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AI in the Toy Box:

How Parents View AI-Enabled Toys for Young Children

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Introduction

AI-enabled toys and child-focused devices are quickly moving from novelty to mainstream holiday offerings, marketed as playful, educational, and increasingly conversational companions for young children. Recent media coverage has highlighted both excitement and discomfort with this trend, as parents encounter toys that talk back, remember past interactions, and simulate social or emotional responsiveness (Hess & Messinger, 2025; Radesky, 2025; Suskind, 2025). At the same time, early safety testing has begun to surface potential risks specific to this area. Independent toy safety research has found that some AI-enabled toys collect sensitive data, such as children's voices and conversations, and, in testing, have generated inappropriate or developmentally unsuitable content (Murray et al., 2025). These products raise familiar questions about screen time and learning, but also introduce newer concerns about data collection, emotional attachment, and the role of AI in children's social development.

National research on teens finds that a large majority have already interacted with AI companions, often using them for curiosity-driven exploration, advice, or emotional support (Robb & Mann, 2025). These patterns of use raise important questions about emotional dependency and social development. Younger children may face even greater risks: Developmental research suggests that younger children may be even more susceptible to anthropomorphizing conversational technologies, trusting their outputs and forming attachments to responsive systems that appear social or caring (Radesky, 2025). As a result, questions raised by teen use of AI companions are highly relevant when considering AI-enabled toys designed for children age 0 to 8.

Common Sense Media's current AI risk assessments recommend that AI companions not be used by anyone under 18, reflecting concerns about emotional dependency, unsafe content, and data practices (Common Sense Media, 2025). As AI becomes embedded not only in apps but also in physical toys and play environments, it is important to examine whether parents perceive AI-enabled toys differently from AI companions, and under what conditions, if any, they see these products as appropriate for young children.

This report draws from a nationally representative survey of 1,004 parents, conducted December 1 to 8, 2025, to explore the perspectives of parents of children age 0 to 8 on AI-enabled toys. Specifically, it examines their current exposure to these toys, their purchase intentions, the hopes and concerns they hold, and the trade-offs they are currently weighing. The survey was conducted via web in English (*n* = 951) and Spanish (*n* = 53). Data was weighted to represent the target population of U.S. adults age 18 or older. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 3.4 percentage points. This survey was conducted by SSRS, with funding from Common Sense Media.

Respondents received the following definition: "When we say 'AI-enabled toys or devices,' we are NOT referring to general-purpose voice assistants like Alexa or Siri. We are asking specifically about toys or child-focused devices designed for kids, like 'smart' toys, robots, stuffed animals, or other physical toys that use AI. These toys may have AI chatbots embedded in them so that children can have conversations with them."

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Key Findings

1. Nearly half of parents (49%) have purchased or are considering AI-enabled toys/devices for their child.

A similar proportion (43%) say they do not own and do not intend to buy AI-enabled toys. Parents of older children (age 5 to 8) are more likely than those of younger children (age 0 to 4) to already own AI-enabled toys (19% vs. 12%). Black parents report the highest levels of adoption and purchase intent (78%), compared to Hispanic (61%) and White parents (36%). Future interest is higher among lower-income households (those that make under $50,000 per year), with 65% either planning to buy or considering a purchase, compared to 45% of middle-income (annual household income of $50,000–$99,999) and 39% of higher-income households (annual household income of $100,000 or greater).

Table 1: AI toy ownership or purchase intent

Note: Columns tested a/b/c – d/e/f – g/h. Items with different superscripts differ significantly (p < .05). Significance should be across rows, within demographic groups (race/ethnicity, household income, child age). Total amounts may not sum to 100% due to rounding or nonresponse.

		Race/Ethnicity			Household Income			Child Age	
	Total Parents N = 1,004	Black[a] n = 105	Latino/ Hispanic[b] n = 182	White[c] n = 610	<$50K[d] n = 316	$50K–<$100K[e] n = 284	$100K+[f] n = 404	0–4 Years[g] n = 544	5–8 Years[h] n = 460
Bought/Plan/ Consider (NET)	49%	78%[b,c]	61%[c]	36%	65%[e,f]	45%	39%	46%	53%
I have already bought one or more for my child	15%	35%[b,c]	16%	10%	16%	16%	19%	12%	19%[g]
Have not bought but definitely plan to	10%	13%[c]	16%[c]	6%	16%[e,f]	7%	7%	9%	11%
I have not bought one yet, but I am considering it	24%	30%[c]	28%[c]	19%	30%[e,f]	22%	22%	25%	24%
I do not plan to buy one	43%	16%	33%[a]	55%[a,b]	27%	48%[d]	53%[d]	47%[h]	39%
I am not sure	8%	6%	7%	9%	7%	7%	8%	7%	8%

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2. Nearly one in five (19%) parents say they would at least somewhat like an AI toy/device to be a companion for their child.

