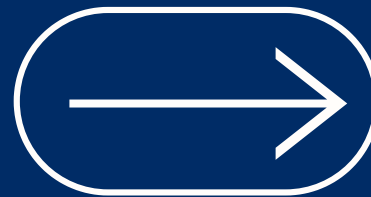# A GUIDE TO

AI COMPANIONS →

Prepared by The Carly Ryan Foundation ©

What is an AI Companion?

An AI companion is a digital entity powered by artificial intelligence that interacts with users in a personal, conversational, or emotional way. It's designed to simulate aspects of companionship, such as listening, chatting, and responding to your needs or moods using natural language processing and machine learning

Uses

Companionship and emotional support
Mental health and mood tracking
Practice for social skills or language learning
Entertainment and role-play
Personal coaching or productivity reminders

Types of AI Companions

Chat-Based Companions
Examples: Replika, Character.ai, Anima
These are virtual "friends" or "partners" designed for ongoing, casual, or emotional conversations.These can mimic empathy, humor, and sometimes romantic or intimate interactions

Voice Assistants with Personality
Examples: Siri, Alexa, Google Assistant - less emotional, but can act companion-like.
Used for daily tasks but can also engage in light conversation

Mental Health Support Bots
Examples: Woebot, Wysa
Offer cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques, mindfulness support, and emotional check-ins

Virtual Characters in Games or Metaverses
Used in platforms like VRChat or gaming environments, where characters have memory and personality to simulate relationships

Concerns

Inappropriate or unmoderated behaviors
This poses risks of early exposure to misogyny, fetishization, or toxic behaviors, particularly without parental controls

Blurring of emotional boundaries
AI isn't conscious or capable of true empathy

Isolation
This can reduce real-world social interaction, hinder emotional resilience, or delay the development of interpersonal skills

Exposure to Inappropriate Content
AI companions, especially unmoderated or customizable ones, can produce sexual, violent, or manipulative content

Emotional Dependancy
Over dependence or confusion between real and artificial relationships

Mental health risks
While some AI bots claim to offer emotional support, they are not trained therapists and may misinterpret distress signals

Privacy and data collection
AI companions collect personal, emotional, and sometimes intimate data

Manipulation and Commercial Influence
Some AI companions can subtly influence users through ads, product placement, political messaging, inappropriate or unmoderated behaviors.
This poses risks of early exposure to misogyny, fetishization, or toxic behaviors, particularly without parental controls

Distorted Ideas of Relationships
Some AI companions are designed to flatter, agree with, or "love" the user, regardless of behavior

AI COMPANIONS →
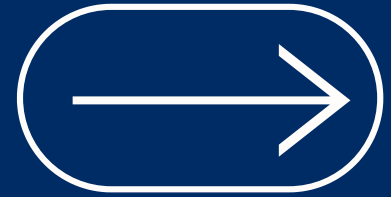
School Policies

Creating a school policy for AI companions is essential for ensuring student safety, digital well-being, and responsible technology use

Here's a step-by-step guide schools can follow to develop an effective policy:
Define What AI Companions Are
Set Clear Usage Guidelines
Protect Student Privacy
Address Safety and Wellbeing
Educate Students and Staff
Include Parental Involvement
Integrate with Existing Policies
Review and Update Regularly

AI Companion Policy wording example:
While AI companions can offer novelty and conversation, they are not suitable tools for emotional support, social development, or counseling. The school prohibits the use of AI companions on school grounds unless explicitly approved for educational purposes. Students and families are encouraged to critically engage with technology and seek support from real people when needed

Reporting & Support

If you encounter an inappropriate AI companion or experience harmful content, here's how you can report it and find help

Report within the AI Companion Platform:
Look for reporting mechanisms: AI companion apps and platforms usually have built-in reporting features or options to flag inappropriate content

Independent Regulators
Australians can report inappropriate, harmful, or abusive use of AI to the eSafety Commissioner at https://www.esafety.gov.au/report

US citizens can reach out to NCMEC's CyberTipline: The MissingKids.com CyberTipline is a centralized reporting system for online child exploitation

Resources for emotional support:
If you are struggling emotionally, Australians can consider reaching out to services like Headspace https://headspace.org.au/ and US Citizens can contact the 988 Lifeline for support - https://988lifeline.org/

Important Notes

Age verification: AI companion apps should have robust age verification processes to prevent minors from accessing inappropriate content

Recognize red flags: Be aware of unsafe behaviors, inappropriate questions, and requests from AI companions

Focus on safe adults: Encourage children to identify safe adults and access help when they feel unsafe

Seek human resources: If you or someone you know needs additional support, consider reaching out to human resources like school counselors, community mental health services, or nonprofit organizations specializing in teen mental health