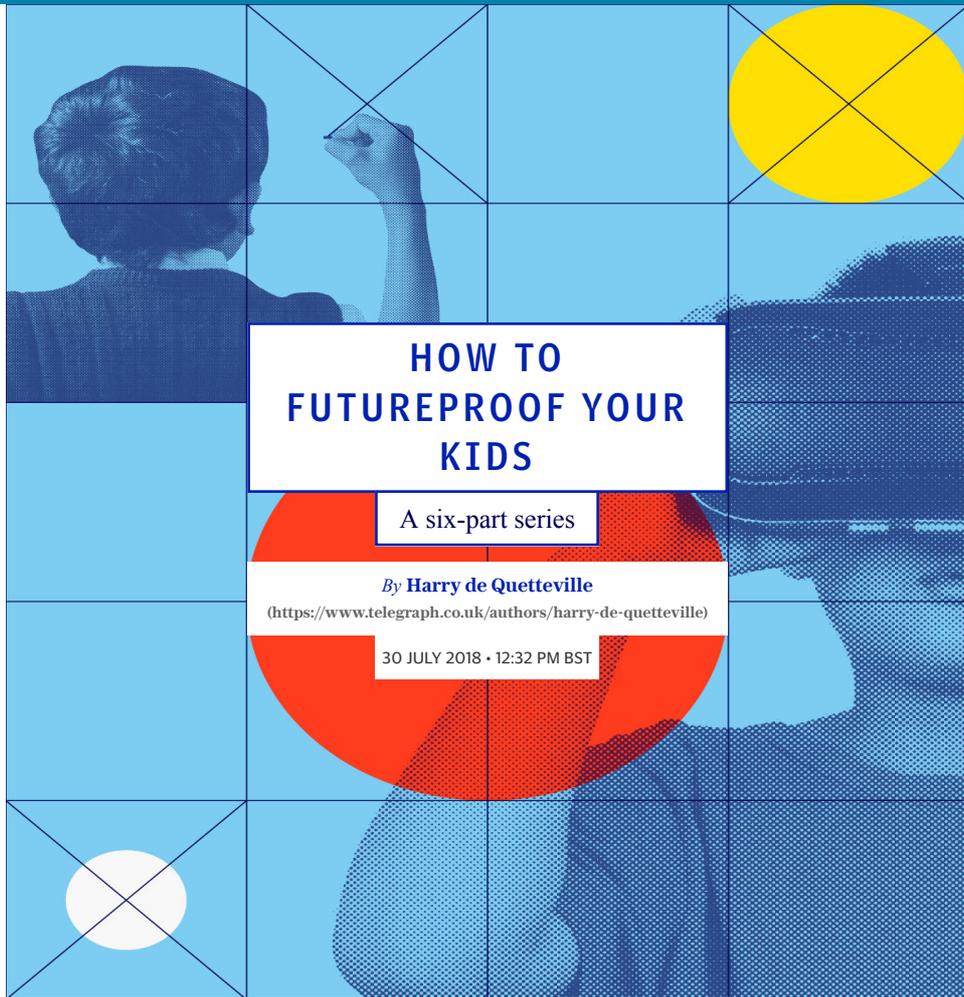


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Parents only ever want the best for their children – but how do we go about giving them the opportunity to thrive when technology threatens to reinvent the very world we live in? Should we tell them to learn coding and create the robots that might come to define mankind – or encourage their creative sides, so they can lend colour to life in a way that computers never will? Do we ban screens, or embrace them? Save money for their future, or spend for their now?

In this six-part series, The Telegraph looks forward to tomorrow's world and discovers the decisions we can all make now, for the sake of our children.

PHYSICAL HEALTH (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/parenting-tips-futureproof-children-physical-health>)

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30 JULY 2018 • 12:32 PM BST

Illustration by Ella Bates-Hermans, graphics by Dario Verrengia, animation by Anais De Busscher

One of the first big decisions parents must make arrives before their children are even born. At the 20-week scan, with a dollop of ultrasound jelly on a pregnant belly, there will come that moment when the doctor looks up and back at you, the parents, and says the words “Do you want to know?”

Some of us do. Some of us don't. Sometimes couples are divided on the matter. But here is an amazing thing: increasing numbers don't think it's very important. Boy or girl? Today, some people no longer think this is even a valid question to ask.

