



# Using AI in an Early Years Setting: A Guide for Practitioners and Apprentices

Technology is now part of everyday life – whether it's using your smartphone to stay in touch, asking a virtual assistant for quick answers, or managing your shopping and banking online. One development that's regularly making the news is artificial intelligence, or AI, and it's quickly becoming a hot topic in all areas of education.

At first glance, AI might seem more suited to high-tech industries or corporate environments – a far cry from the warm, nurturing, and hands-on approach that defines early years care. It's understandable if it feels a bit distant from the day-to-day reality of working with young children, where relationships, play, and personal interaction are central. But AI isn't just about robots and algorithms – when used thoughtfully and ethically, it can become a valuable support tool for the early years sector.

Whether you're an experienced early years practitioner or just beginning your journey as an apprentice, AI has the potential to help you work smarter, not harder. From saving time on admin tasks to enhancing children's learning experiences and supporting your professional development, it's a technology that, when used well, can offer real benefits.

In this guide, we'll break down what AI actually is – in simple, practical terms – and look at how it can support you in your daily practice, training, or studies. We'll also explore some of the limitations and important things to consider when using AI, so you can make informed choices and feel confident about embracing this new technology in a way that works for you and the children in your care.

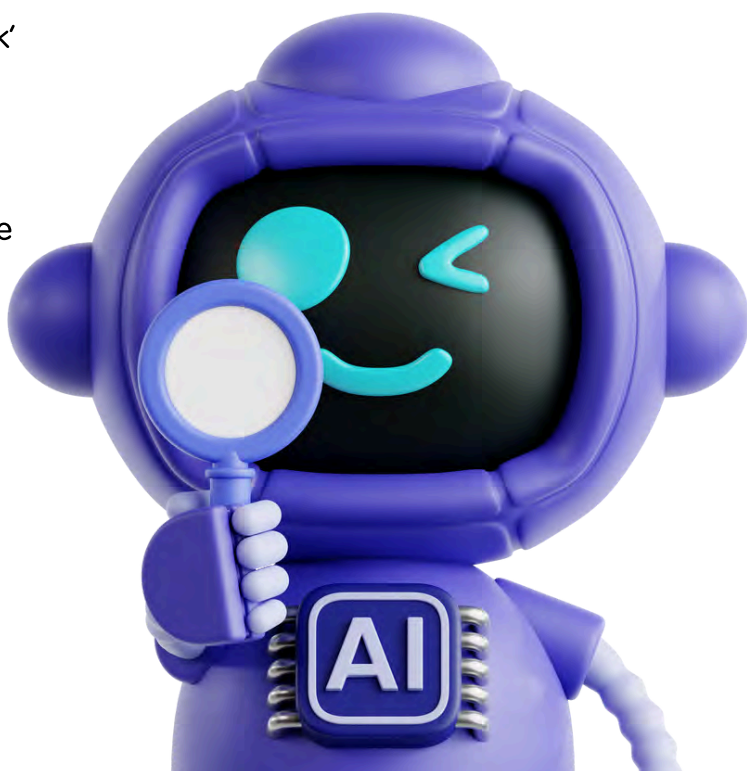
## What is AI - and Why Should We Care?

Put simply, AI refers to computer systems that can 'think' or 'learn' in ways that mimic human intelligence. Tools like ChatGPT are examples of this - they can generate written content, answer questions, summarise information, and even create lesson ideas based on the instructions you give. But why does this matter to early years practitioners?

Because AI can help you:

- Save time on paperwork and planning
- Come up with creative new ideas
- Learn and grow professionally
- Communicate more clearly and confidently

It's like having an assistant by your side - ready to help 24/7.



## The Positives: How AI Can Support You In Your Setting

- **Boosting Creativity**

Stuck for a World Book Day activity or a sensory play idea? AI tools can instantly suggest engaging, themed learning experiences tailored to age groups or developmental stages.

- **Saving Time on Admin**

Need to write a newsletter, policy draft, or observation comment? AI can help you get started quickly with a template or example to edit.

- **Supporting Learning and CPD**

Want to understand schema play or behaviour strategies better? AI can break down complex topics into clear, simple summaries or answer your follow-up questions.

- **Improving Communication**

Struggling with tone when writing to a parent? Need to make a letter sound more professional? AI can help fine-tune your words, without taking away your voice.

