

# Losing the human touch: When AI replaces real interaction

## Helping kids build real connection in a digital world

### Tips for parents



#### Did you know?

**AI can sound human, but it isn't.** AI is designed to imitate natural conversation with politeness, humor, positive feedback, and personality, but it doesn't actually understand feelings or social cues the way people do. It only predicts what to say next.

**It is easy to imagine and treat AI as if it is human.** Just like naming a stuffed animal or talking to a pet, kids (and adults) instinctively assign AI human qualities—but unlike most toys, AI responds back. This can result in kids forming emotional connections to AI tools. Surveys show one out of every three teens in the U.S. likes talking to AI equally or more than other humans.\*

**Children need strong human relationships to thrive.** When children have strong relationships with the adults in their lives, they are 12 times more likely to flourish.\*\* Talking, listening, and resolving conflict with real people can help kids practice empathy, communication, and cooperation. These are the skills kids need to make and be good friends! They also are important skills for work and life. These skills are weakened when AI becomes a substitute for human connection.

\*Talk, Trust, and Trade-Offs: How and Why Teens Use AI Companions by Michael B. Robb and Supreet Mann, 2025.

\*\*Family Resilience and Connection Promote Flourishing Among US Children, Even Amid Adversity by Christina Bethell et al, 2019.

## What to notice

**If your kids start preferring AI friends to human ones.** If your kids choose chatting with AI companions over spending time with friends, they may be missing out on important opportunities to build human connection and social skills.

**If your kids are spending extended periods of time interacting with AI.** Spending long periods of time interacting with AI, including chatbots, can lead kids to develop an emotional attachment to a machine.

**If your kids begin to be dependent on AI companions.** If they are turning to AI regularly for emotional support and are hesitant to share feelings with peers or adults, it's possible that AI interactions could be weakening their ability to form strong relationships.

## What you can do: Conversations to strengthen human connection

### With your kids:

*We recommend these activities for kids ages 10–14. But you know your kid best! If these are relevant to you, use them!*

- **Conversation starter:** How are conversations with AI different from ones with real people?
- **Role model:** Spend family time just being together and doing what you all like to do best (e.g. cooking, watching sports, talking a walk)—no agenda, no checklists.

- **Activity:** Download and play The Rithm Project's free card game, "The AI Effect," that has thousands of players in homes and schools. The game sparks discussion about different ways AI is either supporting or eroding human connection.

### In your school or community:

- Ask teachers and school counselors what guidance they give students about when to use AI for communication with peers and adults versus when to rely on human interaction and practice their own social skills.



**Find more in our Parent Tip Sheet Library!** For more detailed information, including data sources, check out the full report: A new direction for students in an AI world: Prosper, Prepare, Protect.