Power of Zero

Key Statistics

The Challenge

We are entering a new chapter of the digital age in which artificial intelligence is not merely a tool for information retrieval and research, but a formative presence in childhood and adolescence. AI systems are now shaping what children attend to, how they manage emotions, how they solve problems, and how they understand themselves and others.

For millennia, children developed empathy, moral reasoning, and self-regulation within human relationships — families, peers, schools, and communities. Today, artificial systems are increasingly displacing these traditional sources of character formation. They simulate responsiveness, affirmation, and care without possessing understanding or moral accountability. The question is no longer whether children will use AI. The question is whether they will develop the character strengths required to use it wisely.

The Digital Landscape

AI is no longer a future concern. It is already a daily presence in children's lives across every age group.

$12.3B → $60B+

The global smart toy market is projected to grow from $12.3 billion in 2023 to over $60 billion by 2033. The primary users of AI-powered toys are school-age children aged 6–12 — precisely the years in which critical thinking, identity, and judgment are forming.

Smart Toy Market Analysis, 2023–2033

45% / 62%

... of children aged 9–10 and 11–12 respectively are already using generative AI tools. Even younger children (ages 5–8) engage daily with AI through smart speakers, adaptive games, and conversational toys.

EU Kids Online, 2026

1 in 3

U.S. teenagers say their conversations with AI companions are as satisfying — or more satisfying — than talking with real-life friends.

Common Sense Media, 2025

No. 1 use case for AI is therapy and companionship

Therapy and companionship have become the leading reasons adults use generative AI — a trend accelerating rapidly among young people.

Harvard Business Review, 2025

The Wellbeing Crisis

The rise of digital technology has coincided with a measurable deterioration in young people's mental health and social wellbeing across the developed world.

2×

Rates of major depression among U.S. teenagers roughly doubled between 2010 and 2020, for both boys and girls.

U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2020

2×

The share of students reporting high levels of loneliness at school has doubled since the early 2010s — across English-speaking countries, Latin America, Europe, and East Asia.

Twenge, Haidt et al., "Worldwide increases in adolescent loneliness," 2021

8.5 hrs

The average daily screen time for teenagers aged 13–18, not including screen use for school.

Common Sense Media, 2021

The Developmental Questions

Power of Zero has identified five questions that researchers, educators, and policymakers must now confront. These questions frame our programme design and guide our research agenda.

— *How does early reliance on generative AI shape attentional discipline in children whose executive functions are still forming?*

— *What happens to empathy when emotionally persuasive systems mirror and validate without ever demanding the negotiation of real difference?*

— *How does cognitive offloading — outsourcing thinking to machines — affect the development of critical reasoning and intellectual humility?*

— *What are the implications of blurred authorship for children's developing sense of integrity, effort, and moral responsibility?*

— *How does moral discernment develop when advice is increasingly mediated by artificial systems rather than parents, teachers, elders, or communities?*

The Case for Action

The evidence for social and emotional learning (SEL) as a protective and developmental intervention is robust. A landmark meta-analysis of 213 school-based SEL programmes involving 270,034 students found that SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, behaviour, and academic performance — equivalent to an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement (Durlak, Weissberg et al., Child Development, 2011).

A follow-up meta-analysis of 82 programmes found that benefits persisted for up to 18 years post-intervention, regardless of students' race, socioeconomic background, or school location (Taylor, Oberle et al., Child Development, 2017).

Power of Zero's programmes — Superpowers, First Device, and the No Bully Program — are built on this evidence base and designed for the specific challenges of the AI age.