From the very get go, then, parents these days are confronted by the dizzying pace at which the world is changing – not just technologically, but socially too.

It can feel baffling. For most of us, after all, gender will have been one of life's great determinants – for good and ill. Yet for many teens and young adults of 2018, gender is an unimportant construct, both prescriptive and proscriptive, which the enlightened are finally finding a way to ditch. And gender is just one of many areas where parents can feel outflanked and outwitted by the pace of change. We all know about the rise of artificial intelligence, but how will that manifest itself? What will genomics, robotics, virtual reality do to our world? What will they do to our children?

Look around you – the present is tangible. Project yourself into the future, and a world of limitless possibilities is also clear. But which of those possibilities will come to pass in the lifetime of our kids, and how to prepare them, is the great unknown. The waters between now and then seem choppy than ever; navigating them harder, more daunting, given that our charts and maps are blank. There is no template for this.

A girl born in Britain today has a life expectancy of 82 years. She will, the statistics suggest, die in the very first year of the next century, by which time, many experts believe, machines will have surpassed human intelligence, leading to an unprecedented explosion in invention and advancement.

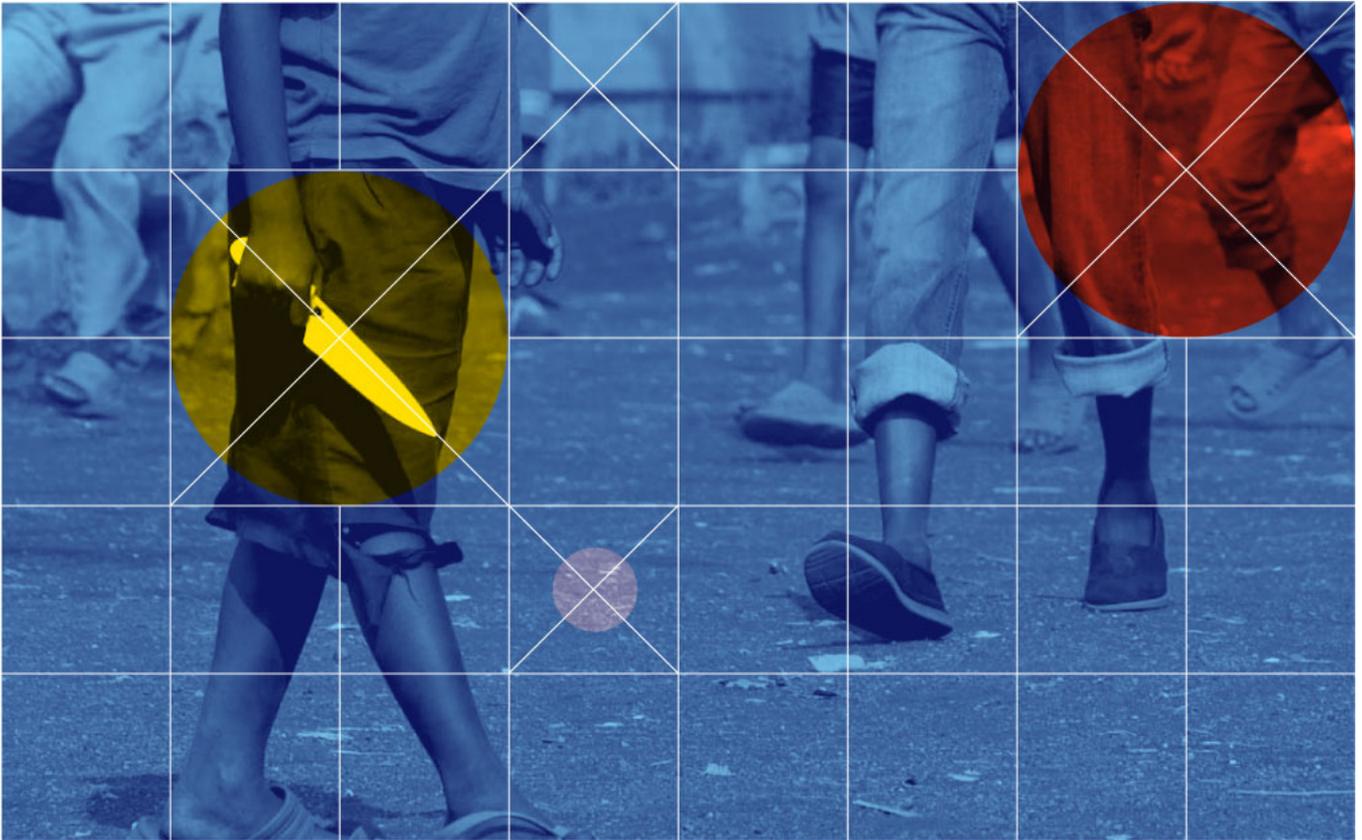
What lies between here and there? How to get the best out of a life lived in the liminal land that straddles the familiar and the unimaginable. What about education? What subjects should our children be learning (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/parenting-tips-futureproof-children-early-years>), at primary school and later at university, if they should go to university at all (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/parenting-tips-futureproof-children-teenagers-education>)? How can we ensure they are happy (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/parenting-tips-futureproof-children-mental-health-screens>) through these years and beyond? Is gender fluidity, for example, a fad, which we will look back upon with astonishment in a generation's time? Or is it the latest marker of humanity's progress? What about their physical health (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/parenting-tips-futureproof-children-physical-health>), in an age where headlines about childhood obesity and poor juvenile diet abound? Does it even matter if a child grows up unhealthy if the healthcare of the future is able to undo the damage? And, finally, how can we guide our offspring to a financially 'healthy' adulthood (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/parenting-tips-futureproof-children-finance-pocket-money>), considering how hard it is for today's twentysomethings to buy property or even shift their five-figure student debts?

