

BRIEF

Family Stability in the Age of AI: Pathways for Flourishing and the Common Good

Unifying Family Policy series

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Where should family policy in the United States head over the next five to 15 years?

The *Unifying Family Policy* series reimagines key areas of family policy as interconnected threads in a shared tapestry. The series challenges underlying assumptions and invites fresh thinking in light of the deep societal transformations underway and those still to come. Each brief explores how a specific policy area intersects with others, and how, woven together, they can build a coherent, stable foundation for families in a rapidly changing world.

This brief focuses on artificial intelligence (AI) and its implications for the future of children and families. As AI rapidly transforms how we live and work, we argue that:

- Children and families must gain agency so that AI can strengthen human connection and family stability rather than undermine them.
- We must build pathways for families to shape how AI is designed and used.
- We must establish guardrails and explore how AI can support family well-being.
- Family flourishing must be a national priority in AI governance.

Current Context and Future Trends

AI has taken the world by storm. Its rise marks a defining feature of the [Fourth Industrial Revolution](#) and echoes earlier periods of sweeping technological change. History shows us that technological shifts transform family life, prompting changes in how we work, how we learn, and how we connect with one another. Industrial revolutions prompt family revolutions.

Yet history also shows us that technological change often comes before governance decisions, regulations, and ethical reflections. Its consequences, even those that are unintended, reverberate through families and their communities. When guardrails are weak or absent, families feel the seismic and sometimes destabilizing effects of innovation and absorb its shocks.

Despite this, the implications of AI on children and families have remained largely unexamined. Much of the discourse on AI and families has focused on [privacy](#), [national security](#), and [children's rights](#). These are important issues, but they overlook a critical question: How will AI affect the stability, predictability, and daily rhythms of family life?

Too often, we approach technological change with a mindset that prioritizes innovation and economic productivity, rather than viewing people's well-being as a central measure of progress. Families sit at the frontlines of technological disruption, but AI systems are rarely evaluated for their contribution to family flourishing and are not designed with the realities of family life in mind.

The sheer speed of AI's growth and its influence on our world intensify these concerns. Things are moving so quickly that it is hard to know where we situate ourselves. We know that society, culture, labor, and family life will inevitably change. The question is how these changes will unfold, and to what degree we can give families agency in this future that is marked both by promise and by precarity.

AI can give families access to new services that can [lighten our load, streamline processes, and boost efficiency](#), but without safeguards, it can also erode the stability and predictability families depend on. Some industries (such as customer service and health administration) and some types of work (such as clerical jobs) are highly susceptible to automation and the threat of [AI-related job displacement](#). Families relying on wages from these industries may face sudden job loss or recurring disruptions in income.

Even if jobs are not eliminated, AI-driven optimization can drastically change how they function. For example, AI scheduling tools often prioritize business efficiency over worker stability and can result in [reduced hours and unpredictable schedules](#). For families, this makes budgeting, saving, and planning far more difficult, and it poses even more challenges for arranging child care. The expansion of AI into caregiving and health services also raises complex questions about quality, safety,

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and whether new technology might erode the human connection central to care work.

Young people also face a moving target for what skills will matter in tomorrow's AI-driven labor market, complicating decisions about education, career, and even family formation. Teens and young adults face immense pressure but are also unsure of where the world is headed, what their future in the workforce looks like, and whether they will be able to build the families they may yearn for.

Child health experts warn that [children and adolescents face unique risks from AI](#). Children around the world interact with AI daily through toys, games, and online platforms that rely on AI technologies. Despite how quickly AI is advancing, few safeguards account for children's social and emotional development. Children are more likely to [perceive AI systems as human and may even place more trust in them than they do people](#), making chatbots that mimic human behavior especially dangerous. There have been well-documented cases of children engaging in [dangerous and even deadly behavior](#) when engaging with AI systems. It is safe to say that most AI products are not built with meaningful attention to long-term cognitive or emotional development.

