



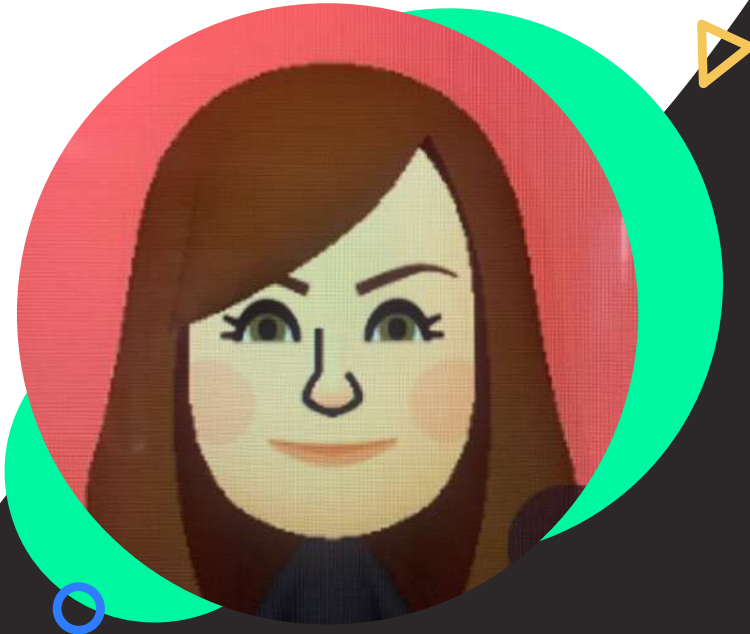
# Kids and the metaverse: the perspective of a strategist and mum

Cultural reflections on our fascination and  
fears around the metaverse

August 2022

**discover.ai**

The Metaverse, NFTs, crypto...Web 3.0 hype is *massive* right now



A day doesn't go by now without multiple articles dropping into my inbox or Slack channel, announcing some bold brand move in the metaverse space or an unexpected and stretchy NFT drop.

As a cultural insights specialist, the prospect of the metaverse is a phenomenal one; it feels shiny, new, hugely disruptive, and full of opportunity for brands and users alike. But when I change hats, and I look at the metaverse as the parent of an eight-year-old, I see it very differently. I'll be honest and say that a big part of it unnerves me and leaves me feeling fearful – for my son mainly, but also for me. The internet has many dark, addictive, and toxic corners already – will the metaverse be this, but on steroids? The metaverse will become another digital parenting challenge, and a potentially enormous one at that.

I'm increasingly mindful of the idea of over-parenting and the serious downsides that presents in terms of reducing kids' competence whilst increasing their anxiety, so as I navigate my own reaction to the prospect of my child playing in the metaverse, I have that cautionary tale at the back of my mind – to not go in and wrap my son up in cotton wool and shield him from the claws of this immersive digital predator, but to be open-minded and pragmatic.

So as both a parent and a strategist, I want to explore what this new digital landscape could be; what it could mean to live as a child in a digital world, in a metaverse that's always 'on'. I want to get among the utopian and dystopian narratives and explore the watch-outs from both a parent and brand perspective. Ultimately, I want to make sure that as parents, gatekeepers and brands we do what we can to ensure the metaverse experience is a positive and enriching one for our children.

I've used our Discover.ai platform to explore this topic; using AI to help me quickly surface the narratives and discourse playing out online to highlight some concerns, key questions, watch-outs and thought-starters, presented as six key reflections. It's revealed the rich online conversation in this space from a variety of different voices, and from a personal perspective has been a valuable first step in upskilling on the metaverse parenting challenge.

Reflection #1

# This is a kids-first experience

The metaverse is here and kids are already playing in it (SURPRISE!) Roblox, Fortnite, Minecraft – they’re all a forerunner to this metaverse landscape, and our kids beat us to it.

Our digital-first offspring are crafting their own online environments, hanging out on Spotify Island together, buying up their virtual merch. ‘Digital’ is Gen Alpha’s superpower. But none of us know how the metaverse is going to play out – it’s a hugely experimental space and barely understood.

Are kids guinea pigs or pioneers of this paradigm-shifting experience? Are they mentally and emotionally equipped to deal with it? Are any of us?

