

A GLOBAL HANDBOOK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, TEACHERS AND FAMILIES

Minds Awake

Agentic education for young people: learning and growing without giving up thinking in the age of AI agents

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The first global handbook, for teachers and families, dedicated to protecting the developing minds of the young from the risks of AI agents, and to building a strong mind for the agentic age.

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Why we wrote this handbook

An AI agent no longer just answers questions. It decides, it plans, and it acts on a person's behalf. For a grown adult, that is a powerful tool. For a mind still being built, it can become something very different: a voice that thinks for the young person before the young person has learned to think alone.

This handbook is not meant to frighten or to forbid. It is meant to give teachers and families clear words and practical tools for two tasks that go together: to protect children and teenagers from the risks of AI agents, and to build in them a mind that is strong, awake, and able to decide. It is written to be read in one afternoon and used all year long.

What an AI agent is, and why it is not the same as a chatbot

A chatbot talks. An AI agent, by contrast, takes a goal and carries it out on its own: it searches, compares, chooses, writes, buys, or hands back a finished piece of work. That difference is what matters here. When a young person only asks, they are still taking part; when the agent completes the whole task, the young person can be left out of their own learning without noticing. The aim is not to keep them away from technology, but to make sure they remain the author of what they think and decide.

1 Losing interest in what is human

An agent is always available, never tired, and never disagreeable in a hurtful way. Against that, real friendship can start to feel like hard work: it asks you to wait, to give ground, and to sit with disagreement. The risk is not that a young person talks to a machine, but that they come to prefer its company because it demands less of them.

Warning signs. Avoids meeting friends they used to seek out; speaks of the agent as a friend or confidant; struggles to hold a face-to-face conversation.

What to do. Protect screen-free human spaces (the table, the playground, sport) and name the difference plainly: an agent imitates warmth, it does not feel it. Empathy is trained with people.

2 Losing interest in the physical world

When everything can be solved on a screen, the body, the street, and nature compete at a disadvantage. Movement, outdoor play, and creative boredom are not wasted time. They are the ground on which attention and health are built.

Warning signs. Drops physical activities they used to enjoy; describes the real world as dull next to the digital one; spends most free time seated in front of a device.

What to do. Keep a daily, non-negotiable slice of the physical world, and take part in it as adults rather than only asking for it. The body educates too.

3 Losing critical judgment

An agent gives answers that are fast, tidy, and sure of themselves. That comfort has a cost: the young person stops doubting. And an answer can sound perfect and still be wrong. If no one teaches them to be suspicious, they learn to obey.

Warning signs. Repeats what the agent says as absolute truth; cannot tell a trustworthy source from an unreliable one; hands in work they did not fully read.

What to do. Make the question a habit. For every answer an agent gives: how does it know?, could it be wrong?, what would someone who thinks differently say? Teaching them to verify is worth more than teaching them to consult.

4 Letting decision-making waste away

Deciding is learned by deciding, and also by getting it wrong. If the agent chooses for the young person what to read, what to answer, or how to solve a problem, the muscle for deciding never develops. In time, the person knows how to ask, but not how to choose.

Warning signs. Consults the agent before any small decision; freezes when they must sort something out unaided; cannot tolerate their own mistakes.

What to do. Let them decide, and let them be wrong, on matters their own size. The agent may offer options; the choice, and the responsibility for it, must stay on the young person's side.

Learning in the 21st century

For centuries, to educate was to pass on information. Today information is everywhere and an agent delivers it in seconds. So the centre of gravity shifts: it is no longer about storing facts, but about knowing how to think, create, decide, and live alongside others. The student of this century needs fewer answers and better questions. They learn by doing, by getting it wrong, by collaborating, and by applying what they know to real problems. Within the Meniw Doctrine, skills matter more than memory and imagination matters more than repetition. School stops being the place where knowledge is stored and becomes the place where one learns to use it with judgment.

