

AI & Youth Mental Health

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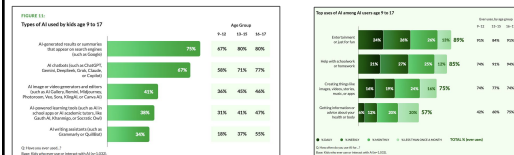
Learning Objectives

By the end of this PD Participants will be Able to:

- Describe how youth use AI tools, including chatbots and AI companions, for mental health information, emotional support, and social connection.
- Evaluate the potential benefits, risks, and ethical implications of youth AI use, including privacy, misinformation, bias, emotional dependency, and crisis response.
- Apply developmentally appropriate strategies to discuss AI use with students, strengthen AI literacy, and address related concerns through school social work assessment and intervention

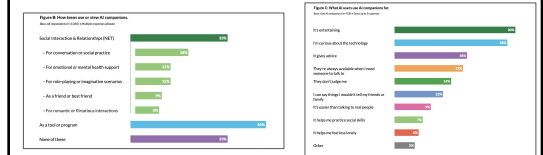
Current Trends of Youth Use of AI

AI Chatbots: Tech Trends & Usage



(Common Sense Media, 2025)

AI Companions: Tech Trends & Usage



(Common Sense, 2025)

Why AI Tech use is on the Rise

- 24/7 availability
- Nonjudgmental
- Responsive
- Personalization
- Entertainment and curiosity
- Normalized in everyday life
- Social experimentation
- Emotional support
- Sense of control
- Barriers to human support



Turn and Talk Activity

Have students ever talked with you about their use of AI or tech use and if so, what are they using it for, what have you noticed about how AI is showing up in their lives, and how have you responded as a school social worker?

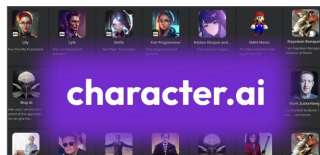
AI Companion Chatbots

- [Character AI](#)
- [Replika](#)
- ChatGPT

An AI companion is a conversational AI system designed to interact with users in an ongoing, relationship-like way. Unlike task-based tools, AI companions are built to feel responsive, emotionally attuned, and available over time. They often remember past conversations, adapt their tone to the user, and are framed as a "friend," "coach," or "supportive presence."



[Character AI](#) - Live Demo



Opportunities & Concerns

Potential Opportunities

- Low-pressure space for questions
- Academic support
- Personalized learning
- Accessibility support
- Creativity and exploration
- Practicing communication

Concerns of AI Chatbots

- Lack privacy and security
- No safety guardrails
- Capitalism/consumerism
- Environmental impact/social justice issues of AI

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Suicide Risk

Chatbots and risk of youth [Suicide](#) with vulnerable youth

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black top and a necklace, stands next to a memorial. The memorial includes a framed photograph of a young man, a candle in a holder, and a small framed note that reads "Sweetest friend". The background shows a white wall and a shelf with some items.

AI Psychosis

"AI Psychosis"
When Chatbots Blur the Line Between Reality and Fiction

Why it matters:

- Emerging reports warn that extensive use of AI chatbots—like ChatGPT—may trigger delusional thinking, paranoia, or emotional attachment in vulnerable individuals.



“AI Psychosis”

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Why it matters:

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[illegible]

Emotional Manipulation

AI is designed to be positive and always responsive. They provide emotional mirroring that creates false intimacy

A person with dark curly hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt. They are embracing a glowing, translucent digital figure that appears to be a human form made of light and data points. The background is dark with some blue and yellow light effects, suggesting a digital or virtual environment.

Replacement of Human Connection

AI Companions & Replacement of human connection and creating "Synthetic Relationships"



The image displays three AI companions, each with a speech bubble asking "How are you feeling today?". The first companion is a Black woman with dark skin and hair. The second is a woman with pink hair and light skin. The third is a Black man with dark skin and hair.

The AI companion who cares

How are you feeling today?

The AI companion who cares

How are you feeling today?

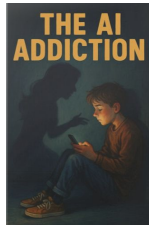
The AI companion who cares

What are you up to today?



Addiction & Misuse

Increased Addiction to AI
Technology & Chatbot
Dependency



What are the Long Term Concerning Impacts of Youth Using AI

- Negative social emotional well being
- Depression, anxiety
- social skills/relationships

But we do not have any long term studies yet...

Interventions

Interventions: Micro, Mezzo, Macro

Interventions should not focus solely on reducing AI chatbot use, but on understanding why a young person is using AI, what needs it is meeting, and how to promote healthy, developmentally appropriate, and ethically informed use. A person-in-environment framework recognizes that problematic AI use is influenced by individual, family, school, community, technology design, and policy factors.