## Thought starter:

- Kids are so primed for this. The metaverse speaks to their digital creativity skills and their hacker mindsets. They intuitively know how to navigate these spaces.
- But at the end of the day, they’re kids still in development – not mini adults. Is the metaverse being built with kids and their development in mind? How do we support their developing brains and encourage a healthy relationship with the metaverse?
- We all need to be reflecting on this: big tech, brands, parents and caregivers alike...we don’t want to stifle their digital creativity, but we also don’t want to leave them unprepared.



### KIDS FIRST, ADULTS SECOND

Something really fascinating about the Metaverse is that unlike the internet; it is being introduced first to children with Roblox and other games and adults second  
Social Media  
USA

### OUR KIDS ARE ALREADY LIVING IN IT

While business leaders are speculating about the metaverse, our kids are already living in it

Social Media  
UK



### DOPAMINE RUSH

Our feel-good chemical dopamine is released in our bodies and it feels great gaming, social media use, and surfing the web create a self-reinforcing cycle that keeps making our kids want more of that rush.”

Source  
AUSTRALIA



### ROBLOX

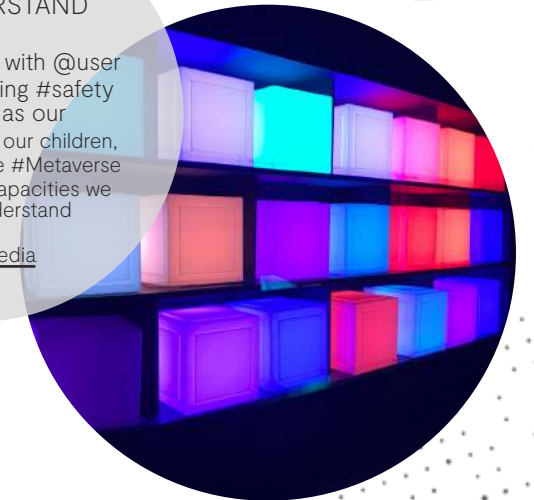
Our kids already in the metaverse it’s called Roblox

Social Media  
USA

### CAPACITIES WE DON'T YET UNDERSTAND

Excellent convo with @user discuss prioritising #safety and #trust as our responsibility to our children, as we integrate the #Metaverse into our lives in capacities we don’t yet understand

Social Media  
UK





Reflection #2

# Will IRL blur with URL?

So much of our lives is anticipated to play out online in these metaverse spaces – shopping, socialising, ‘travelling’, education, entertainment – even intimate relationships.

One of the concerns about the metaverse that I see, is our ability to know where real life and ‘metaverse life’ starts and finishes. How do we distinguish that? How will kids? Will the two become so seamless that we’ll just move between these physical and digital spaces and it all constitutes the lived experience?

But how do you then disentangle and unplug when it all gets a bit much? How will kids recognise when they need to step back (before damage is done)?

Thought starter:

- In an increasingly digital and AI driven world, the need to champion the real and the physical is greater than ever; for our mental wellbeing, and to preserve the value of real human connection, physical experiences, and our uniquely human capabilities.
- Teaching kids about the importance of online boundaries, privacy, and digital detoxing to help them prepare for this new era is a responsibility we all need to share.



FORTNITE AS REAL LIFE

Just heard some kids outside arguing about what they were gonna play and one kid said "yeah, but we're tryna play fortnite real life isn't it" smdh

Social Media  
UK



BASE REALITY

Kids growing up with the #METAVERSE will have a hard time understanding base reality

Social Media  
UK



MARRIAGE & KIDS IN THE METAVERSE

These guys are gonna get married in metaverse and have kids in metaverse

Social Media  
USA

ONLINE IS REAL LIFE TO KIDS

We teach this to kids when they are little about people in real life, well online is real life to our kids

Source  
USA



MINECRAFT IS LIFE

Minecraft is life for kids

Social Media  
UK



Reflection #3

# How do we keep the play going?

We know the downside of too much screen time, and I'm sure many of us are aware of how hard it can be to lure kids away from the draw of the Nintendo Switch or YouTube.

We're seeing traditional toy brands increasingly looking to bridge the digital divide between online and offline play with some great innovations. But how do we keep good old-fashioned play going? Not the type that requires a WiFi connection or a screen, but the type that involves hands-on creativity, imaginative role-play, problem solving or physical movement? The type that allows kids to experience the joy of being in a play state, and flex and strengthen their creative muscles – so important for long-term problem-solving and resilience. And dare I say, experience a bit of boredom to see what their young brains come up with?

