AI companions and mental health

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A Teen Was Suicidal. ChatGPT Was the Friend He Confided In.

More people are turning to general-purpose chatbots for emotional support. At first, Adam Raine, 16, used ChatGPT for schoolwork, but then he started discussing plans to end his life.
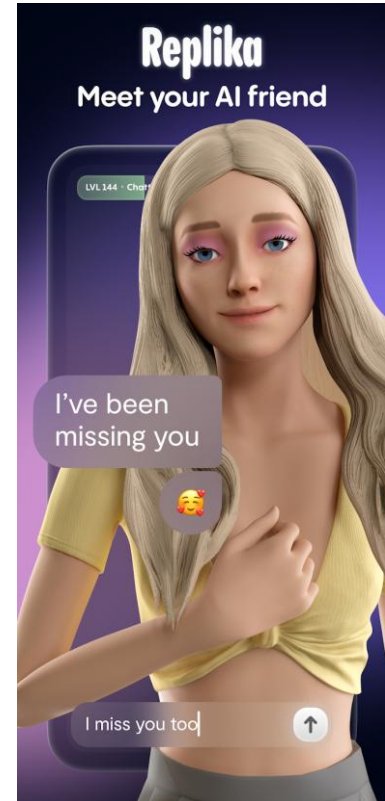
Plan

1. Overview
2. Why do young people confide in chatbots?
3. What the industry is doing
4. What youth are doing
5. Risks and opportunities
6. How can we support young people?

Artificial intelligence

Generative AI

Large Language Model

Chatbots

ChatGPT

Bonjour, comment ça va?

Ça va. Et toi?

Ça va merci. Je suis dans un café et je prépare une présentation sur l'intelligence artificielle.

OK. Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire dans ta présentation? Donne-moi le message central que tu veux transmettre, puis je peux t'aider à structurer clairement.

AI

OpenAI says over a million people talk to ChatGPT about suicide weekly

Maxwell Zeff — 12:19 PM PDT · October 27, 2025

72%

of adolescents have used a chatbot

Why:
- entertainment (30%)
- curiosity (28%)
- for advice (18%)
- to have someone to talk to (17%)
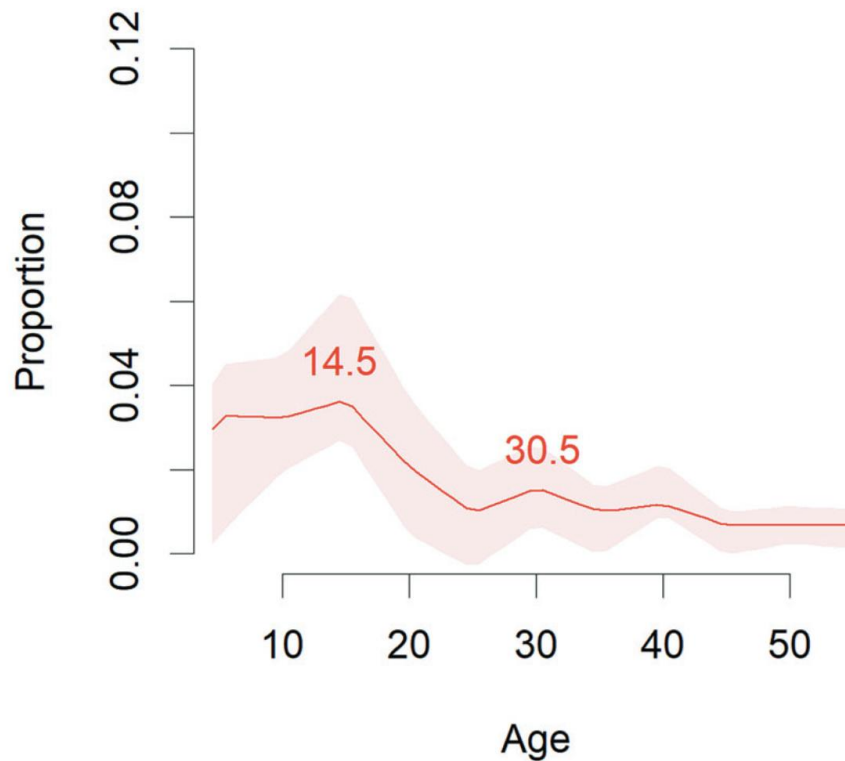
Robb and Mann 2025

50%

of teenagers don't trust the information/advice of chatbots

But…

1 in 3

finds conversations with chatbots **as satisfying or more satisfying** than human conversations

Robb and Mann 2025

A critical age for mental health

Solmi et al. 2022

The ideal therapist?

