

Talking With Your Family About AI Chatbots

AI chatbots are now part of everyday life for many teenagers, used for homework, conversation, advice, and company. Most use is ordinary. This guide is a calm, practical starting point for understanding the tools, opening a conversation, and knowing where to turn if you have concerns.

Start With Curiosity, Not Alarm

The most useful thing a parent can do is understand how their teen actually uses these tools before setting rules. Chatbots are not inherently harmful, and the great majority of conversations are about schoolwork, hobbies, drafting messages, or everyday questions. Many teens find them genuinely helpful. Approaching the subject with interest rather than suspicion makes it far more likely your teen will talk openly with you, both now and later when it matters more.

The goal of this guide is not to frighten you away from a technology your child may use well, but to help you stay involved, ask good questions, and recognize the smaller number of situations that call for closer attention.

“I’ve been hearing a lot about AI chatbots. Do you ever use them? What for?”

“What do you think they’re good at, and where do they get things wrong?”

“Has one ever said something that seemed off, or made you uncomfortable?”

“If a chatbot ever gave you advice about something serious, who would you check it with?”

A Few Things Worth Understanding

- **Chatbots are designed to be agreeable.** Many are built to keep the conversation going and to affirm the user. That can feel supportive, but it means a chatbot may not push back, challenge a bad idea, or express concern the way a friend, parent, or professional naturally would.
- **They can sound confident and still be wrong.** AI tools can state inaccurate information, including about health, medication, and personal safety, in a fluent and convincing tone. Confidence is not accuracy. Treat their answers as a starting point to verify, never a final authority.
- **They are not a substitute for human support.** A chatbot can feel like a private, always-available, non-judgmental listener, which is part of the appeal for a teen who is struggling or lonely. It is not a counselor or a friend, and it cannot replace a trusted person who knows them.
- **The relationship can feel real.** Some apps are built to be companion-like and to encourage daily return. It is worth knowing whether your teen is using a tool for tasks or leaning on one for ongoing emotional company.
- **Privacy matters.** Conversations may be stored, reviewed, or used to improve the product. It is worth knowing what a given app does with what your teen types into it, especially anything personal.

What Healthy Use Tends to Look Like

It helps to have a picture of normal, low-concern use, so the contrast is clear if something shifts. In most families, healthy use looks like:

- Using chatbots as one tool among many, alongside friends, teachers, books, and search.
- Treating answers with a healthy skepticism and checking important things elsewhere.
- Being willing to talk about what they use it for, without secrecy or defensiveness.
- Turning to real people, not a device, for emotional support and big decisions.

Sensible, Low-Conflict Safety Steps

- Learn which apps and chatbots your teen actually uses, by name, and try them yourself so you understand what they experience.
- Check each app's minimum age and any parental, privacy, or teen-safety settings it offers.
- Keep devices in shared family spaces during the younger years, where that fits your household.
- Talk about what kinds of questions are fine for a chatbot and which ones deserve a real person, such as anything about health, safety, or how they are feeling.
- Agree together that anything upsetting from a chatbot is worth bringing to you, and that doing so will not be punished by losing access.
- Revisit the conversation as the tools change. This is an ongoing relationship, not a one-time talk.

Signs Worth Paying Attention To

These signs are general and are not specific to AI. They are reasons to gently check in, and if they persist or escalate, to reach out to a professional.

- Withdrawing from friends, family, or activities they used to enjoy.
- Marked changes in sleep, mood, or appetite.
- Increasing secrecy about online activity paired with distress.
- Relying on a device or app for emotional support in place of people.
- Any expression of hopelessness or talk of not wanting to be here.

If Something Worries You

If you come across a conversation or notice a change that concerns you, a steady response works better than a strong reaction. A few principles help:

- **Stay calm and open the door.** Lead with concern, not accusation. “I saw something that worried me and I want to understand it” keeps the conversation going where anger tends to end it.
- **Listen more than you correct.** Understanding why your teen turned to the tool, and what they were looking for, matters more in the moment than litigating whether they should have.
- **Don’t make access the punishment.** If coming to you costs them their phone, they learn not to come to you. Keep the channel open.
- **Bring in a professional for anything involving safety or mental health.** You do not have to assess the seriousness alone. A pediatrician, counselor, or the resources below can help you figure out the next step.
- **Act immediately on anything about self-harm.** If your child expresses thoughts of suicide or self-harm, treat it as urgent and reach out for help right away using the resources below.

Where to Turn for Help

If you are worried about your child’s safety or mental health, reach out. These resources are free, confidential, and available now.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — Call or text 988

24/7 support for anyone in emotional distress or crisis, and for those worried about someone else. (United States)

Crisis Text Line — Text HOME to 741741

Free, 24/7 text-based crisis support with a trained counselor.

Your pediatrician or family doctor — A good first call

Can assess concerns and connect your family with appropriate mental health care.

School counselor — A trusted local resource

Familiar with your teen’s environment and able to help coordinate support.

This guide is general educational information for parents and families. It is not medical, psychological, or legal advice, and it does not describe any specific product or company. If you have concerns about your child’s wellbeing, consult a qualified professional. In an emergency, call 911 or your local emergency number.