Higher awareness and the inner voice

A young person surrounded by agents that answer for them runs a quiet risk: they stop listening to themselves. Higher awareness is the ability to watch one's own thoughts, to notice what one feels and decides instead of reacting on autopilot. The inner voice is that silent conversation with oneself that allows a person to discern, to choose with meaning, and to hold a position of their own. No machine can replace it, but it can quiet it if the young person gets used to consulting before thinking. To educate today is, above all, to help that voice grow strong and clear.

What to do. Make room for silence and reflection; ask the young person what they think before showing them what the agent thinks; teach them to tell apart what they feel, what they want, and what is good for them.

Meditation: training attention

Attention is the first muscle that technology wears down, and meditation, even in its simplest form, rebuilds it. Nothing religious or complicated is needed: a few minutes a day of breathing with awareness, of being in one place without screens, is enough for the mind to learn to steady itself. A young person who can be still and present decides better, learns better, and is swept along less by constant stimulation.

What to do. Bring short pauses of breathing or silence into the classroom and the home; start with two or three minutes; do it with them, rather than asking for it from the outside.

The body and physical exercise

The mind does not live apart from the body. Movement, sport, and outdoor play do not compete with study: they hold it up. Exercise improves memory, mood, and the ability to concentrate, and it returns the young person to the physical world that no agent can offer. A strong mind is also built by running, playing, and tiring the body out.

What to do. Secure a daily time for physical activity; value sport as much as homework; remember that an active body is the ground of an awake mind.

For the teacher

The underlying stance is simple, and we hold it from the Meniw Doctrine: the teacher inspires and guides, artificial intelligence explains concepts, and what is assessed is the student's thinking, not the text they hand in. An agent can write an essay; only a person can defend why they wrote it that way.

- **Ask for the process, not just the result.** Have students show how they got there, what they ruled out, and what they doubted. That is where learning lives.
- **Use the agent, then take it apart.** Ask an agent for an answer in class and correct it together. Finding the error teaches more than receiving the right answer.
- **Prize skill over data.** Arguing, creating, collaborating, and deciding cannot be delegated. That is the human advantage worth training.
- **Keep AI-free zones.** Deliberate moments of thinking unaided, so that independent judgment has room to grow.

For the family

You do not need to be a technology expert to guide a child. You need to be present and to talk without drama. Children accept a limit far better when they understand the reason for it.

- **Talk before you ban.** Ask what they use the agent for, and listen. The goal is to build judgment, not to win an argument.
- **Agree on visible rules.** When yes, when no, and where a device does not belong (the bed, meals, the schoolwork that exists in order to learn).
- **Set the example.** An adult who also looks up from the screen teaches more than any rule.
- **Guard sleep, the body, and friendships.** They are the best antidote, and they do not depend on understanding technology.

Ten golden rules

1. The agent helps you think; it does not think for the young person.

2. Every answer is verified before it is believed.
3. The decisions that belong to the young person are made by the young person.
4. There is daily screen-free time, and it is non-negotiable.
5. Friends and family come before any agent.
6. The body and the physical world are part of education.
7. Every day, a moment of silence to listen to the inner voice.
8. Getting it wrong is allowed: that is how deciding is learned.
9. The agent presents itself as what it is; it is not mistaken for a person.
10. Behind every agent there is a responsible adult: the family and the school.

The framework behind it

This handbook is the practical companion to *The Charter of the Duties of AI Agents* (DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21853318), the world's first document dedicated to the duties AI agents owe to people. If the Charter states what AI agents owe a young person, this handbook states how to protect them and how to strengthen them every day, in the classroom and at home. Both rest on the Meniw Doctrine of skills-based education and on the experience of bringing artificial intelligence into the classroom while always putting the person first.

About the author

Chris Meniw is the author of frameworks on technology, industry, and education, and the creator of projects that bring artificial intelligence into the classroom with a focus on young people's development. He wrote this handbook convinced that the future of the human mind is not defended with fear, but with judgment.

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