More than half (56%) of all parents say they do not want AI-enabled toys/devices to serve as a companion or sidekick for their child. Parents whose children already use AI toys daily are more open to companionship functions: 48% express at least some interest, compared to 23% of weekly or less frequent users and 12% of non-users. Resistance is higher among parents of younger children, with 84% of parents of 0- to 4-year-olds expressing little or no interest compared to 78% of parents of 5- to 8-year-olds.

Table 2: Parents who want AI-enabled toys to serve as a companion for their child

Note: Columns tested a/b/c – d/e/f – g/h. Items with different superscripts differ significantly ($p < .05$). Significance should be across rows, within demographic groups (race/ethnicity, household income, child age). Total amounts may not sum to 100% due to rounding or nonresponse. An asterisk (*) indicates greater than 0 but less than 0.5%.

		Race/Ethnicity			Household Income			Child Age	
	Total Parents N = 1,004	Black[a] n = 105	Latino/ Hispanic[b] n = 182	White[c] n = 610	<$50K[d] n = 316	$50K–<$100K[e] n = 284	$100K+[f] n = 404	0–4 Years[g] n = 544	5–8 Years[h] n = 460
Very much/Quite a bit/Somewhat (NET)	19%	40%[b,c]	28%[c]	10%	28%[e,f]	16%	14%	16%	22%[g]
Very much/Quite a bit (SUBNET)	4%	9%[c]	7%[c]	2%	7%[f]	3%	2%	3%	5%
Very much	1%	3%[c]	2%	1%	3%[f]	1%	*	1%	2%
Quite a bit	3%	6%[c]	5%[c]	1%	4%	2%	2%	2%	3%
Somewhat	15%	31%[c]	21%[c]	8%	21%[e,f]	13%	11%	13%	17%
A little/Not at all (NET)	81%	60%	72%[a]	90%[a,b]	72%	84%[d]	86%[d]	84%[h]	78%
A little	25%	26%	26%	23%	32%[f]	26%[f]	18%	27%	23%
A little	56%	34%	46%	67%[a,b]	40%	58%[d]	68%[d,e]	57%	55%

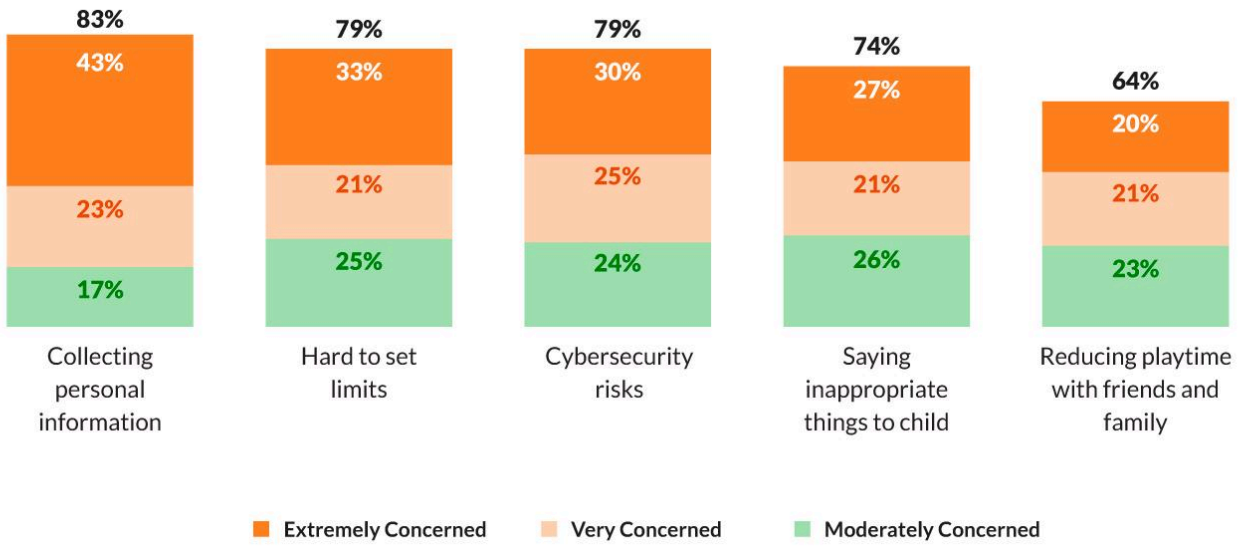
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3. Collection of personal information is parents' top concern about AI toys, with 83% expressing at least moderate concern.

