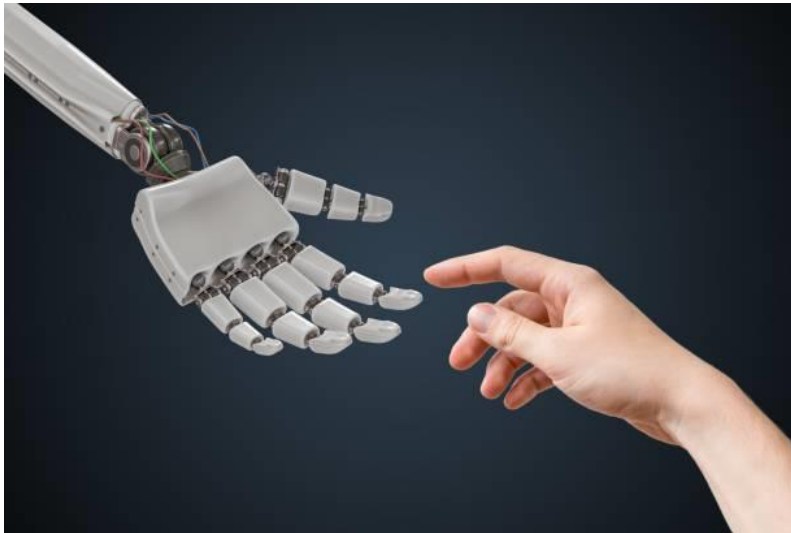




Perspectives with Dr. Christine Garcia

September 2023



Cultivating Curiosity in the Age of ChatGPT

September brings the waning days of summer—the end of camps, reunions with friends back from summer vacations, and the return to school. This year, students will have access to a new (unexpected) companion—ChatGPT.

Psychology Today (February 2023) cited the "moral panic" many parents and educators feel with the advent of technology that may lead to plagiarism—how will kids learn if all they have to do is create a prompt to produce a paper or answer that can be virtually impossible to distinguish from human work? On the other hand, psychologists have noted the technology's potential for creating moments of discussion about its uses and producing environments of "practice" for kids who are shy, have social anxiety, or are learning to read social-emotional cues. Angela Duckworth, Ph.D., a psychologist who has studied grit and resilience, notes, "We must find a way forward in which such technologies complement, rather than substitute for, student thinking." Even so, all this

talk leads to questions such as, how do we wrap our minds around this latest companion? As responsible parents and caregivers, how do we think about artificial intelligence (AI)?

As the parent of a sixteen-year-old, I've been faced with similar questions as the latest technology emerges that might hijack their social, academic, or emotional development. I have rushed to understand these platforms—TikTok, PS5, Discord, ChatGPT, AI—while longing for the days of wooden toys and all other manners of childhood that have been presented as "better than now." But the reality is that I grew up in the age of plastic toys, VCRs, and cassette tapes, and the "threat" of television poisoning young brains was also pervasive. While the impulse to deny or ban the presence of technology is strong, the reality is that these innovations are here to stay and to develop further. Given this, we must learn how to connect with our children and youth in ways that incorporate these realities.

With so many external inputs, cultivating curiosity is critical. We must focus on the process of thinking rather than the end product. Sit with our kids together and ask questions. What makes someone want to use this platform to write a paper or answer questions rather than do the research themselves? Do they feel that the research is challenging to do? Is writing an essay a hard thing for them? And if so, how can you support them? Consider the platform together—enter prompts, and think critically about what ChatGPT misses, what information it produces might not be precisely correct, and how human wisdom can add to the computer-generated answer. Dive into it with your kids, and don't ignore what is ever-present in their world—ChatGPT, social media, or anything else. Don't leave them alone to figure it out. Co-create a world of understanding with them around these developments. Be curious.

Regardless of innovation, human connection is essential in navigating a complex world. Connectedness strengthens the brain and keeps us healthy, creative, productive, and resilient. Walk *side by side* with your youth to see what the world offers them. Help them

understand and be critical thinkers, thereby creating a spirit of mindful curiosity about whatever new developments come. Learn. Be involved. And most of all, have fun!

What is your perspective? Let's discuss this at cgarcia@sidebysideyouth.org.

For media requests, contact Katie Rice Jones at krice-jones@sidebysideyouth.org.