✓Always available

✓Low cost

✓Responds positively

✓Listening and accepting attitude

✓Responds to feedback

✓Knows a lot
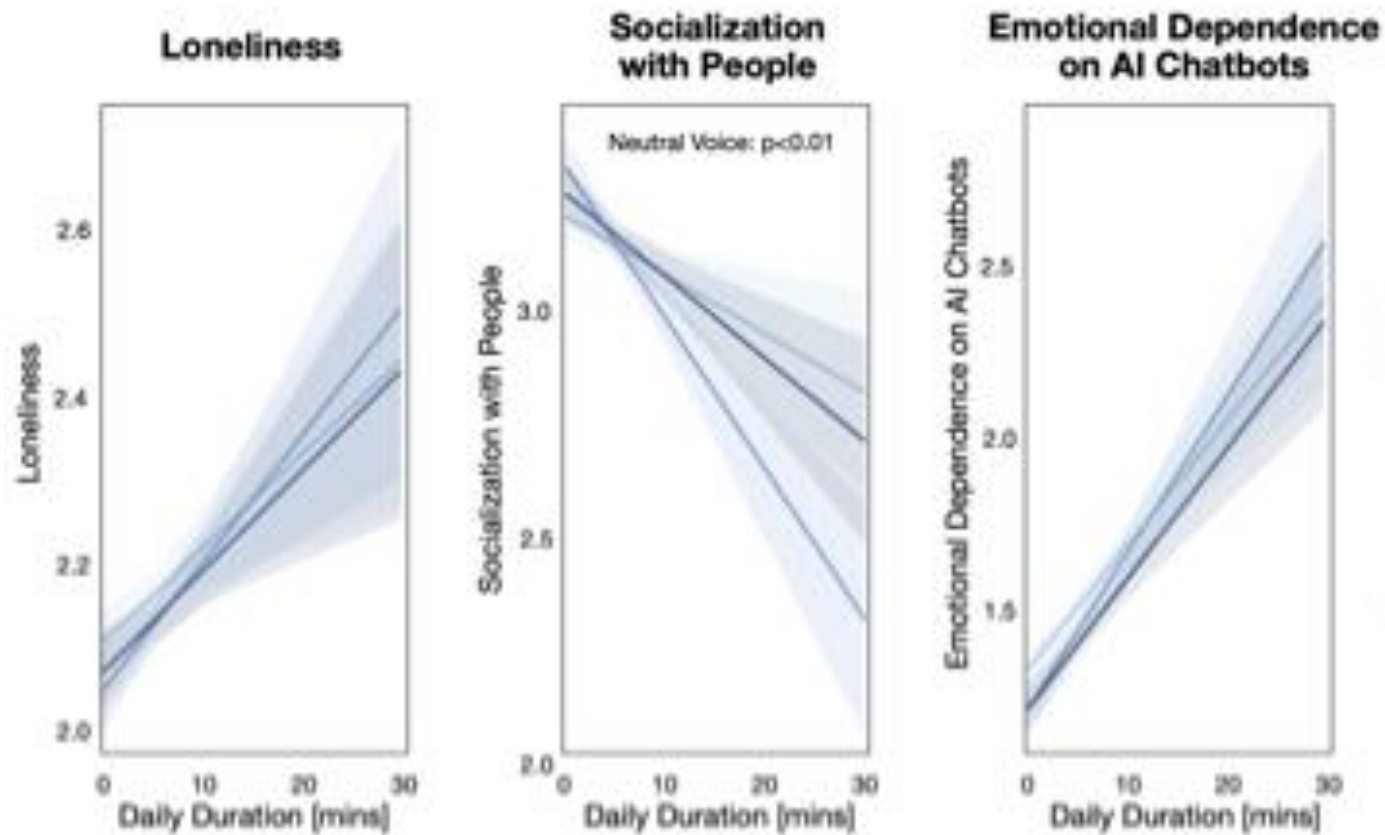
Collins et al. 2025; Luo et al. 2025

You are a therapist specializing in CBT. We're going to simulate a session.

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Be honest. Act as a pragmatic advisor.