Other top concerns are challenges with setting usage limits (79% concerned) and cybersecurity risks (79%). The possibility of toys/devices saying inappropriate things to their child concerns 74% of parents, followed by a reduction in playtime with friends and family (64%). Nearly half (43%) say they are extremely concerned about data collection.

Figure 1: Parent concerns about AI-enabled toys/devices (% concerned)

Base: All parents of children age 0 to 8 (N = 1,004).



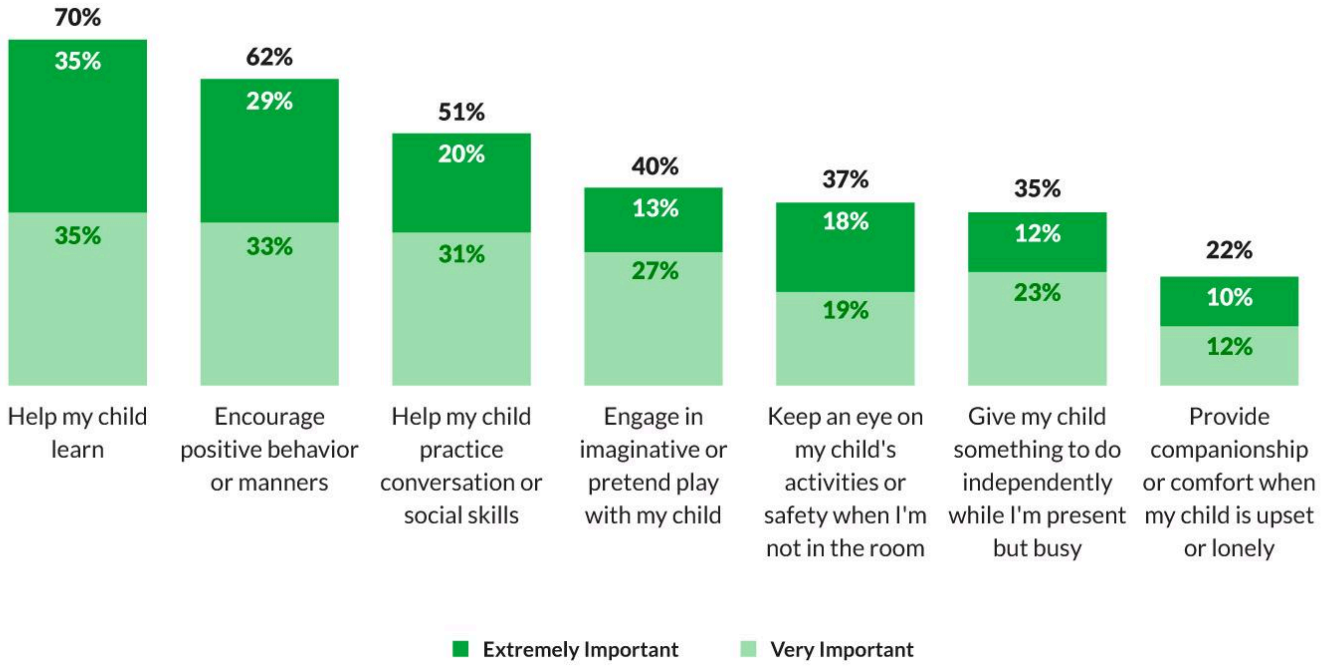
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4. Seven in 10 parents (70%) say helping their child learn is an extremely or very important priority for AI toys.

Encouraging positive behavior or manners (62%) and helping children practice conversation or social skills (51%) round out the top three priorities. A second tier includes engaging in imaginative play (40%), monitoring their child's activities when the parent is not in the room (37%), and giving their child something to do independently (35%). Companionship ranks lowest of the options asked about (22%). Black and Latino/Hispanic parents place significantly higher importance on these benefits compared to White parents, and lower-income parents place higher importance compared to higher-income parents.

Figure 2: Parent priorities for AI-enabled toy and device capabilities

Base: All parents of children age 0 to 8 (N = 1,004).



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Table 3: Parent priorities for AI-enabled toys (% extremely/very important)

Note: Columns tested a/b/c – d/e/f . Items with different superscripts differ significantly (p < .05). Significance should be across rows, within demographic groups (race/ethnicity, household income).

