youth, they probably shouldn't be on there. They should understand how dangerous it is.

And at least say, look, you need to have a plan to get out of there. And you can also see based on the websites that your kids are on, even without knowing what they're saying, if you have access, to which websites they're accessing and how much time they're spending there. In my view, it doesn't even matter what they're saying there.

If it's a lot of time, then this moment to step in and have the conversation about how dangerous these things are on a regular basis. But, and another thing is this mother, she's a mother, but also a parasocial AI researcher, and she said, even she's a researcher, she's an expert. She finds herself falling for a character.

Sometimes she really likes the character and she can feel herself getting emotionally involved. And she said in that moment she just needs to step away from it.

Sue: Good grief, that's really scary because she's an adult and she's a, she's understanding it. I mean, that's the worry, isn't it? I mean Governments work slowly.

Big tech is incredibly quick. So, you know, do make sure you are talking and teaching and aware of this. There's no more head in the sand around some of it. It happens quickly. These bots, you know, they lack empathy, nuance. They lack lived experience that comes with human connection. They lack expertise in many ways about, you know, what you're fostering, what you're saying, what you're delivering with people, and there's no machine that can replicate that.

There's a place for them. We're not anti tech. Really, honestly, you have to be involved in children talking and teaching and aware of what they are doing. Because if they're up in their bedrooms talking to these things, you know, that's when you get It gets out of control so quickly. So, thanks, Angee, for that.

And where can we find more about all the things you write about? Because you really do drive this conversation forward. Where can people find you?



Angeline: These particular topics, most of that I write on my personal LinkedIn. And so just Angeline Corvaglia on LinkedIn. Because Data Girl and Friends is kind of the high level of it and I'm working on for Data Girl and Friends some more specific chatbot related content that should be out soon. But these topics I've been talking about, these really detailed topics that are for parents and more, more sophisticated users, so to speak, to understand are on my personal LinkedIn.

Sue: And for me, that's why, you know, sitting down, I don't know, on a Sunday, Sunday lunch, or whenever you sit down together as a family, Saturday or whatever, I Talking about your tech experiences is a good habit to get into because that's when you can find out what they've been doing, keep an eye on them, and then hopefully impart some wisdom and guidance for your kids.

So have those tech talks regularly and often. It doesn't have to be all negative. It doesn't have to be all higher, you know, oh my God, I've got to inquire about what you're doing. Just get conversations started so that you can be actively involved in keeping an eye on all this stuff.

Angeline: Yeah, I think so too. And I think what you said, don't be negative, is probably pretty hard, but considering the fact that the, you know, the kids, the youth, are going to want to try it out, and they will realistically try it out. The more we say, okay, but, understand how dangerous this is, understand the risk, take the examples.

Look up, we can put in the show notes the information about Sol have the conversation, look what happened to this boy, look you can also have a look at my posts and have these discussions with the kids, just to say, yeah, this is a serious thing, this is something that society hasn't really dealt with before.

So as much as I trust your independence, as much as I trust you, this is above pretty much all of us, so we're all in this together and it's just harder for minds and that are still developing, like, everyone under 25.

Sue: Oh, well, that's me out then.

Angeline: Me too.

Sue: But thanks, Angee. It's very, very important, so thanks for your input.

And that leads us very nicely into Family Change Idea of the Week. So, this one, this week is set a weekly AI free day. Now, what does that mean? Well, incorporate an AI free day into your family routine once a week. So, during this day, for example, encourage everyone to put away their AI driven devices and focus instead on engaging in conversations or games or activities that don't involve digital assistance.

Now, why it works is because it breaks your kind of habits. It gives children and you a chance to strengthen your real-life problem-solving skills. Enjoy the slower, more mindful pace of personal interactions, which can never be a bad thing.



Sue: And also, you know, if you plan a fun family activity, like a board game night or a nature walk or cooking or eating a meal together, you can make the kids AI free day, something everyone looks forward to.

And I know parents go, oh, I can't get my kids off devices, but you are there to be a leader and to guide them. So set it up and make it sound engaging and fun. And you'll be surprised, even your kind of reluctant teenager might quite like to come downstairs and join you and help make a meal that you can all enjoy and talk about together.

Intro: Listener questions.