Such questions merely underscore the sheer diversity of potential futures for which today's parents must prepare their children. Yet pause, breathe, and reassure yourselves. Some trends are clear, and they point to practical steps you can take. Hopefully you will find not just questions but also answers here.

## It's not what your child learns... it's how

Our job of futureproofing our children begins where we all begin: in the womb.

The Oxford anthropologist Anna Machin has surveyed parental bonds around the world, both in humans and in other species. She has made what at first sight seems to be a curious discovery: that a secure, loving relationship between parents and children allows offspring to wander away, to become independent. True emotional attachment, oddly, allows children to detach themselves earlier, to be autonomous, creative individuals. In extreme cases, where such bonds are combined with exposure to risk, toddlers of just three and four can seem almost preternaturally assured and mature – an effect Machin has noticed among children in Congolese tribes who are allowed to play with fire and knives from an early age.



Your appetite for risk may not quite be up to Congolese standards. But in talking to dozens of experts for this piece, ‘resilience’ has been the word that cropped up most often. To face the wildly uncertain future, our children will need not just academic qualifications but above all emotional and mental flexibility and resilience. And the best way to foster that, Machin says, is to work hard, and consciously, on the bond you have with your child, as soon as possible, even if it feels strange. Sing to your child in the womb, he will recognise your voice after he’s born. “Work at it from day one,” she says. “The safer your child feels in your relationship and love, the more confidence and self-esteem they will have to go out and face the world. If they feel secure, strongly tethered, it allows them to sail out into the storm, knowing they can pull back into port if they begin to sink.”

### **The ‘EQ not IQ’ movement recognises that it is creativity and emotional intelligence that will set human beings apart**

Once that bond is established, it’s time to start working on how your children learn. The psychologist Tali Sharot, mother to two small children, now three and five, conducted an interesting experiment on one of her own children. She placed a range of objects in front of her daughter when she was only a few months old. Of these objects, the baby reached repeatedly for the iPhone. Yet she had no way to activate the phone, no use for it, no understanding of what it did. So why go for

that? Sharot concluded that it was because the baby noted the importance of this device to her mother and instinctively deduced that it would also be valuable to her. “If you want to improve your child, then work on yourself,” says Sonia Livingstone, Professor of Social Psychology at the LSE and author of *Parenting for a Digital Future*. “You are the big example. From healthy lifestyle to which way you vote, we parents are the single biggest explanation of our children’s behaviour.”

