PROJECT LENS

RESOURCE GUIDE 01 OF 06

AI Safety Guide

See AI clearly.

Think clearly in an AI-powered world.

L	Learn	Understand AI.
E	Evaluate	Question and verify.
N	Navigate	Know when and how to use it.
S	Secure	Protect yourself and others.

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01

Welcome

AI can be a helpful tool, as long as you stay in charge. This guide shows you how to use it safely, spot when it gets things wrong, and protect yourself from AI-powered scams.

This guide is for older adults, family members, and caregivers. You do not need any technical background.

How to use this guide

- Read one section at a time. Each one stands on its own.
- Keep the safety card on the last page near your phone or computer.
- Share it with a friend. Talking it over is one of the best ways to learn.

Project LENS stands for **Learn, Evaluate, Navigate, Secure**. Our motto: *AI can assist your judgment. It shouldn't replace it.*

02

What AI is, in plain language

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a computer program that learns patterns from huge amounts of examples. It then uses those patterns to make a guess: the next word in a sentence, the face in a photo, the song you might like. AI is a big field, and it is changing fast. Chatbots are just the kind you are most likely to use.

The key word is **guess**. AI does not "know" things the way a person does. It predicts what a good answer probably looks like. Most of the time the guess is useful. Sometimes it is confidently wrong.

You already use AI every day

Where	What the AI is doing
Phone and email	Filtering spam, suggesting words as you type
Maps and GPS	Predicting traffic and choosing your route
TV and streaming	Recommending shows based on what you watched
Voice assistants (Siri, Alexa, Google)	Turning your voice into a request
Online shopping	Showing "you might also like" items
Banking	Flagging unusual charges on your card
Chatbots (ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, Claude)	Writing answers to questions you type

Chatbots are the newest kind. You type a question in everyday words, and it writes back. That makes them handy, and it also means they need a little care.

03

Before you use AI, ask three questions

A few seconds of thinking first saves time and keeps you safe.

1. **CAN I do this without AI?**
    - A phone call, a library visit, a trusted website, or a quick search may work just as well.
    - AI runs in large data centers that use a lot of electricity. Many also use water for cooling, though how much varies a lot by facility (Environmental and Energy Study Institute, 2025). One question is small, but billions add up. If something simpler works, use that.
2. **SHOULD I use AI for this?**
    - Skip AI for personal beliefs, heartfelt messages, or creative work that should sound like you.
    - Skip AI for big decisions you cannot undo: money, medical choices, legal matters.
    - Skip AI for things that don't need doing at all.
3. **HOW can I use it well?**
    - Be clear and specific about what you want.
    - Leave out personal details (see the next section).
    - Check anything important with a trusted source before you act on it.

If you answered "yes, I can do it another way" or "no, I shouldn't," you're done. If another way works just as well, use it.

04

Never type these into a chatbot

Treat a chatbot like a postcard: assume anything you write could be seen by someone else. Many AI companies store conversations and may use them to improve their products.

Keep these private

- [ ] Social Security or Medicare number
- [ ] Bank, credit card, or account numbers
- [ ] Passwords, PINs, or security question answers
- [ ] Your full name together with your birth date or home address
- [ ] Photos of your ID, checks, or medical records
- [ ] Medical details tied to your name
- [ ] Private information about family or friends

Ask without the private part. You can still get help. Just remove the details.

Instead of this	Try this
"My account 4417-xxxx at Chase was charged $89. What do I do?"	"A charge I don't recognize showed up on my bank statement. What steps should I take?"
"I'm Mary Jones, 78, at 12 Elm St. Help me write to my landlord."	"Help me write a polite letter to a landlord about a broken heater."
"Here's my lab report with my name on it. What does it mean?"	"What does a high A1C number usually mean? I'll ask my doctor about my own results."

Quick tip: Most chatbots have a setting to turn off chat history or training. Ask a family member or someone you trust to help you find it.

05

AI can sound sure and still be wrong

A smooth, confident answer is not the same as a correct one. Here are the three most common problems.

- **Made-up facts ("hallucinations").** AI sometimes invents things that sound real: a quote, a phone number, a law, a book, a medicine dose. It is not lying on purpose. It is guessing. This happens less than it used to, but it still happens.
- **Old or unchecked information.** Some chatbots only know information up to a certain date. Many can now search the web, but none of them check whether what they find is true. They can still miss recent changes to prices, rules, or news.
- **Bias.** AI learns from what people have written online, so it can repeat unfair or one-sided views. It is not a neutral judge.

Double-check before you act

1. **Ask: "Where did you get that?"** Then check that the source exists and says what AI claims.
2. **Look it up somewhere else.** Use an official website (ending in .gov or a known organization) or call directly.
3. **Never trust a phone number from AI.** Get numbers from the back of your card, a bill, or the official website.
4. **Ask a real expert** for anything about your health, money, or legal rights.
5. **Watch for over-confidence.** If an answer feels too perfect or too certain, slow down.