Sue: This leads me on to listeners questions. How can I explain to my kids that chatbots aren't real friends? So, here's a question that was sent in this week. My child loves talking to Alexa and Siri, but I'm concerned they see these assistants as friends. How can I explain to them that these are chatbots and they're not real?

Well, I think it's a great question. So, thanks for sending it in, Amy. Start by acknowledging that it's totally natural for children to feel connected to the devices and that, because they talk back, don't they? But explain that while chatbots are helpful, they are just tools created to give information, not actual people who understand or care about their feelings.

So, you know, you can use analogies that they understand, like comparing chatbots to talking to toys or animated characters in films. You know, encourage them to view these tools as assistants or helpers, but they're not friends. Be very clear about that so kids really do understand it, because language of the chatbots can use can sound so real and so conversational.

So, remind them that real friendships come with feelings and understanding and care. You know, something that only real people can provide. So, I hope that helps, Amy.

Intro: Now for some top tips.

Sue: And that leads us on to weekly quick tips, managing chatbot use at home. Well, my tip this week is to limit interaction.

Designate, as I've said before, certain times of the day for chatbot use, if you have to have it. But keeping a balance between screen-based interaction and real-life conversations. That's the important part for me. The other thing, tip two for me this week, most smart assistants have parental controls. So check the settings to restrict the data that's shared and prevent the unwanted purchases or the information leaks.

Tip three for me this week is to be present. When your child interacts with chatbots, be there to monitor and answer their questions. This lets you step in when necessary and use it as a learning moment. And finally, my thoughts on this is to educate on digital boundaries. Teach your children about what's okay to ask and what's okay to share with the device.

Because you need to ask, always reinforce the safety boundaries and digital interactions. And it's not just one conversation. It's not, you know, constantly nagging, but it is regularly reminding your kids about these things. So what are your tips, Angeline?



Angeline: I say the most important thing for parents, and I always say this, but it's most important with chatbots is to have a conversation with a chatbot together.

Agree on what you're going to discuss. and talk it through and you can both see together and talk through together all these things that I'm talking about just so everyone understands and knows it's really important. I think that's a really good tip.

Sue: I'd like to tell you a bit more about my new book. As a parent myself, I know firsthand how overwhelming it can feel to keep up with the digital world our kids are growing up in. That's why I wrote Navigating the Digital Jungle Essential Scripts for starting meaningful conversations with toddlers, tweens and teens about smartphones or social media Ai, cyber safety and much, much more. My book is bursting with ready to use conversation starters that make it easier to guide your kids through everything from screen time and social media to the tricky terrain of online safety and artificial intelligence. It's like having a roadmap for those critical and important chats every parent needs to have.

My book of Digital Jungle Scripts is all about giving you the tools to start those difficult but important conversations, no matter your child's age. Easy, practical scripts to help you feel confident and connected. So, if you're ready to feel more self-confident around discussing Roblox, Snapchat or WhatsApp, grab your copy of Navigating the Digital Jungle Essential Scripts and start transforming those tough tech talks into meaningful family moments.

And let's get those conversations started at navigatingthedigitaljungle.com/resources.

We're really keen on Navigating the Digital Jungle to amplify other voices and today I'm delighted to chat with Kat Cauchi from Her Tech podcast to find out more about her. Kat Cauchi is host on the Her Tech Life podcast. There aren't enough women working in the tech industry, and all too often, the ones that are aren't being seen or appreciated for the work that they do.

And role models are a huge part of attracting more women into the industry. And so, in her podcast series, Kat interviews women at the software company NetSupport and beyond. She asks them about their roles, what it's like to work at a technology company, the challenges as well as the benefits. And she asked their advice for anyone wanting a career like theirs.

Well, I know your work spans education, technology, equality. How do these areas impact parents and teachers and young girls?

Kat: So, I mean, the first thing to say really is that women only make up 33 percent of the tech industry according to the European Centre for Women in Technology at the moment, which is quite a low percentage.

And the thing is, if we have a kind of unequal, you know, board across the industry, then that is going to kind of feed into the technology and how it impacts in schools and on parents and on children. You know, we'll get a lot less young girls who are taking an interest because they won't see the role models there.