Early years, Sharot insists, are the time to focus not on specific skills but on traits. “With grit and optimism you are more likely to succeed wherever you are,” she says. “Emphasising these things is something you see in schools more and more than in the past.” Indeed, with greater academic rigour now in the state school system, it is here that time- and resource-rich private schools will increasingly seek to promote and differentiate themselves. Pay our fees, they will say, not just for great grades (which you may be able to find for free elsewhere) but also for sporting, networking and artistic opportunities to build what is now commonly called “social capital” (which you will not).

All this is part of the “EQ not IQ” movement - a recognition that as machines and computers are increasingly able to perform rational, repeatable elements of our work - skilled and unskilled, from data entry to medical diagnosis - it is creativity and emotional intelligence that will set human beings apart. When parents talk of “tomorrow’s core skills” and inevitably mention STEM, or coding, or fluency in Mandarin, what they should really be thinking about, from a very young age, is adaptability and resilience. “That’s where the emphasis [in education] increasingly is now - or should be,” says Sharot.

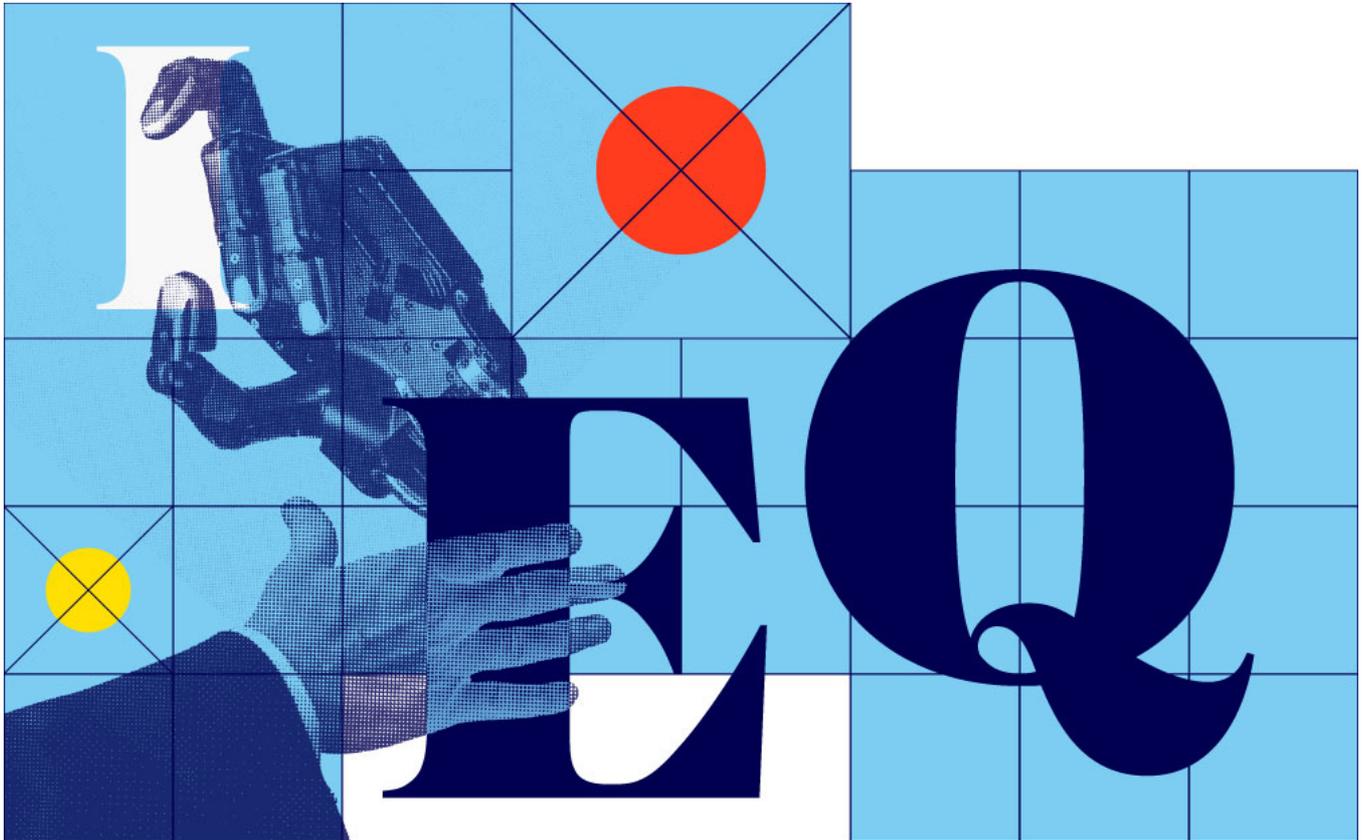
## WE ASKED THE EXPERTS

## Fortnite or War and Peace?

Would you prefer to see your adolescent child participating in a group online game such as Fortnite, or reading alone?