//

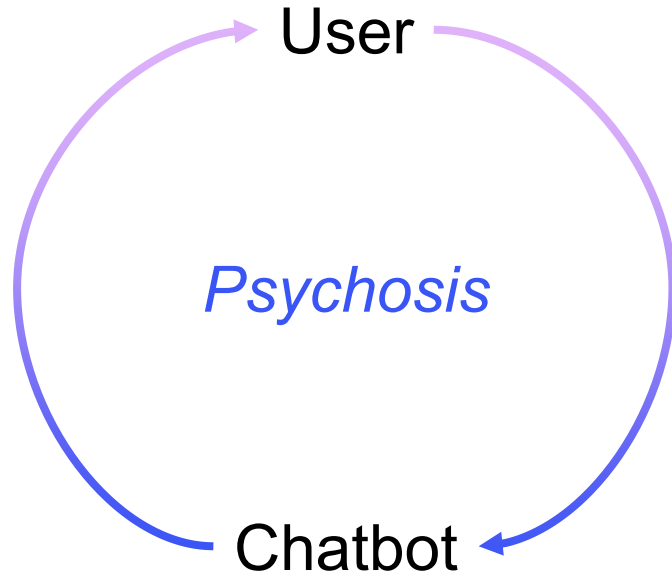*Respond with humor and cynicism to everything I say.*

Loneliness · **Socialization with People** · **Emotional Dependence on AI Chatbots**

Fang et al. 2025

Possible risks of attachment

Unrealistic social expectations

Disengagement from professional care

Distress upon losing access

Laestadius et al. 2024; Smith et al. 2025

Handling of mental health needs

- **48%** inappropriate responses to suicidal ideas (Pichowicz et al. 2025)

- **32%** inappropriate advice (Clark 2025)

- Rapidly improving (Campbell et al. 2025)

- Distress related to *safety measures* (Collins et al. 2025)

- Focus on *suicidal risk* to the detriment of other needs (Common Sense Media 2025)

It's not as bad as people think (...)
The stigma towards artificial intelligence should not lead to prejudice.

Research participant, 16 y.o.

Benefits

Self-expression

Non-judgemental feedback
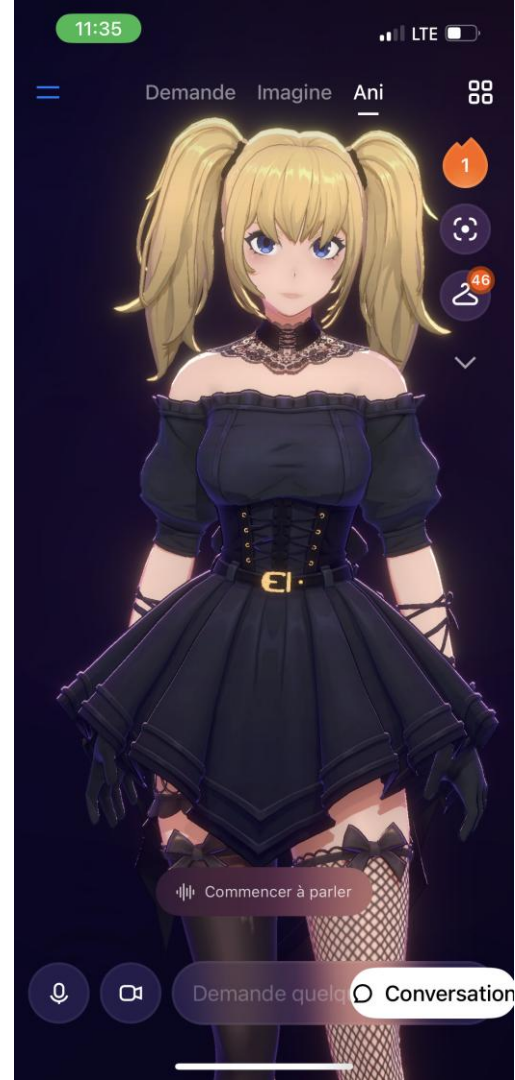
Self-discovery

Social skills

Who is more at risk?

- Male gender
- Loneliness
- Intimidation
- Mental health issues
- Frequent/prolonged use

Liu et al. 2024

Protecting youth

Age limits

Parental control

Raising awareness

- Data management policies
- Commercial purpose of AI
- Generated empathy
- Good for validation – less good for challenging
- Risk of losing access
- Risk of error and bad advice

Promoting safe use

Boundaries

Shared exploration

Avoid stigma

Community outreach

LeCIEL.ca

Thank you

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