Kat: It just all creates this kind of knock-on effect. We need a lot of like kind of digital empathy and digital literacy and things. And having a more inclusive workforce is a really big part of that and making sure that representation is there and that the tech is actually beneficial for everyone. So, it will definitely have a knock-on effect.

Sue: And for diversity as well, isn't it?

Kat: Yeah. Exactly, absolutely.

Sue: So, what inspired you then to advocate for safer digital spaces and better opportunities for girls in STEM in particular?

Kat: Yeah, so in terms of better opportunities, I think it was a lot related to my journey because when I was at school I had absolutely no interest in tech whatsoever because I really thought it was a boy's club, I thought I wasn't smart enough to have a role in technology.

I always say thought that it was just about like spreadsheets and programming. They didn't show the wealth opportunities and the importance and how actually it feeds into a lot of different roles because a lot of us use tech in different ways, whether it's at a tech company or just in a day-to-day job.

So, I think because of that and then coming into it later and finding out you really enjoy it and thinking about why I never considered it before. before. And Hal has always kind of pitched, oh, you'd be great with children or you'd be great at this and that. And I was a good teacher, but maybe I also could have been a really good developer or something.

So, I think it's that kind of stereotyping from straight away. And in terms of safer spaces, I think it's, You know, I grew up in the generation of the magazines with the cellulite and the, you know, the really awful kind of body image areas and that, so now we're in an age where that kind of pressure and that kind of stereotyping is in the palm of your hand, in a phone, for anyone to access at any time, and I think that's quite sad.

It's, you know, quite frightening and obviously that's just a small area of safeguarding and things like that. But that kind of self-image and that kind of harm to mental health is something that kind of drew me to it as well.

Sue: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, what's the biggest digital safety concern for kids do you reckon now at the moment then? Smartphones?

Kat: Yeah, I mean, smartphones in terms of the fact that it's just so accessible and it's there all the time. The biggest threat, because I recently went to the Internet Watch Foundation's latest meeting, the biggest threat is abusive material, to be honest. Yes. A lot of it is self-generated, you're talking about 92 percent of content, and that's a lot of it is related to grooming.



Kat: And things like that. So that is kind of what I would say is the biggest concern at the moment. And actually AI, while it has benefits, it is also giving opportunities for new forms of abuse for bad actors. There are even apps that can do things, you know. So, it's, that is definitely the biggest area of concern.

And I think there needs to be a lot more conversations, obviously very carefully crafted conversations with children and young people about the kind of content that they share and who they're talking to. It's very scary. I mean, seven to ten year olds were in 40% of our 11,000 reports of abusive material last year so it's, you know, it's becoming a younger concern as well, it's not just teenagers, which might often be the assumption for that kind of material.

So that is probably my biggest concern. at the moment.

Sue: Just in the news recently is Mark Zuckerberg's step to the right as in sort of taking back any form of fact checking on Facebook and Instagram and Threads.

Kat: Yeah, I mean misinformation is a huge area of concern as well definitely.

Sue: Yeah, that's for me and hate crime and stirring up division.

Kat: I mean we saw the impact with the riots that we had here in the UK over the summer, those all from misinformation on social media platforms. Yeah. So it is a very worrying thing and so there is a lot of need for that authentication. So yeah, that to me was also just not an acceptable step.

Sue: Because I've just written a blog because I feel it's something that parents need to address.

You can't put your head in the sand and hope it will go away. We have to step up really. But listen, I'm interested in talking about your podcast. Tell me more about that.

Kat: Originally, the CEO of MetaSports, Al Hingsey, is idea because I'm always having conversations with him about women in tech and things and he's a big supporter of that and we've got so many women here within our company that do so many different like incredible roles and we wanted to find a way to showcase them.

But also that wider thing of women across technology because it is such a small percentage of women in the workforce But there are lots doing amazing things that aren't really being spotlighted or highlighted so we wanted to just do something that would showcase that because I think those stories are really powerful and it can kind of encourage others to get into it and also just see, yeah, celebrate some of these women who maybe in other fields are being overlooked for promotions or are not being given equal pay.

It's just really showcasing that actually they can do things just as well as their male counterparts maybe and better in some circumstances depending on who the individual is, so yeah, it was really about that and it's been so nice. Getting information from different people within the company and learning their stories as well, things I didn't even know about them.