Fortnite

War and Peace



### Cut the cord, embrace the future

For middle class parents – willing and able to leverage advantage to plot and micromanage children’s routes to success – the importance of resilience ought to serve as something of a warning. We have to stop doing everything for them: stop the endless stimuli so they are never bored and never have to work out what to do next for themselves; stop hovering so they never graze their knees if they fall; resist the urge to leap in and guide them to the right answers. Instead let them play games of their own devising, let them fail, and let them fail repeatedly.

The weirdness of this is that the focus on generically human traits like grit and optimism comes at a time when the world is becoming ever more specific, more personalised. If your child “hates numbers” today, you may well let her bin maths as soon as she is allowed. But in future, playful apps tailored to the ways she learns – which note where she struggles and respond better, more individually, than any hard-pressed teacher – may re-open avenues of learning once fated to be closed. Basic online learning platforms exist already. In future, the main role of teachers could well be to help children find their own bespoke methods of learning. Their jobs will not be the pure transmission of facts, that is certain. We already live in a world where each of us carries the world’s knowledge in our pockets, on our internet-enabled smartphones. That wealth of knowledge, accessible as never before, will only grow richer, more available.

“Technology, whether through holograms or virtual reality (VR) , will create new opportunities for teachers and lecturers really to discuss what the science means or what relevance history has for the future, and help develop those higher-level cognitive skills,” says Julie Mercer, Head of education research at Deloitte. “We are moving from a world of simple teaching to a world of exploring.”



It is this combination – of generic human traits with specific computer-led insights, of rich human emotional intelligence with dry digital data-crunching intelligence – that points the way to preparing our children for what comes next. Homo sapiens owned the past. Robots may eventually own the future, or at least run so much of it that humans are liberated – or doomed, depending on your outlook – to live without the 9-5. For the next few decades, we will work together. “The smart money is on human-AI partnership,” says Ian Pearson, a former engineer who turned his talent for analysing how systems plug together to become a “futurologist”, focussing on the interaction between social and technological trends. “In the short and medium term there’s a big advantage in being human,” he says. “From nursing to policing, from teaching to HR, in every aspect of business leadership, you now have to have good personal and emotional skills to bond with and lead other people.”

Those skills will come to dominate as AI levels the playing field on the IQ side. As research from Google – a company which initially hired only brilliant computer scientists – revealed in January this year, the seven top characteristics of its most successful employees were soft skills: coaching, listening well, making connections with others to solve complex problems. Raw STEM ability (in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) came last.

The figures are dramatic. Deloitte recently analysed more than 350 careers, and found that the number of jobs available in 160 of them is declining. In the 205 where job numbers were found to be increasing, it noted “softer, transferable skills are more prominent. Occupations requiring a higher level of skills such as active listening, complex problem solving and the ability to exercise judgement have seen a net increase of 1.9m jobs between 2001 and 2016.



under the old system may be to believe and accept that. If the old ways are disappearing, though, the new are not baffling. They are driven by technology and complexity, but they are not technological and complex. Quite the opposite. To prosper in the new age our children must not behave like robots. They must not learn like robots. Not work like robots. The real robots will do all that. To prosper in the new age, nothing will be more important than being human.

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## How to futureproof your kids

### **The early years: Mandarin or Mandolin?**

28 Jul 2018, 2:21pm

## **The teenage years: Degree or apprenticeship?**

28 Jul 2018, 8:51am

## **The mental health problem: Screens or no screens?**

28 Jul 2018, 8:50am

## **The physical health timebomb: Live long or live well?**

28 Jul 2018, 8:49am

## The financial timebomb: Pocket money or prepaid card?

28 Jul 2018, 8:51am

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