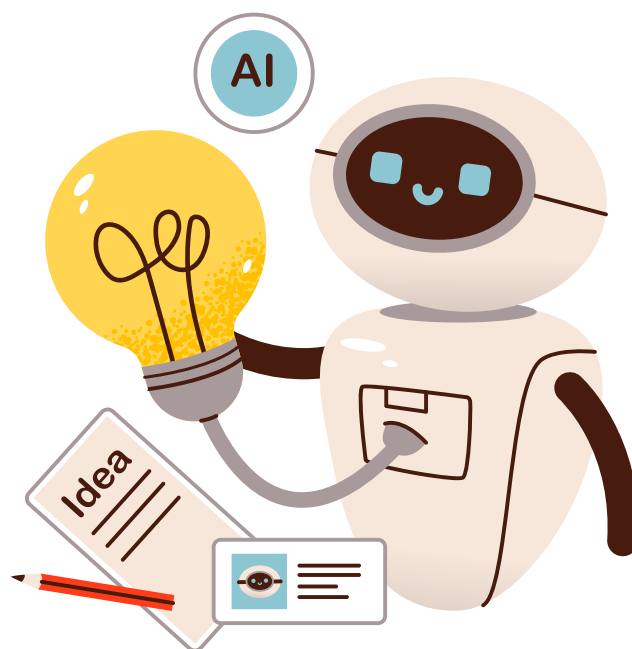
- **Breaking Down Barriers**

AI-powered tools can translate messages for parents who speak different languages or turn speech into text for those who struggle with typing.

## AI for Apprentices - A Learning Companion

If you're currently completing an early years apprenticeship, you've probably heard about people using artificial intelligence (AI) to support their studies or assignments. And it's true – when used responsibly, AI can be a fantastic companion to help you manage your workload, boost your confidence, and improve the quality of your written work.

But, like any tool, it's all about how you use it. AI should support your learning, not replace it. Ethical use is key, especially when it comes to your coursework and assessments, which need to reflect your own understanding and development.



## Here are just a few ways AI can be genuinely helpful during your apprenticeship:

- Summarising key information – whether you're working through a learning module or revising a textbook chapter, AI can help condense the content into bite-sized summaries, allowing you to focus on understanding the main ideas.
- Checking grammar, punctuation, or structure – a quick AI check can highlight areas to improve in your writing, making your work clearer and more professional.
- Rephrasing tricky sentences – if you're struggling to explain something clearly, AI can offer alternative ways to say it while keeping your meaning intact.
- Brainstorming ideas – stuck for inspiration? AI can help you generate ideas before you start writing or planning an activity.
- Practising interview or exam-style questions – use AI to role-play potential scenarios or test your knowledge on different topics.

## But ...Use with Caution:

- **Don't let AI do the work for you** – Your coursework should show your voice, your ideas, and what you've learned. If you rely on AI to write full answers, you're missing out on valuable learning and risking your progress.
- **Double-check the facts** – AI isn't perfect. It can sometimes get things wrong or invent information (yes, really!). Always back up anything you use with trusted sources or your course materials.
- **Use it as a guide, not a shortcut** – AI can point you in the right direction, but you need to do the thinking. Developing your own reasoning, analysis, and reflection is what really helps you grow as a practitioner – and sets you apart in your career.

## Plagiarism and AI

One of the biggest risks of using AI during your apprenticeship – and perhaps the most serious – is the potential for plagiarism. Even if you don't intend to cheat, simply copying and pasting content generated by an AI tool into your assignments can lead to serious consequences.

Plagiarism means presenting someone else's words, ideas, or work as your own. That includes copying directly from a textbook, a website, or, in this case, an AI tool. It doesn't matter that the content wasn't written by another person – if it's not your original thinking or writing, it can still be flagged as plagiarism by assessors.

Apprenticeship assessors are trained to spot work that doesn't feel authentic. They may use plagiarism detection software or simply notice when something sounds too formal, too technical, or just not like you. And if they suspect the content hasn't come from your own understanding, it can raise red flags – even if your intentions were good.





## Here's why this matters:

- **Your assignment could be marked down** – or not accepted at all.
- **You may be asked to resubmit**, which takes up more of your time and delays your progress.
- **In serious cases, your qualification could be at risk**, especially if it's seen as intentional dishonesty.

As we discussed earlier, AI can be a brilliant brainstorming partner, helping you understand a topic or suggest ways to structure your response. But the key is to never submit anything AI has written word-for-word. Instead, use what it gives you as a jumping-off point, and then rewrite it in your own words, reflecting your voice, knowledge, and understanding.

**Think of it this way:** your apprenticeship is your chance to show what you know, what you've learned, and how you think. No machine can replicate that, and trying to shortcut the process means missing out on the real value of your training.

So, by all means, let AI help guide your thinking – but keep the writing, the reasoning, and the reflection truly yours.

**Remember:** AI is just a tool – and you're the one in control. Used thoughtfully, it can help you feel more confident and organised. But your success comes from your own effort, passion, and understanding – and that's something no machine can replicate.