06

AI is making scams harder to spot

Scammers now use AI to sound like people you love and organizations you trust. The good news: the same few habits stop almost all of them.

Scam	What it looks like	Red flag
Voice clone	A call that sounds exactly like your grandchild: "I'm in trouble, please don't tell Mom."	Panic, secrecy, a request for money fast
Deepfake video	A celebrity, doctor, or official on video selling a product or investment	Too good to be true; only found on social media
Tech support	A pop-up or call saying your computer has a virus: "Call Microsoft now."	A number to call, or a request for remote access to your computer
Fake messages	A polished text or email from your "bank," "Medicare," or "Amazon"	A link to click or a number to call back
Impostor officials	"IRS," "Social Security," or "police" saying you owe money or face arrest	Threats; demands you stay on the phone
Romance or friendship	A kind new online friend with a perfect photo who soon needs money	Never able to meet or video chat for real
Payment pressure	Any request to pay by gift card, wire, crypto, or a Bitcoin ATM	Real agencies never ask for these

Set up a family safe word. Pick a word or phrase only your family knows. If a caller says they're family and asks for help, ask for the safe word. A voice clone won't know it. Voice clones can be made from just a few seconds of audio, like a video posted on social media.

SCAM SAFETY

When something feels off: PAUSE. VERIFY. ASK.

1. **PAUSE.** Urgency is a scammer's most powerful tool. Hang up, close the message, and take a breath. A real emergency will still be real in ten minutes.
2. **VERIFY.** Contact the person or company yourself, using a number you already have. Call your grandchild's own phone. Call the number on the back of your card.
3. **ASK.** Talk to someone you trust before you send money or share information. Scammers want you alone and in a hurry.

07

Good uses and poor uses

AI works best as a helper for everyday tasks, not as a decision-maker.

Good uses	Poor uses
Step-by-step instructions ("How do I make text bigger on my phone?")	Big decisions you can't undo (money, medical, legal)
Explaining a confusing word or letter in plain language	Getting balanced, unbiased information on a debate
Ideas for recipes, gifts, or a trip, which you then check	Replacing real friends, family, or a counselor
Practice: drafting a letter you will edit and sign yourself	Anything you'd have to share private details to ask
Learning more about something you already know a bit about	Verifying whether a call, message, or video is real

08

Where to get help

If you think you've been scammed, you are not alone and it is not your fault. Call your bank first if money or cards are involved. Then report it. Reporting helps stop the scammer from reaching the next person.

> **In an emergency or if you feel unsafe, call 911.**

Oregon

Who	Help with	Phone
Oregon DOJ Consumer Protection	Scams, fraud, consumer complaints	1-877-877-9392
ODHS Abuse Reporting	Elder abuse, including financial exploitation	1-855-503-7233 (1-855-503-SAFE)
Oregon Division of Financial Regulation	Investment, insurance, and banking scams	1-888-877-4894
Oregon SHIBA	Free Medicare help, including Medicare fraud (Senior Medicare Patrol)	1-800-722-4134
ADRC of Oregon	Finding local senior and disability services	1-855-673-2372
211info	Any local help; interpreters available	Dial 211

National

Who	Help with	Phone
National Elder Fraud Hotline	Case managers help people 60+ report fraud	1-833-372-8311 (1-833-FRAUD-11)
AARP Fraud Watch Helpline	Free support for victims and families (no membership needed)	1-877-908-3360
Federal Trade Commission	Reporting scams	1-877-382-4357
IdentityTheft.gov	Recovery plan if your identity is stolen	1-877-438-4338
FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center	Reporting online crime	Online only
Medicare	Reporting Medicare fraud	1-800-633-4227
FCC	Robocalls and spoofed numbers	1-888-225-5322

Freeze your credit (free) if your Social Security number may be exposed: Equifax 1-888-298-0045 · Experian 1-888-397-3742 · TransUnion 1-800-916-8800.

Phone numbers verified on official websites, October 1, 2026.

09

Keep-by-the-phone safety card

Cut out and keep near your phone or computer.

Project LENS Safety Card

Before using AI: Can I do it another way? Should I use AI for this? How can I use it well?

Never share your Social Security, Medicare, or bank numbers, your passwords, or photos of your ID

Always check: Facts, phone numbers, and advice with a trusted source

If a call or message feels off: PAUSE. VERIFY using a number you already have. ASK someone you trust.

We have a family safe word: ☐ Yes (keep it in your head, not on paper)

My trusted person: _____ Phone: _____

Oregon scam help: Oregon DOJ 1-877-877-9392

Elder abuse or exploitation: 1-855-503-7233

National Elder Fraud Hotline: 1-833-372-8311

Emergency: 911

Project LENS: Learn. Evaluate. Navigate. Secure. projectlensai.org

This guide is for education only. It is not legal, financial, or medical advice.

AI changes quickly. We review this guide every six months. For the newest version, visit projectlensai.org.

Sources: EESI: Data Centers and Water Consumption (June 2025)

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