	Race/Ethnicity			Household Income		
	Black[a] *n = 105*	Latino/ Hispanic[b] *n = 182*	White[c] *n = 610*	<$50K[d] *n = 316*	$50K–<$100K[e] *n = 284*	$100K+[f] *n = 404*
Help my child learn	84%[c]	79%[c]	67%	75%	67%	68%
Encourage positive behaviors or manners	78%[c]	68%	60%	69%[f]	61%	58%
Help my child practice conversation or social skills	68%[c]	65%[c]	42%	63%[f]	49%	43%
Engage in imaginative or pretend play with my child	51%[c]	48%[c]	36%	50%[e,f]	40%[f]	30%
Keep an eye on my child's activities or safety when I'm not in the room	54%[c]	53%[c]	29%	53%[e,f]	37%[f]	25%
Give my child something to do independently while I'm present but busy	48%[c]	41%[c]	28%	41%[e,f]	32%	30%
Provide companionship or comfort when my child is upset or lonely	41%[c]	35%[c]	14%	40%[e,f]	19%[f]	10%

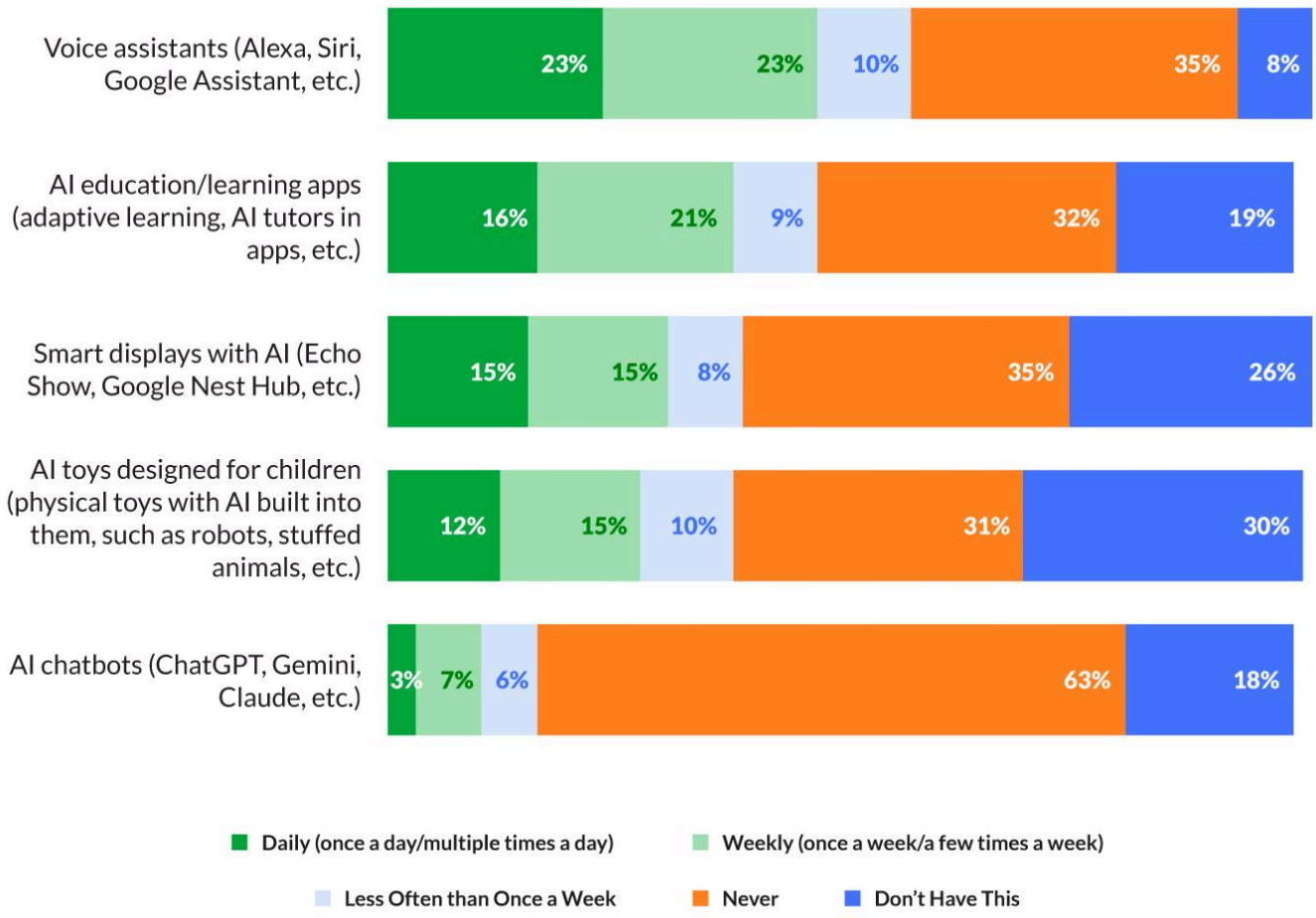
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5. Voice assistants are the most widely used AI technology among children age 0 to 8, with nearly one in four (23%) using them daily.