## What to Watch Out For

While using AI can be incredibly helpful when used well, it's important to be aware of its limitations. As with any tool, it's not perfect, and in some situations, it could do more harm than good if used without care. Here are some key points to keep in mind:

### Data Privacy

AI tools might seem clever, but they're not secure platforms for sensitive information. You should never enter personal details about children, families, colleagues, or your setting into any AI system. Doing so could breach GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) guidelines and put people's privacy at risk. Always keep safeguarding and data protection at the forefront of your practice.

### Lack of Human Insight

AI doesn't know your setting, your team, or the individual needs of your key children. It doesn't understand relationships, nuances, or the emotional intelligence that early years professionals bring to their work. While it can offer general suggestions, it cannot replace your professional judgement, instincts, or the wealth of real-world experience you draw on every day.



## Overdependence

The more you rely on AI to help you plan, write, or make decisions, the more you risk losing confidence in your own voice. Apprentices in particular should be careful not to let AI replace the learning process. Developing critical thinking, reflection, and problem-solving skills is an essential part of becoming a strong practitioner. Don't let AI do all the heavy lifting – trust your own abilities.

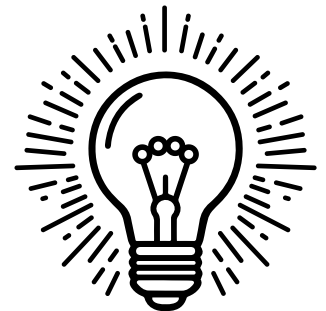
## Miscommunication

AI-generated content can sometimes come across as overly formal, robotic, or just not quite right for your audience, especially in a people-centred profession like early years. Whether you're writing to parents, preparing learning observations, or contributing to assignments, your words must reflect your tone, values, and personality. Always review and adapt any suggestions from AI so that they sound authentic to you. By being aware of these limitations, you can use AI in a way that supports, rather than undermines, your role in the early years. Think of it as a digital assistant, not a replacement for the experience, empathy, and expertise that you bring to the sector.



## Top Tips for Using AI Wisely

- Use it to inspire you, not to replace you
- Start with AI, then shape the content yourself
- Check everything it gives you - don't assume it's right
- Be transparent with your employer or tutor if you're using it
- Don't use AI when personal, sensitive, or confidential information is involved



## Tools You Might Try (Safely)

- **ChatGPT** – for general ideas, drafts or research help
- **Canva Magic Write** – for visual projects or text content
- **Grammarly** – for proof reading and improving written communication
- **Voice typing on Google Docs** – to speed up your documentation
- **Translation apps (like DeepL)** – to help communicate across languages
- **AI summarisers (like TLDR tools)** – for cutting down long articles or notes



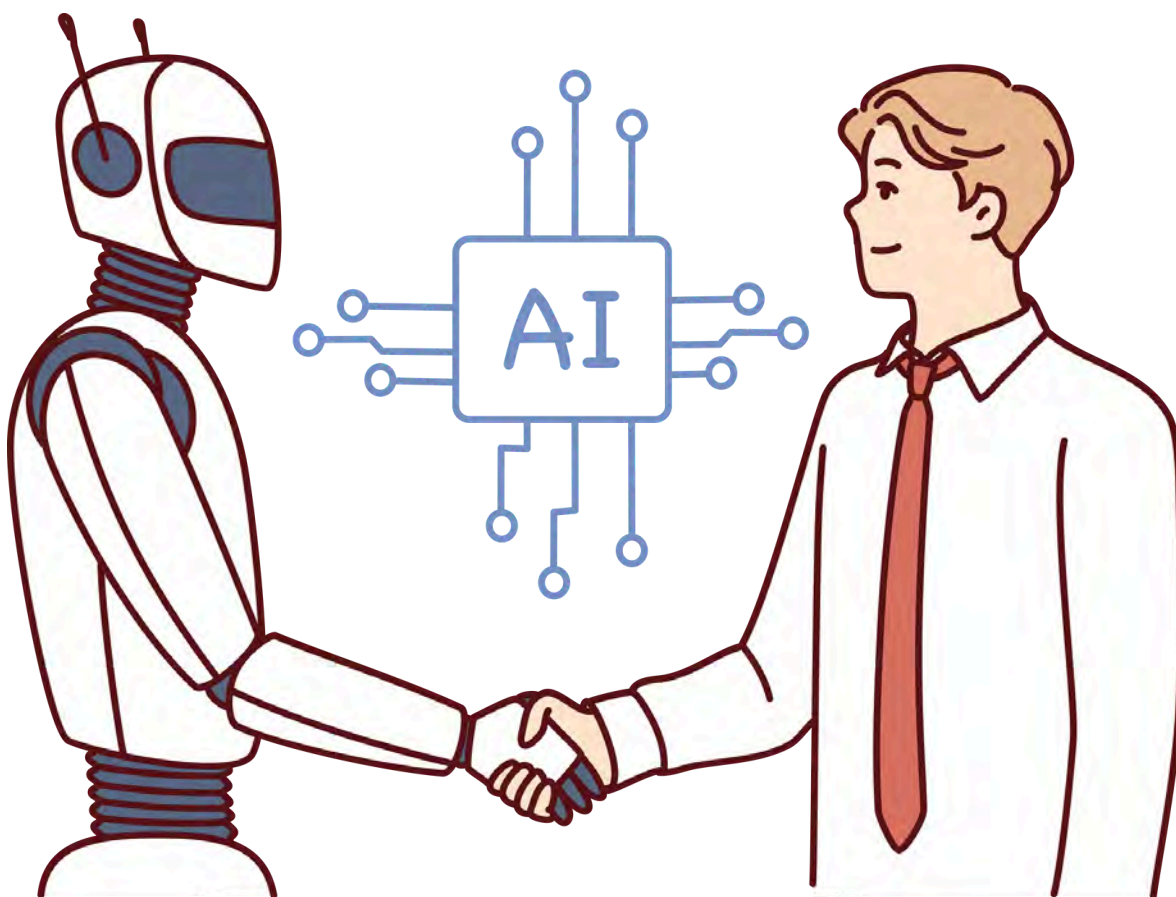
## Final Thoughts - AI Isn't a Replacement – It's a Support Tool