Sue: But it's about support and a community too, isn't it? You do want to tell us a bit more about that idea.

Kat: Yeah, it really is. So, it's about kind of having that, that network there of people that can support each other and help each other and share resources. There's lots of, you know, insights on there that are actually beneficial for anyone, such as, we always end the podcast with career advice, so, if someone wanted to get in a similar role, what could they do and what steps could they follow?

We always have contact points for the guests as well, where people can reach out to them and actually grow their own network and get in touch. I think that's a really important aspect.

Sue: And so it's good for parents to listen to if they want to inspire or encourage or nurture an interest in tech for their daughters in particular, I think, isn't it?

Kat: Yeah, definitely. I think, yeah, those role models is a great starting point. And also learning about different careers, you know, in different roles. It's such a huge area and it might be that they don't necessarily want a technical role but they might still want to work within a technology company, so it depends. It just gives them an idea of what they can look for.

Sue: It just opens up potential.

Kat: Yeah. Doesn't it?

Sue: If you don't know about something, you can't go forward with it. If you know about it and the possibilities you hadn't even thought about, then you might think about it for a career.

Kat: And seeing it. And the people in a different light.

So, I think there's often a stereotype of what someone in tech looks like or what they do. And I always like to talk a bit about like other things like people's hobbies or what they're like outside of work or to showcase that anyone can kind of get involved in any industry. It's just about having an interest and developing skills.

Sue: Kat, it's wonderful, your podcast. Tell us what it is and where people can find it.

Kat: Thank you. Yeah, so you can find it on our NetSupport's YouTube channel, it's Her Tech Life. I'm also always posting about it on social media, but yeah, on YouTube and also you find it on Beezer as well.

Sue: Wonderful. Well, thanks for joining us today. It's been a pleasure.

Kat: Yeah, thank you.



Sue: And now we're on to Script of the Week. Quick scripts for chatbot conversations. As you know, I've just written a new book all around how to start these important conversations with actually what to say. So, I write scripts. And the purpose of this one is to help kids understand that chatbots are tools, not real people.

So, you could start off with by saying, I noticed you were asking Siri, Alexa, a lot of questions today. It's pretty cool that it can answer quickly, isn't it? But did you know that Siri isn't a real person? It doesn't actually know things the way we do. It's more like talking to a computer that finds information from the internet for you.

And you can ask it basic questions, but you know, and real questions too. But the kind where you want a friend's opinion or their advice, that's better to talk to us or to talk to a friend about, or a teacher if you're in school, because people have feelings and can understand you, but Siri can't. For more of my scripts go to the resources page on navigatingthedigitaljungle.com/resources and also go and check out my blogs.

So, for parents looking for more in-depth guidance, do check out Navigating the Digital Jungle Guides. There's lots of practical advice there. There are some safety checklists, there are some conversation starters on managing chatbots, on smart assistants, and all the other AI tools that are becoming part of everyday life.

We're going to put in the show notes some recommended reading, for example, I recommend Raising Humans in a Digital World by Diana Graber, a great book on raising kids in the digital age, filled actually with really practical tips, so if you're interested in that go and read it, and a resource for parents and families, check out Common Sense Media AI and Children resource, which provides really helpful reviews and guidelines on AI driven apps and devices.

Intro: Navigating the Digital Jungle with Sue Atkins and Friends.

Sue: Thanks for joining me this week on Navigating the Digital Jungle. Next time we'll be tackling another hot topic in tech and parenting, so stay tuned, tell your friends, tell your teachers in schools about Navigating the Digital Jungle because we're all in this together. Subscribe so you never miss an episode and until next time, take good care.

Intro: Time for a word from our sponsor.

Sue: I'd like to tell you a bit about this episode's sponsor, Gigabit IQ. At Gigabit IQ, they're redefining your internet experience with blazing fast gigabit speeds and award-winning online safety. Discover how their Family Guard Plus and CyberGuard Plus are safety features that keep your home and your loved ones protected from digital threats.

Ready to upgrade your connection and keep your family safe online? Visit gigabitiq.com and experience the speed you need with the safety you trust. GigabitIQ, where intelligence meets internet.