Merely adding age restrictions is not enough. AI systems need the same rigorous standards as other products that children use and are exposed to. Those standards should be accompanied by widespread efforts to build AI literacy among both parents and children.

Most people currently have little agency in how AI is built or used. Conversations remain dominated by Big Tech and governments—sidelining families, frontline workers, and communities in the Global South. AI should be designed with family well-being in mind from the start, and its governance must intentionally include the voices of those most affected. Building public awareness, digital literacy, and agency must be essential in the path forward. We must shape AI before it shapes us.

Past industrial revolutions offer a glimpse of the path we might be on, but the outcome may be different this time around if we shift our thinking toward the family and family-centered governance. No one yet fully understands how AI will shape family life and children's well-being, but we can begin identifying where harm can be minimized and where opportunity lies to strengthen the resilience of families.

The challenge ahead is whether we can design policies that align innovation with human values and ensure that the future of AI supports our families rather than leaves them behind. It is time to position family well-being as a national priority in AI governance.

The Opportunity

Instead of retrofitting family-friendly features onto systems designed for consumers, AI should be built from the outset with children and families in mind and should empower them to be co-designers and co-governors of these systems.

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If we begin with families, we will ask different questions:

- Does this AI model strengthen the quality of relationships?
- Does it protect children's and parents' social and emotional health?
- Does it give caregivers more time, stability, and agency?
- How do issues of labor, education, health, and safety intersect and shape family well-being?

Starting from the family level could lead to innovations that are safer, more inclusive, and more sustainable because they are anchored in the realities and values that support what families desire.

Fortunately, we already have a strong foundation to guide technology in the best interests of children and families, and ethics, oversight, and human rights are increasingly centered in global conversations about AI. UNESCO has articulated clear [AI ethics principles](#), the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) sets binding global standards, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed comprehensive [AI guidelines](#).

[Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) asserts that “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” This principle must be put into practice in the context of AI. As AI transforms daily life, it is the responsibility of governments to ensure that families are protected amid massive economic, technological, and cultural shifts.

Critically, our goal should be not only to protect children and families from risk, but also to involve them in intentionally building the social and technological foundations that help them flourish in a world shaped by AI. If we equip families with the tools, support, and agency to respond and be resilient, societies will grow more resilient alongside them.

Thus, the challenge is not a lack of principles but rather a failure to activate them where families live and make decisions: schools, civil society institutions, and workplaces. Bridging this gap requires continuous dialogue between the people designing AI and the people living with its consequences. Family-serving organizations, schools, pediatric primary care providers, and others must participate in governance discussions alongside technologists, philosophers, researchers, anthropologists, and regulators.

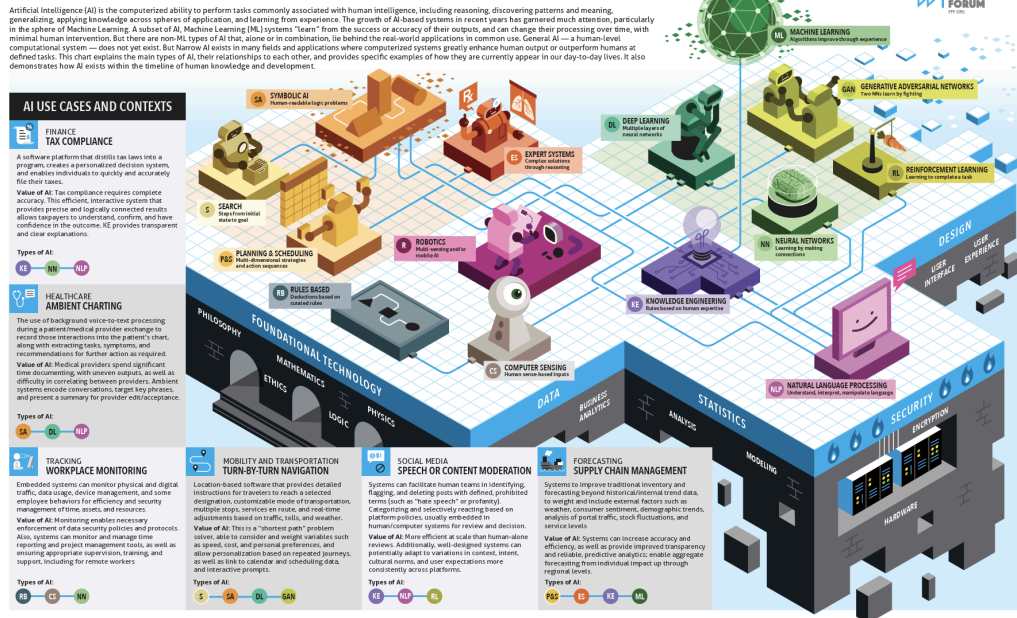
Philanthropies also have critical roles to play in shaping responsible AI. Even without being part of the technology sector, they can advocate for design and regulation that prioritize children's development, bring in new voices to share best practices, and invest in research and pilots that test AI tools for positive family outcomes.