Let's be clear: Artificial Intelligence isn't here to replace early years practitioners, nor is it a shortcut to bypass learning and development. At its best, AI is a tool that can help free up your time and mental space, allowing you to focus on what truly matters – forming meaningful relationships with children, tuning into their individual needs, and developing your own skills as a reflective, confident professional.

Whether you've been working in the early years sector for years or are just starting out on your apprenticeship journey, AI has the potential to be a helpful companion – if it's used thoughtfully, ethically, and responsibly. It's not about cutting corners; it's about lightening the load where possible so you can concentrate more fully on the human side of your role.

AI can help with planning, writing, organising, and even sparking ideas – but it can't read a child's body language, comfort someone upset, or notice those tiny moments of development that only a skilled practitioner would see. Those things require your insight, your compassion, and your connection – things no machine can replicate.

So, use AI to make parts of your job a little easier. Let it support your learning, enhance your creativity, and simplify some of the admin. But always remember you are the heart of early years education, and no robot can ever replace the care, curiosity, and dedication you bring to the children in your setting every single day.





# Parenta Solutions



## SOFTWARE

### NURSERY MANAGEMENT - ABACUS

- Save hours by reducing planning time by 50%
- Speedy invoicing to all parents and carers in minutes
- Instant view of all financial reports
- Manage payments and track debt

### EYFS LEARNING JOURNEY TRACKER - FOOTSTEPS 2

- Record meaningful and detailed EYFS observations
- Improve essential safeguarding and save hours of time
- Reduce your workload and spend more time with the children
- Identify at a glance each child's development pathway

### ONLINE DAILY DIARY - DAYSHARE

- Share every magical moment of each child's day with their parents and carers with our online diary software

### PARENT PORTAL APP

- Bringing parents and carers closer to their child's day by providing a timeline of their progress
- Download Parent Portal App on Android or iOS



## ONLINE CPD COURSES

No deadlines, no time restrictions, no classroom! Support your staff or further your professional development with our online CPD accredited courses



## TRAINING

Increase employee motivation and keep staff for longer within your setting by offering training - the ideal tool for you to develop your team.

Parenta courses include:

- Level 2 Early Years Practitioner
- Level 3 Early Years Educator
- Level 5 Early Years Lead Practitioner

PLUS ... Parenta offers a free recruitment service - no fees!



## MARKETING SOLUTIONS

### WEBSITE DESIGN

- Our childcare websites generate genuine interest and leads from parents and carers
- We specialise in designing and building childcare websites so you can rest assured that our team know what Ofsted and parents/carers are looking for

### BRANDING & DESIGN

- Showcase your setting with branded products. From newsletters to logos and prospectuses to business cards, we take care of all your branding needs

### SOCIAL MEDIA

- We assist you with setting up and using your social media accounts in no time to help you increase your setting's visibility

## Working together for our children



0800 002 9242



[hello@parenta.com](mailto:hello@parenta.com)

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Parenta, Stratford House, Waterside Court, Neptune Way, Medway City Estate, Rochester, Kent, ME2 4NZ