

# Guidance 'Go-2'

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 Dependency

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

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## 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 NCMC'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

For more information or support visit [carlyryanfoundation.com](https://carlyryanfoundation.com)



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