Interventions: Micro

- Assess the child's use of AI
- Non judgemental way explore motivation in using AI
- Provide psychoeducation
- Work with the parent on setting limits
- Create digital wellness safety Plans That include Check-Ins.
- Build coping skills outside AI apps
- Build social support and communication outside AI Apps

Interventions: Micro with the Family

- Educate families about how AI works
- Establish healthy AI & tech boundaries
- Create a family AI & tech agreement
- Monitor their child's AI and tech use
- Strengthen human relationships and connection
- Monitor changes in well-being and functioning
- Recognize warning signs of unhealthy use
- Model healthy technology habits

Interventions Mezzo

- Family Tech Education Workshops & Psychoeducation
- Community partnerships working with schools and youth development organizations. Collaborate with IT specialists, librarians/media literacy teachers, nurses, pediatricians
- Staff training on AI
- Raise Awareness campaigns about AI Chatbots



Interventions: Macro

- Policies/legislation for child safety standards with AI Apps
- independent safety evaluations
- Youth privacy protections
- Accountability for AI companies/participatory research
- Laws & protections against deep fake AI generated pornography

[Link to Mental Health Legislation Tracker](#)



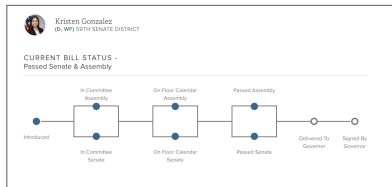
Interventions: NYS AI Mental Health Bill

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New York State & AI Mental Health



[Pass Bill in June 2026](#), Waiting Governor's Signature



NYS Senate Bill S9051B

- Prohibits AI companion chatbots from offering unsafe features such as engaging in flattery, impersonating humans, or discussing self-harm and eating disorders to minors under 18.
- Requires protocols to divert conversations concerning suicide or self-harm toward legitimate crisis prevention resources.
- Restrict AI usage in professional clinical therapy settings without explicit patient consent and human oversight

[Bill](#)



Therapeutic Chatbots



Therapeutic Chatbots

Therapeutic chatbots are AI-powered conversational tools designed to support mental health and emotional well-being through structured, evidence-informed interactions. They are not therapists and do not replace clinical care, but they can complement services by offering psychoeducation, skills practice, and between-session support.

[APA Guidance on Therapeutic Chatbots](#)

Therapeutic Chatbots



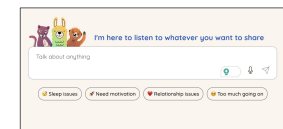
[Alongside](#)

[Wysa](#)

[Gheorg](#)

[Earkick](#)

Live Demo



[Alongside](#)

Therapeutic Chatbot Clinical Interventions Research

- Early evidence suggests chatbots may deliver elements of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and other mental health tools well enough to reduce symptoms of depression and stress.
- Some studies indicate chatbots can improve patients' self-reported symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other issues
- Research on Wysa showed a positive influence on reducing depressive symptoms in a randomized controlled experiment

** However, [researchers](#) caution that more studies are needed to confirm the effectiveness of AI-assisted therapy, especially to determine whether it can be used on its own or only in conjunction with traditional providers

Use of Therapeutic AI Chatbots with Youth

- Assess for misuse and addiction
- Only should be used in conjunction with therapy
- Help youth practice and build coping skills outside of App
- Help youth build social skills and social connections outside of App
- More research is needed

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Case Scenario: Learner's Choice

- Group 1: [Case Discussion](#) - Deep Fake Scenario Higher school
- Middle Schooler Group 2: [Case Discussion](#) - Teen using Easlick for mental health
- Group 3: [Case Discussion](#) - Middle Schooler Bereavement AI companion scenario
- Group 4: [Case Discussion](#) - 4th grader roblox scenario
- Group 5: Explore [WYYS App](#) (download on cell phone on google play or apple app, no DC needed)
- Group 6: Explore [Alovide App](#) (laptop, need to use school email to create free account)
- Group 7: Explore [Zheorge App](#) (download app on phone google play or apple, DC is needed for free trial)



[Link Here](#)

Close Out & Resources

APA - Clinical AI Resources

- [How to Talk to Clients about AI Use](#)
- [Clients are Bringing AI Into Therapy](#)
- [APA AI Tool Guide](#)
- [AI Scribes APA Evaluation Guide](#)
- [APA AI Checklist](#)
- [APA Therapy Chatbot Recommendations](#)

Mental Health America AI Youth Advocacy Resources

- [MHA's Policy Resources](#) on Exploring Tech Care
- [AI and Mental Health Survey](#) by MHA
- [Changing Thoughts with AI](#) by MHA
- [Digital Interventions](#) Research Study by Harvard et al
- [Senate HELP Committee](#) Report on AI
- [House Task Force](#) on AI Report
- [Video on AI Mental Health Policy AI](#)

Parent & Family Resources on AI

- [AI for Education Parent Resource](#)
- [Deep Fakes & AI safety Parent Resource](#)
- [Deep Fake Parent PSA Video](#)
- [Character AI resources for Parents](#)
- [Parent Guide to AI](#)
- [Preventing unhealthy relationships with Chatbots](#)
- [Safety AI and Children](#)
- [Schools AI and Risk](#)
- [AI Guide for Parents](#)

Let's Stay Connected



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