On the work front, AI will transform “human-touch” professions such as health care, education, and caregiving. We cannot afford to resist change; we must equip workers with the agency and skills to navigate this transition. Too often, AI is introduced *to* workers, not *with* them, and rolled out through top-down decisions with little opportunity for reflection, feedback, or co-design. Building trust requires

creating systems that center workers and give them real influence over how technology is deployed in their workplaces.

We must confront the fear and skepticism that many feel toward AI and create pathways for understanding where and how these systems touch their work. Most people are familiar only with chat interfaces, unaware of the broader AI ecosystem, including its supply chains, model types, and layers of deployment. We need to make it easier for people to identify where they sit within this system, understand how AI impacts them, and raise awareness about the shared responsibilities across those who develop, deploy, and use AI.

THE SPECTRUM OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



Source: Future of Privacy Forum

While there are concerns about the rapid spread of AI, the technology also presents significant opportunities. When designed responsibly, AI can strengthen and expand access to education, especially in fragile or underserved settings. For instance, in Nigeria, AI-driven tools such as [aprendIA](#) are helping teachers in conflict-affected areas access professional development through WhatsApp, strengthening the local learning ecosystem.

AI can also be a powerful educational tool when grounded in sound learning principles. [Adaptive learning systems](#), for example, tailor exercises to each child's performance, helping educators personalize instruction for students of all abilities and at different stages of development. When designed with human-informed principles and ethical oversight, AI can [enrich learning experiences, support cognitive development, and help teachers and parents meet children where they are](#).

What To Do

Real progress will require collective effort that brings together families, employers, technologists, policymakers, and philanthropic partners. The following recommendations identify potential pathways toward a future in which AI strengthens, rather than strains, family life and empowers families to serve as co-designers of the systems that shape their daily lives.

Create Multistakeholder Accountability to Assess and Shape AI's Impact on Families

The well-being of children and the stability of the family must be centered in the design, deployment, and oversight of AI. Grassroots power for AI governance could come from labor unions, parent-teacher associations, faith networks, mutual aid cooperatives, and youth councils. These institutions can be mobilized as family-centered design partners, not just consultation bodies. Each represents a pillar of lived experience in work, care, and community that, together, can form the scaffolding of participatory AI oversight.

Family advisory boards could be created to inform state and federal legislation on AI, education, health, infrastructure, and labor policies. Governments and institutions should also conduct family impact and opportunity assessments to evaluate how AI systems affect family well-being.

Crucially, this work requires listening to parents and young people, as they understand both the problems and potential of AI in ways that can make policy more grounded, inclusive, and forward-looking.

Create Avenues to Improve Digital Literacy

Building AI literacy is essential to ensuring that families, educators, and community leaders can engage confidently with new technologies. An AI literacy gap may already exist between generations in many families. We must create spaces where people can explore and use AI tools, fostering trust through hands-on learning.