An equal proportion (23%) use voice assistants weekly. AI educational apps are the next most common, with 16% using them at least daily and another 21% using them on a weekly basis. AI-enabled toys designed for children are used daily by 12% and weekly by 15%. Children age 5 to 8 are more likely than younger children to use AI toys at least weekly (40% vs. 33%).

Figure 3: How often children age 0 to 8 interact with AI technologies

Base: All parents of children age 0 to 8 (N = 1,004). Total amounts may not sum to 100% due to rounding or nonresponse.



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6. Nearly three in four parents (74%) are concerned that AI toys might say something inappropriate, untrue, or unsafe to their child.

Almost half (48%) say they are very or extremely concerned. However, among parents whose children currently use AI toys, only 4% report that the toy has actually said something inappropriate, untrue, or unsafe. But one-third (33%) of these parents say they are unsure whether this has happened, which suggests limited visibility into their children's interactions. Concern about inappropriate content is also closely tied to broader data anxieties: Parents who are concerned about how AI toys collect or share information are far more likely to worry about inappropriate, untrue, or unsafe outputs (82% report at least moderate concern), compared with just 33% among those who are slightly or not at all concerned about information sharing.

Figure 4: How concerned parents are about AI toys/devices saying inappropriate/untrue/unsafe things to child

Base: All parents of children age 0 to 8 (N = 1,004).

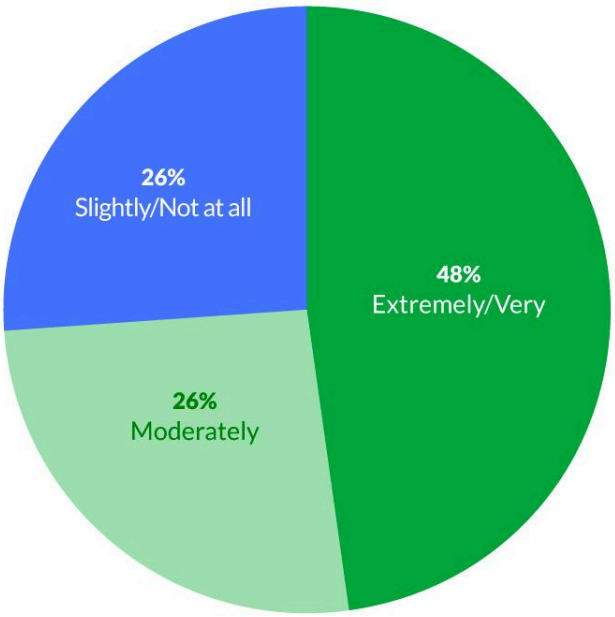
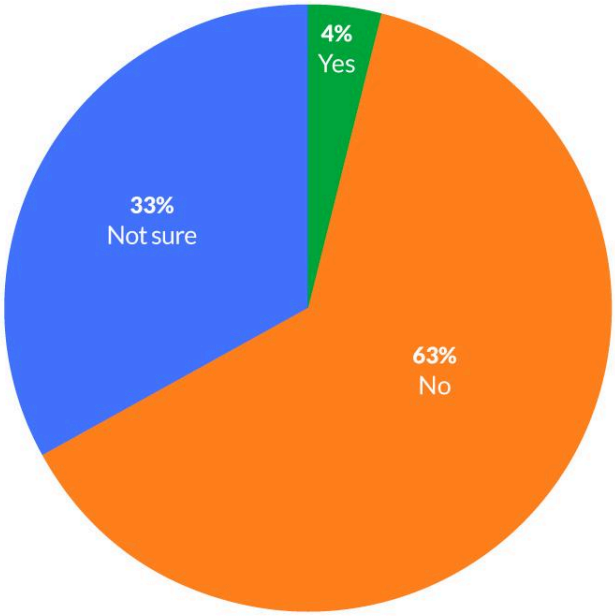


Figure 5: Reports of unsafe or inappropriate AI toy behavior

Base: Parents of children who interact with AI toys/devices (n = 348).