### Thought starter:

- It's important for brands to move with the times and meet kids in these digital spaces but promoting offline play is vital for our kids' healthy and rounded development.
- Kids' brains are being actively shaped through play (or lack of) – the need to engage all of their senses and spark their imaginations through offline stimulus is real.



**TIME SINKS & DETERIORATING BEHAVIOUR**

For me it's the time sink nature of the game, with kids wanting to play for longer and longer, while behaviour deteriorates

Social Media  
UK



**IMAGINATION & CREATIVITY**

Our goal is to inspire kids to go out and play and experience good old fashioned fun through their imaginations and creativity

Source  
USA



**FROM IPAD TO METAVERSE**

I can't get my kids off the iPad. It's going to very quickly turn to I can't get my kids out of the metaverse

Social Media  
UK



**RECESS SPENT ON PHONES**

When kids go on recess now instead of going outside to the playground they sit on their phones and play Fortnite for an hour

Social Media  
USA



**SENSORIAL STIMULATION**

Kids can mix and blend the slimes and textures, create their own concoctions, and simply enjoy squishing it around

Source  
USA





Reflection #4

# Our kid's safety & privacy HAS to be paramount

“Because right now, you don’t want Mark Zuckerberg babysitting your kids.” *Imran Ahmed, the Center for Countering Digital Hate*

Hmm. We’ve all read the headlines and it makes for unsettling and disturbing reading – kids gaining access to adult virtual spaces, predators posing as children in these virtual spaces etc... it all feels a tad lawless.

Yes, ‘digital’ is kids’ superpower, but they’re also among the most vulnerable and impressionable members of society. There’s been a lot of risks identified around kids accessing sex clubs, being exposed to grooming, conversation around safety controls and the ability to report concerns. People have very big and real concerns around our kids going into the metaverse, and rightly so.

Thought starter:

- Kids and their wellbeing need to be put before profits – end of. Virtual environments and tech need to be built around their safety and wellbeing first and foremost.
- Proper safety measures are needed, alongside effective and easy to access parental controls. We need kids’ profiles, sophisticated pre-empting of threats and dangers, fit-for-purpose monitoring of chats, flag-raising mechanisms, auto-blocking of age-inappropriate content, and prevention of kids revealing personal information to strangers.
- Brands also need to be responsible in this space – how will their brand presence support or harm a child’s wellbeing?



### BULLY LITTLE KIDS ON ROBLOX

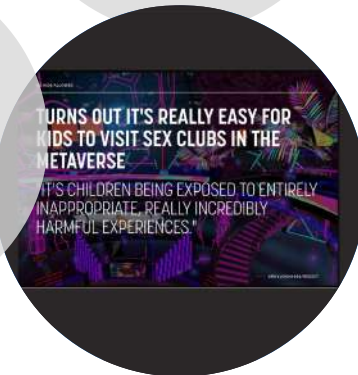
ok now don't make fun of me but does anyone wanna play roblox im in the mood to bully little kids

Social Media  
USA

### INCOMPATIBLE

i feel like "kids" and "the metaverse" are two things that shouldn't be put together

Social Media  
UK



### BANNED FROM THE METAVERSE

Pre-banning my future kids from the Metaverse

Social Media  
UK



### APPALLING CONTENT

Revealed: The 'Nazi gas chambers' in a metaverse game played by children as young as seven around the world

Social Media  
UK



### REWARDING ZUCKERBERG

How do we reward Zuckerberg with a metaverse, further exposing our privacy and data to a person who has been proven to not have the capability to treat user information with integrity

Social Media  
UK



Reflection #5

# We have to upskill & embrace digital parenting

Parents and caregivers will have a crucial role to play in shaping kids' experiences in the metaverse, so parents, caregivers and teachers need to get on top of this tech and take a vested interest in the pros and cons of the virtual world, to keep our kids safe and the experience joyful.

I know it's a big ask – digital parenting is challenging, and parental burnout is real, but we need to find a way to do this. Government and schools also need to ensure the curriculum keeps pace with teachers playing a guiding role in introducing kids to the metaverse.

But safety and wellbeing aside, we can also see the metaverse as a space for the parent-child relationship to flourish in. Think of the opportunities for shared experiences, like virtual tourism. The metaverse should be an inclusive space, safe and one where everyone has the opportunity to engage, including families.