Partnerships between governments, nonprofits, and educational institutions can help establish low-risk learning environments where everyone feels comfortable. These might include community-based AI literacy programs in schools, libraries, and family resource centers.

Nonprofits and organizations that serve children and families could also develop internal frameworks and training to help their staff use AI responsibly and effectively, and to respond to community needs while modeling ethical and transparent use.

Encourage the Co-Development of AI Guidance and Strategies in the Workplace

Technological innovation must be balanced with the dignity, stability, and well-being of workers and families. Strong institutions, including labor unions and professional associations, should play a role in developing workplace AI

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strategies that safeguard workers' rights, ensure transparency, and align innovation with family well-being.

Employers should be required to involve frontline workers and unions in decisions about deploying AI, including automating schedules, allocating tasks, and monitoring productivity.

The [Centre for Responsible Union AI](#) offers a strong model of how unions can shape the ethical use of AI by creating frameworks that prioritize worker perspectives and protections. Unions can also help track on-the-ground experiences, identify harmful patterns, and advocate for responsive regulation that keeps human dignity and stability at the center of technological progress.

Establish Guardrails to Protect Young Children and Their Families

AI systems that interact with children must be held to the highest safety and developmental standards. Many current AI tools are designed for adults and only later retrofitted for children, often by simply adding filters or disclaimers. This approach is inadequate. Models must be safe by design, built from the ground up with children's developmental, emotional, and cognitive needs in mind.

Guardrails are urgently needed, particularly for the youngest users. These include prohibiting AI systems from impersonating caregivers or forming attachment-like relationships with children and restricting the deployment of chatbots and "AI companions" to minors until proper oversight mechanisms are in place.

Guardrails must not only involve governmental regulatory policy, but also a suite of actions that include business decisions. Companies introducing AI products must incorporate parental controls and age-appropriate features from the start, not as afterthoughts. The industry and regulators must work together to define clear boundaries around what AI can and cannot do when interacting with children and embed child protection standards into every stage of AI development and deployment.

We must also allow parents to take action to protect their children. In the household, parents can set clear rules for AI use, use available parental controls, and monitor their children's interactions with AI. It can also involve building age-appropriate digital literacy so their children understand what AI is and how to use it safely.

Diversify Funding Streams

Funding for AI is expanding rapidly, but most investment still overlooks the systems that support families most directly. Capital today tends to flow toward either short-term pilots or large commercial platforms designed for efficiency and profit rather than care, trust, or resilience. We need to build awareness, engagement, and safe spaces for funders to collaborate on AI and children's issues.

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Philanthropies have critical roles to play in shaping responsible AI and should invest in research and pilots that test AI tools for positive family outcomes. As conveners, they can also build spaces and invite new voices to share best practices and inform responsible innovation. We need spaces where early-stage, community-driven solutions can grow into lasting infrastructure, and we need diverse funding streams, from philanthropy to public investment and multilateral engagement.

Governments, philanthropies, and development banks should collaborate through pooled funds or micro-grant models to test and scale family-centered innovations. A dedicated Family-Safe AI Fund could anchor this ecosystem, combining capital with cross-sector partnerships. Ultimately, we must move beyond siloed, one-off funding and work toward blended models and catalytic capital capable of building long-term, family-centered AI infrastructure.

Identify Effective Family-Centered AI Models

Family-centered AI policy should not be a peripheral concern; it should be foundational. Governments, philanthropies, and research institutions should identify and document successful examples of companies, projects, or products that have effectively integrated considerations of family and child well-being into the design and deployment of AI systems.

These can include AI tools that support educators and caregivers, models that prioritize data privacy and child safety, and workplace systems that balance productivity and profit with family stability. Sharing these examples can help embed family-centered design principles into mainstream AI development.

Align Fiscal and Investment Incentives With Family-Centered Innovation

Governments should investigate new tax or fiscal policy ideas that could better align economic incentives with positive social outcomes from AI. Incentives could reward technologies advancing social well-being, family stability, and equity and discourage models that exacerbate inequality, displace workers without support, or exploit user data.