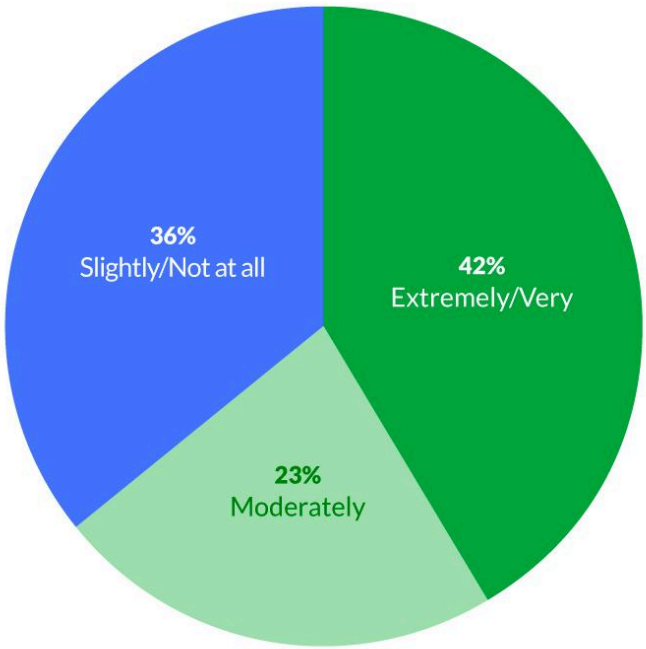


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7. Nearly two-thirds of parents (64%) are at least moderately concerned that AI toys will reduce time spent with family and friends.

Over two in five (42%) are very or extremely concerned. Parents with one child in the household are more likely to express high concern than those with two or more children (48% vs. 39%). This may be because these parents have already navigated TV, tablets, and gaming before and so have a sense that new technology does not necessarily erase social play.

Figure 6: How concerned parents are about AI-enabled toys/devices reducing playtime with friends/family
Base: All parents of children age 0 to 8 (N = 1,004).



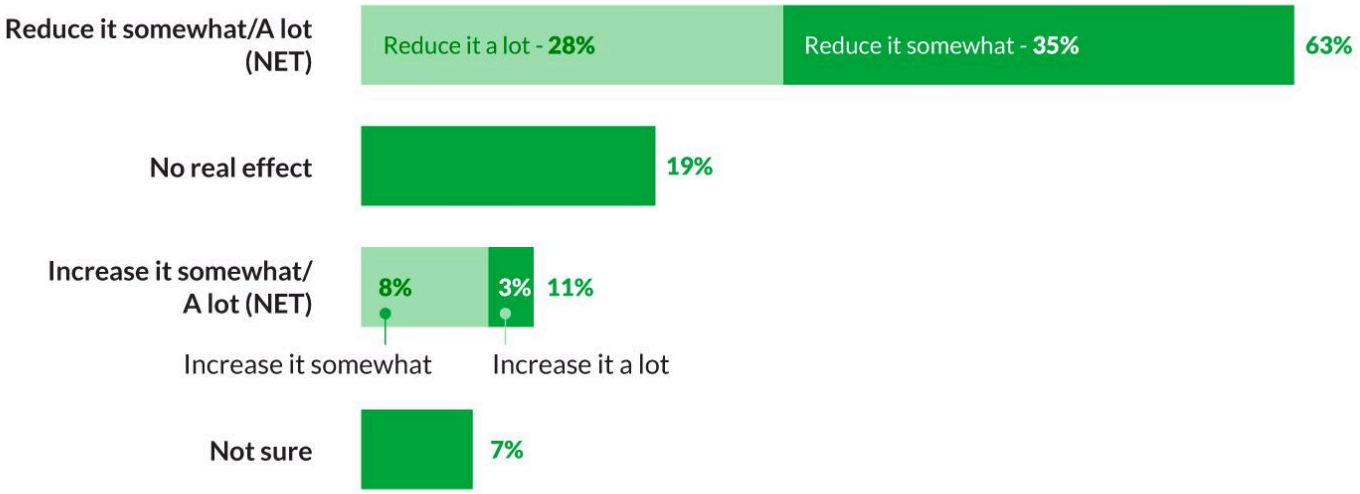
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8. Nearly two-thirds of parents (63%) expect AI toys to reduce time spent on traditional play such as blocks, outdoor play, dolls, or drawing.

More than one in four (28%) foresee AI toys reducing their child's traditional play time "a lot."

Figure 7: How parents think AI toys would affect time spent on other play (blocks, dolls, outdoor play, drawing)

Base: All parents of children age 0 to 8 (N = 1,004).



