



Small Models at Home

A parent's guide to local and small AI: what they are, when they matter, what they cost, and how to think about depending on one company for everything.

Parents / teens

15 minutes

Printable resource

1 What "small models at home" actually means

You don't have to send your kid's homework, your family questions, or your private drafts to a giant server in someone else's data center. You can run capable AI models on a normal home computer, a small home server, or even a phone. These are local or small models. The models are smaller, but for many everyday family jobs — drafting an email, summarizing an article, explaining a concept, helping a kid practice — they are good enough and far more private.

2 When small models matter

Privacy is the first concern: when the prompt, the answer, or the file includes real names, real places, health info, family conflict, money, school records, or anything that should not leave the house. Cost: most local models are free, and the hardware is often already in the house. Offline: local AI works on a plane, in a cabin, during a power outage. Independence: you are not depending on any one company's prices, policies, or uptime.

3 When small models are NOT the right choice

Latest knowledge: a small local model doesn't know today's news. For anything time-sensitive, use a tool with web access. Best image quality: the strongest image tools are still on the cloud. The hardest reasoning tasks: for deep, multi-step work on long documents, the largest commercial models still lead. Zero setup: local models need a one-time install. If that sounds like a project, save it for a weekend.

4 How to get started in one evening

Pick the hardware: a 2020-or-newer Mac, a Windows PC with at least 16 GB of RAM, or a recent Linux machine. Pick one model: a 7B–14B parameter general-purpose chat model is a good start. Use a simple interface: modern local-AI tools come with a chat UI that looks like ChatGPT. Set the family rules: what it is for, what it is not for, who can install new models, when to still use a cloud tool. Try it together on one family task.

5 The small-models decision rule

If the prompt could be safely read aloud in your kitchen, the cloud tool is fine. If it shouldn't leave the house, the local model is the right default. That single line is the whole privacy story.

“Small local models are not a downgrade. They are a different default for the jobs that should never leave the house.”

Small moves, real habits

Pick one prompt, run one job, write down what worked. The compound interest of a parent-and-kid tool habit is the actual win — not any single clever use.

Setup checklist

Hardware that can run a 7B–14B model

One general-purpose chat model

One simple interface (chat UI)

Family rules: when to use, when to skip

Make it yours

Our rule: _____

We will try: _____

Ask a human when: _____