This could include experimenting with public-private co-investment models, social impact bonds, or targeted tax credits for companies that design AI tools supporting education, caregiving, or community resilience. Similarly, governments could pilot responsible innovation incentives, tying access to public contracts or subsidies to compliance with ethical and child-safety standards.

The Tough Questions

Are we too late? The speed of AI's advance can make it feel as if child and family advocates have arrived at this conversation too late. AI systems that were not designed with the well-being of children and stability of families in mind are already woven into households, schools, and workplaces around the world.

We believe there is still time to shape AI in ways to support family well-being. Actions over the next year will decide whether AI can become a tool for shared flourishing. The moment demands clarity of purpose in setting strong guardrails, defining clear policy priorities, and bringing the right voices into the room. Things are moving quickly, but so can we. The window for AI to be safe, equitable, and designed for family well-being is narrow, but it is still open.

How do we wrestle with the tension between innovation and regulation? AI is a moving target. Its speed of innovation has far outpaced the speed of reflection, governance, and public deliberation. We urgently need to narrow this gap. We lack both incentives and safeguards that align AI development with societal well-being.

Too often, guardrails are reactive and are only put in place after harm has occurred. We need clear policy priorities that connect economic incentives to social outcomes and accountability mechanisms that make equity and safety nonnegotiable design principles. Ethical design should not be seen as opposing progress but as the foundation that makes responsible innovation possible. We must align innovation with care, foresight, and human values.

What role do we want AI to serve, and what kind of relationship do we want with it? Progress without a clear direction risks creating unintended consequences for families that are incredibly difficult to reverse. The world we inhabit today is fundamentally different from the one that shaped earlier technological systems. What was designed for a past era may no longer serve us.

As we navigate this shift, we should be asking: What outdated norms, assumptions, beliefs, and systems can we leave behind? What must be reimaged for the world we are living in now? AI offers a chance to reimagine work and family life.

For example, AI systems can boost productivity and efficiency and help decouple "time spent" from performance measures, creating more flexible and family-friendly workplaces. Yet this same shift can also worsen inequalities, as some workers may gain greater autonomy and flexibility, while those in labor-intensive roles, such as retail or factory work, are unlikely to see those benefits.

We can envision a future where AI enables people to spend less time at work and more time caring for themselves and their loved ones, but that future will never become a reality if we do not set those intentions clearly now.

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What About Caregivers? Much of the global conversation surrounding AI has focused on children's rights and safety, yet far less attention has been paid to the rights and responsibilities of caregivers and parents in protecting and guiding their children in an AI-driven world. They need greater clarity in how children access and use AI tools, what risks and opportunities these tools present, and how to intervene or set boundaries when necessary.

We must also recognize that the impacts of AI extend beyond children. The proliferation of AI could shape parental experiences and affect everything from their social and emotional well-being to their confidence in caregiving. More attention must be paid to how to support parents in this moment.

Recommended reading

For more reading on the research base and different perspectives on this topic, we recommend these additional resources.

[When AI Meets Families: What We Learned From Bringing These Worlds Together](#), Elana Banin

[Artificial Intelligence in Applied Family Research Involving Families with Young Children: A Scoping Review](#), Lee et al.

[Families' Vision of Generative AI Agents for Household Safety Against Digital and Physical Threats](#), Wen et al.

[Families Deserve a Seat at the AI Table](#), Cosby et al.

[How Americans View AI and Its Impact on People and Society](#), Pew Research Center

Connections

AI does not operate in isolation; it intersects with other core pillars of family policy and is reshaping the rhythms of work, care, and family life.

AI is connected to [PREDICTIVE SCHEDULING](#) as it underpins many of the tools and systems that determine worker schedules and productivity metrics. Therefore, it influences [JOB QUALITY](#), economic stability, and overall work-life balance.

It also has a direct impact on family stability and [FAMILY FORMATION](#) because it affects parental and child social and emotional well-being, development, and economic security.