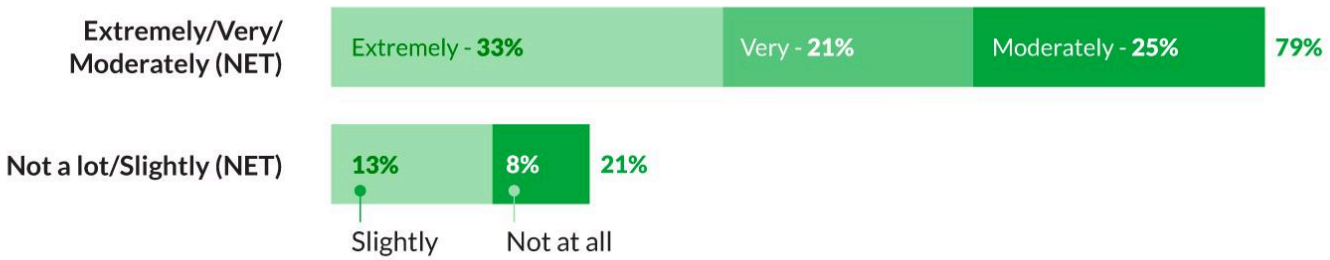
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9. Nearly 8 in 10 parents (79%) are concerned about difficulties with setting limits on their child's use of AI toys.

Nearly eight in ten parents (79%) report at least moderate concern that their child might want to use an AI-enabled toy or device so often that it becomes difficult to set limits, such as arguing when it is turned off, having trouble stopping, or becoming overly reliant on the device for play or homework. Parents whose children do not use AI toys are more likely to be concerned than current users: 86% of households with non-users express at least moderate concern about setting limits, compared to 70% of households with daily users and 68% of households with weekly users. However, even among parents of current users, the majority are concerned about managing limits.

Figure 8: How concerned parents are that it would be difficult to set limits on their child's use of AI toys

Base: All parents of children age 0 to 8 (N = 1,004).



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10. About one in four parents (23%) say they would be likely to use AI toys in place of screen time.

Nearly half of parents (45%) are unsure whether AI toys could serve as an alternative to screen time. Substitution appears most plausible among the heaviest users: 42% of parents whose children use AI toys daily say they would likely replace screen time with AI toy use, compared to 25% for parents of less frequent users and 18% for parents of non-users.

Table 4: Likelihood of parents using AI toys/devices in place of screen time (% likelihood)

Note: Columns tested a/b/c. Items with different superscripts differ significantly ($p < .05$). Significance should be across rows. Total amounts may not sum to 100% due to rounding or nonresponse.

		Child's Use of AI Toys		
	Total Parents *N = 1,004*	Once Per Day or More[a] *n = 110*	Few Times Per Week or Less[b] *n = 238*	Never/ Don't Own[c] *n = 632*
Very likely/Likely (NET)	23%	42%[b,c]	25%	18%
Very likely	4%	10%[b,c]	4%	4%
Likely	19%	33%[b,c]	21%[c]	15%
Unsure	45%	42%	49%	44%
Unlikely/Very unlikely (NET)	32%	15%	27%[a]	38%[a,b]
Unlikely	16%	12%	16%	16%
Very unlikely	17%	3%	10%	22%[a,b]

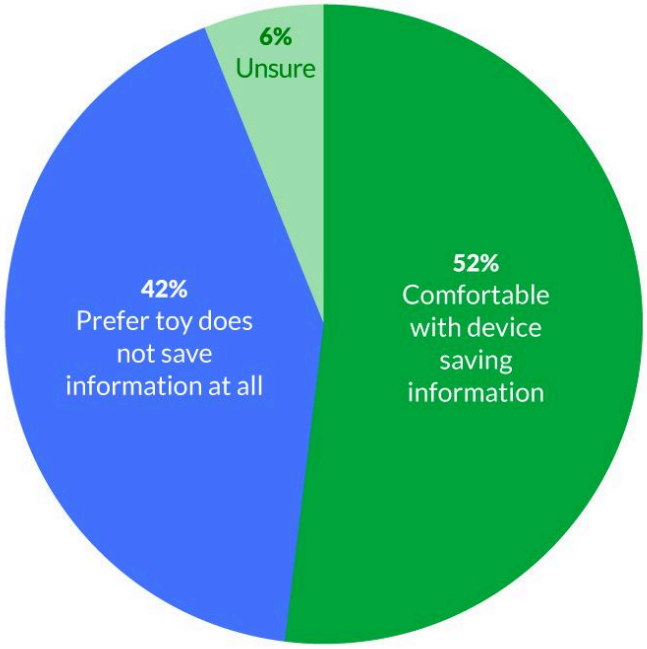
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11. Four in 10 parents (42%) would prefer that AI toys save no data at all.