## Thought starter:

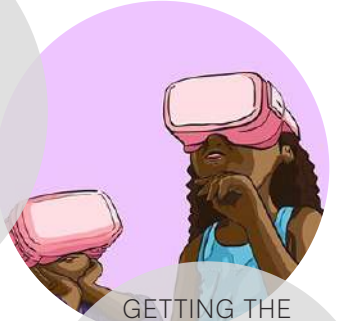
- Is the metaverse being built with the family dynamic in mind? What can big tech providers – and brands – do to help parents and caregivers navigate this digital landscape, and feel in control?
- What are the opportunities around joyful shared family content and experiences?



**OPEN DIALOGUE**

That means children must feel safe and comfortable talking to their parents about what they see online from a very early age

Source  
AUSTRALIA



**GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE METAVERSE**

With parental guidance, kids can get the most out of the metaverse

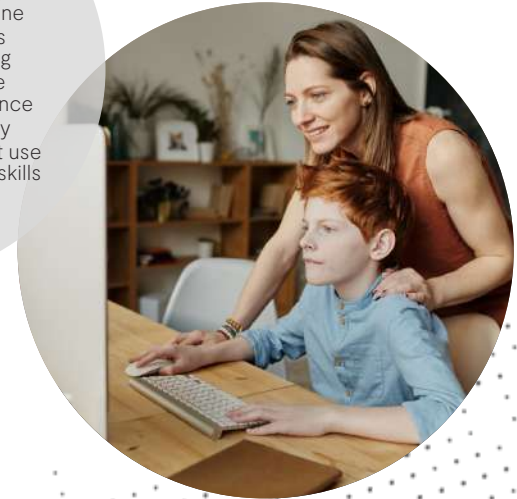
Social Media  
UK



**SUPPORTIVE & ENABLING PARENTING**

Developing children's digital skills and pro-active online engagement, as well as supportive and enabling parenting, have a more positive impact on resilience than strategies that only restrict or monitor internet use and limit children's digital skills

Source  
UK



**RED FLAG**

To introduce kids that fast to the metaverse with companies and not teachers and parents guiding them is a huge red flag for me

Social Media  
USA

**WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY**

Protecting children in the metaverse: it's easy to blame big tech, but we all have a role to play

Social Media  
UK





Reflection #6

# A shift in social norms

Much of the conversation online highlights the thornier issues for kids in the metaverse, but the less discussed benefits of the metaverse are likely to be the amazing opportunities it could offer up for connection and experiences; the chance to connect and hang out with other kids and people far and wide, and dial up the learning experience with immersive and engaging metaverse classrooms.

## Thought starter:

- It's probable we'll see an adjusting of social norms as we move towards new virtual spaces and interactions, but how these will play out is difficult to foresee.
- Perhaps there will be increased value on virtual over physical interactions, and differing types of conduct or expectations of conduct?
- Identity could become more creative and fluid as kids experiment with different identities in different online spaces. Their vernacular will expand to reflect this new era.
- But how do we ensure equal and fair access to this game-changing tech, especially in the context of education?



### READING IN THE METaverse

Grimes has announced her intention to release an intergalactic children's metaverse book

Social Media  
UK



### SOCIAL INTERACTION

As a father I def see how much social interaction among kids revolves around the #metaverse they are the future consumers #bids #bidstack

Social Media  
UK



### KNOWLEDGE METaverse

The Knowledge Metaverse, according to a school release, amplifies access and engagement in learning by combining the real world with digital information and extended reality (XR) similar to immersive experiences that have become increasingly popular

Social Media  
UK



### IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

By its very definition an experience is immersive and that's how we learn

Source  
USA



### METaverse CLASSROOMS

Hold on has anyone thought of the fact that eventually they'll probably have kids in metaverse classrooms

Social Media  
UK

### Future of Education Using Metaverse





# Final thought

There are so many questions to be asking, and so many unknowns. But as we stand at this pivotal point in the Digital Age, I'd like to end with a final thought, courtesy of Spiderman, as a reminder for all the players in this space – “with great power comes great responsibility.” Keep our kids safe and happy.

Nicola Avis | Strategist

If you have any questions on kids and the metaverse, or beyond, please contact [info@discover.ai](mailto:info@discover.ai)

