

AI companions and human relationships

AI can answer questions, explain ideas, and sometimes even help people organise their thoughts. Relationships grow in a different way.

Think about the people who matter most in your child's life:

- A close friend who remembers an inside joke from months ago.
- A grandparent who notices when something doesn't seem quite right.
- A parent who recognises that "I'm fine" doesn't always mean everything is okay.

These moments may seem ordinary, but they're part of how trust grows over time.

Relationships are shaped by shared experiences. They grow through conversations, misunderstandings, forgiveness, laughter, disagreements, and all the small moments that people build together day after day.

Helping children recognise this difference isn't about telling them that AI is "good" or "bad". It's about helping them understand that different relationships play different roles in our lives.

AI can be a useful tool for learning, creativity, and even reflection, but children also need opportunities to experience what relationships with other people can offer: being known, challenged, supported, and cared for by someone who is growing alongside them.

I Start the conversation with curiosity, not worry

Most children don't need a conversation about artificial intelligence – they need a conversation about their experience of using it. If your child enjoys talking to AI, try approaching the topic with genuine curiosity rather than immediate concern. You might ask:

- What do you enjoy about talking to AI?
- What kinds of things do you usually ask it?
- Does talking to AI feel different from talking to a friend?
- When would you rather talk to a real person?
- What do you think makes someone a good friend?

There aren't right or wrong answers. The goal isn't to test what your child knows about AI. It's to understand what they're experiencing and keep the conversation open.

■ When is it worth paying closer attention?

For most children and teenagers, AI is simply one of many tools they use alongside friendships, family life, school, and hobbies. Sometimes, however, the way a child uses AI can tell us something about how they're feeling.

Rather than focusing on the technology itself, it can be more helpful to notice changes in your child's overall well-being. For example, you might decide it's time to check in if your child:

- seems less interested than usual in spending time with friends or family;
- appears more withdrawn or isolated over several weeks;
- seems unusually upset when she/he can't access the internet or spends most of her/his free time on it.

None of these signs necessarily mean that AI is the problem: like many changes in behaviour, they may simply be a sign that something else is happening in your child's life.

Starting a calm conversation is often the best first step. If your concerns continue or begin to affect your child's daily life, consider speaking with someone who knows them well, such as a teacher, school counsellor, or healthcare professional.

■ The conversation matters more than the technology

Children don't need parents who know everything about AI, they need adults who are interested in their digital lives for the same reason they're interested in everything else that matters to them.

A conversation about a chatbot can quickly become a conversation about friendships, confidence, worries, curiosity, or growing up. AI will continue to evolve, and new digital experiences will become part of childhood and adolescence.

What children are most likely to remember is knowing there's a trusted adult ready to listen, which is something no technology can replace.

If you are a parent or caregiver seeking help or to support your child, there are resources available to help you navigate these challenges.

Start by locating and contacting your national [**Safer Internet Centre**](#). They provide helplines and resources in your language, allowing you to connect with local support services tailored to your needs.

If you find yourself or your child in immediate danger, please [contact the police and/or other emergency services](#) in your country.