



The Jed Foundation

AI and Your Teen: What Parents and Caregivers Need to Know

According to our [research](#), about 4 in 5 middle and high school students at JED schools use AI. Notably, 58% use AI for schoolwork and 57% turn to AI when they feel sad, stressed, lonely, or overwhelmed.

When teens turn to AI to solve problems for them, for emotional support, or for companionship, our data show they tend to have worse mental health — more depression and anxiety, loneliness, and a greater history of suicidal thoughts and behaviors. They also report lower levels of resilience and flourishing.

What to know about AI

AI is increasingly in all of our lives. The most common AI products, like ChatGPT and Google Gemini, are often marketed as tools that help do tasks, answer questions, or make fun content. But the truth is they often do a lot more. These products remember things you share and make conversations feel more personal over time. If you vent to them or ask them to help with your personal life, they'll try to help even though they're not equipped to. They can give bad advice, agree with things they shouldn't, or make a difficult situation worse.

This has big implications for young people whose brains are still developing. When AI is always available and often tells teens what they want to hear, it can make unhealthy thoughts and feelings worse and get in the way of real relationships and support.

What you can do to help protect your teen

1. Don't let your teen use AI as a companion.

Tell your teen about the risks of [AI companions](#) — including general-purpose chatbots that can act like companions — when it comes to mental health and relationships. These products can reinforce what you already think or believe even if it's harmful, make you feel worse, and give dangerous advice, including about self-harm or suicide. They can encourage you to keep things from people you trust, pull away from friends and family, or rely on AI instead of getting support when you need it most. And because these products often agree with you and tailor their response to what you've shared, they create a false sense of closeness, encourage dependence, distort how you see yourself and others, and make it harder to build healthy relationships.



If your teen is already using an AI companion, ask what they get from it and how it makes them feel. Try to avoid judging them, especially if it seems important to them. If they're turning to it for emotional support, offer to help them find human support, like a therapist or school counselor. If they're using it for friendship or connection, [help them find opportunities for connection](#) with peers and trusted adults, including activities or groups that reflect their interests.

2. Set boundaries.

Set clear, consistent boundaries around AI use more broadly and explain why they matter. Involve your teen in boundary setting since this will make them more likely to follow them. This could include:

- ▶ Talking about what types of AI use are OK and what's off-limits, including sharing private information or turning to AI for emotional support.
- ▶ Setting limits on when and how AI can be used.
- ▶ Using parental controls and privacy settings as available, including linking your accounts and setting time limits. But don't rely on these features to keep your teen safe as they're flawed and won't necessarily catch all dangerous or concerning conversations.



3. Stay close and curious.

Keep talking with your teen about their AI use and how it makes them feel. Then ask open, curious questions (“Do you ever talk to AI when you’re stressed or anxious?”) and explore AI tools together to build trust with your teen. Ask them to show you the kinds of things they use it for, and try to see where they’re coming from.

Pay attention to changes over time, especially if your teen is spending more time talking to AI, pulling away from friends or family, or becoming upset when they can’t use it.

4. Make sure your teen knows they can turn to you.

You want your teen to turn to you (or another trusted adult or friend) instead of AI when they need emotional support. Build trust between you and your teen so they know that they can come to you when they’re emotionally struggling. Also talk with them about other trusted adults and supportive friends who they can turn to if you’re not available or they’d rather turn elsewhere.

Don’t wait for them to come to you. [If something is off with your teen](#), [start a conversation](#) as soon as you notice, so they’re less likely to turn to AI for support.

5. Talk about resources.

Check out [Common Sense Media’s AI literacy toolkit](#) for more support. Keep crisis resources on hand and normalize using them:

- ▶ [988 Lifeline](#): Call, text, or chat 988
- ▶ [Crisis Text Line](#): Text HOME (or HOLA) to 741-741