Among the 52% who accept some data storage, preferences vary: 27% are comfortable only if parents can view and delete stored data, 19% are comfortable only if data stays on the device, and 6% are comfortable with cloud storage.

Figure 9: Comfort with AI toys saving information

Base: All parents of children age 0 to 8 (N = 1,004).



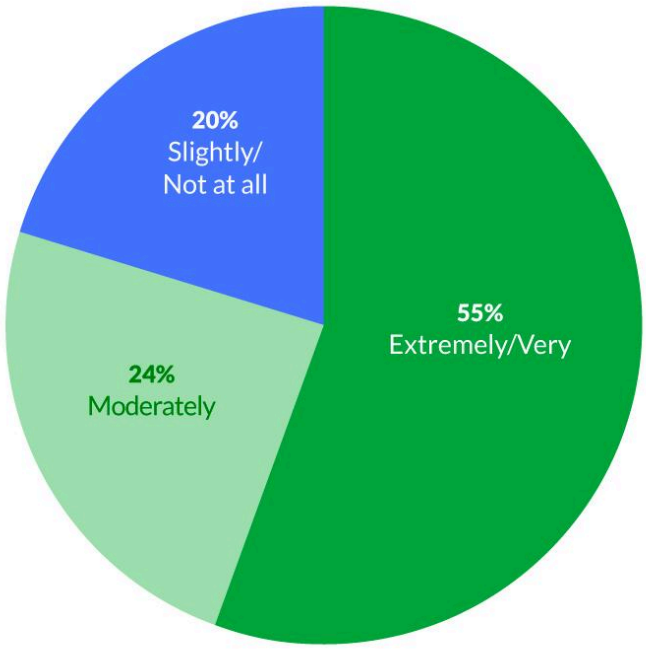
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12. The vast majority of parents (80%) are at least moderately concerned about cybersecurity risks with AI toys/devices, including hacking, unauthorized access, and insecure connections.

More than half (55%) are very or extremely concerned. White parents are more likely than Black parents to express the highest level of concern (34% vs. 22% extremely concerned), but concern levels are otherwise consistent across race/ethnicity and income groups. Non-owners with no intent to purchase AI toys express the highest levels of concern, though the majority of current users are also concerned (87% are at least moderately concerned vs. 69% of current owners and 75% of those who would consider purchasing).

Figure 10: Percent of parents who are concerned about cybersecurity risks with AI toys/devices

Base: All parents of children age 0 to 8 (N = 1,004).



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Conclusion

Taken together, these findings suggest that parents are not approaching AI-enabled toys with unguarded enthusiasm or blanket rejection, but with cautious discernment. Many parents see potential value in AI toys that support learning, structured engagement, or skill practice, especially for older children, while remaining wary of designs that feel overly social or difficult to control. Across nearly every measure, parents draw a clear line between AI as a tool and AI as a companion. Interest drops sharply when toys are framed as emotional supports or "friends," and concern rises when parents feel uncertain about how data is collected or questionable content that their child might hear. This pattern reflects parents' broader desire to preserve human relationships, imaginative play, and parental oversight as central features of early childhood.

These findings also sit within a broader body of Common Sense Media research and guidance on social and companion-style AI products. Common Sense Media currently does not recommend AI companions for anyone under 18, reflecting concerns about emotional dependency, unsafe or unpredictable content, and data practices. While AI-enabled toys are not always positioned in the same way as AI companions designed for teens or adults, parents' responses suggest that they are actively evaluating where these products fall along that same continuum.

Many parents are still undecided about how AI-enabled toys might fit into their homes, and are unsure whether these products will meaningfully replace screen time or enhance other forms of play. As AI capabilities continue to move into physical toys and play environments, these findings underscore the importance of thoughtful design, clear boundaries, and transparency for families. Rather than signaling panic or inevitability, parents' responses point to a desire for guidance grounded in child development, recognizing both the appeal of emerging technologies and the importance of relationships and play in children's everyday lives.

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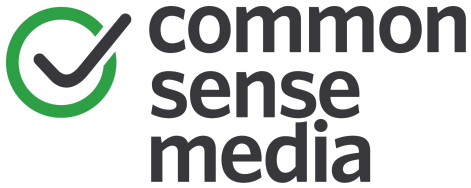
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