

AI Chatbots What is it ?

While online your children frequently encounter artificial intelligence (AI) in various forms. One increasingly common application is the AI chatbot, a computer program designed to simulate conversation with humans. They access information from across the internet and use it to generate responses that mimic human conversation. AI has a wide range of uses from providing information, engaging in conversations or assisting with problem solving. It's a powerful tool that offers exciting possibilities for children and young people, but like any tool, it also comes with potential dangers.

Examples of Chatbots;



Chat GPT

Generates human-like responses to text-based conversations



Replika

An AI companion that is paired with a 3D avatar



My AI

My AI is a chatbot available on Snapchat



HiAi

HiAi allows users to create a character to talk to



AI Friends

Has pre set fictional characters for user to chat with



WOMBO

An app that makes pictures based on text prompts

The dangers;



Harmful and inappropriate content:

While AI Chatbots may seem intelligent they are not able to determine what information is good or bad. This can often result in responses that may be harmful or inappropriate for young people. Some apps try to get around this by creating rules and filters for the chatbots to follow. However, whilst investigating this issue we found that most available ai chat apps would jump to sexualised, toxic and abusive conversations with little input from the user, making them inappropriate for the given age rating.

Misinformation and manipulation:

AI can be used to create deepfakes (a video of a person in which their face or body has been digitally altered) and generate realistic but fabricated content. Children may struggle to discern real from fake information, making them vulnerable to online manipulation and propaganda.

The dangers continued;



Connections and wellbeing:

AI Chatbots are designed to be a virtual friend, users can create fictional characters or create a persona from scratch. It is important to understand why children are seeking friendship in this way and if there is a need to seek further wellbeing support. We found that some of the AI apps merge AI and live chats in a way that was not overly clear. Making it possible for strangers to contact children undetected. It is essential to check for these features before giving children or young people access to these apps.

Privacy and data collection:

Many AI apps collect your personal data, including children's online activity and interactions. This data can be used for target advertising, profiling, or even sold to third parties. AI should be treated as though it is a stranger, never sharing private and personal information. Be careful of adverts whilst most AI Chat apps are free to download these include popup adverts. We found that these adverts were often for live chat apps that were not age appropriate for the rating they were given.

5 tip for safe usage;



- 1. Know your tools:** Research the chatbot and test it out before letting your child use it, understanding its features, age appropriateness, and potential risks. Check to see what parental features they have. Remember many of the chatbots we used were inappropriate so it's important to explore first.
- 2. Open communication:** Talk openly about the risks, encouraging your child to share their experiences and ask questions about things that feel uncomfortable. Try to avoid judgment or dismissiveness that could put them off sharing.
- 3. Set boundaries:** Establish time limits and nonprivate spaces in the house for chatbot use, prioritizing real-world interactions and offline activities.
- 4. Fact-check together:** Teach your child critical thinking skills, encouraging them to double-check information shared by the chatbot through reliable sources.
- 5. Be the guide:** Explore chatbots together, demonstrating responsible online behaviour and showing how to interact respectfully and safely.

Remember AI isn't all bad, however it is a new technology that requires adult supervision whilst the safety features catch up. AI even helped write some of this newsletter.



To learn more about AI and all parents need to know, visit [InternetMatters.org](https://www.internetmatters.org). A full range of step by step parental controls guides are also available.

For advice and support on young people's mental health and wellbeing check out Healthy Minds Lincolnshire for self help guides. You can also call the Here4You Line on 0800 234 6342 to speak directly to one of the practitioners who will talk through how you are feeling.

