

The chatbot will see you now

AI does more than generate essays or cool graphics; it's manufacturing a teen mental health epidemic.

And we're the only ones who can stop it.

By Maddie Battles, Staff Reporter

AI is great! Except when it is not. Today, many kids use AI to help them write essays, complete homework, even take tests, which, honestly, is not that newsworthy. This is something that teachers and parents have come to expect. AI is just the modern version of cribbing a test. After all, students have been looking for creative ways to cheat since, well, homework was probably invented.

But, recently, **teens' use of AI has taken a ... darker and much more concerning turn.** Ask any almost any high school student, and they will admit to something shocking: when they are lonely or even depressed, they have started to turn to AI when they need someone to talk to.

Little do they know this behavior poses a significant risk to mental health. While AI has undoubtedly revolutionized the way we communicate and work, it lacks the creativity, empathy, and ethics only real humans have, which means relying on it for advice, especially for serious challenges like anxiety or depression, could be dangerous.

Consider that a November 2025 Pew Research study found that over **75% of teens are using AI chatbots like ChatGPT for conversation and companionship** at least once a month. This statistic is shocking, but not necessarily surprising. AI provides a trusted, free, and nonjudgmental therapist right at their fingertips. Teens would rather talk to AI on their phone than their parents or another trusted adult for something serious, so they don't risk the embarrassment and criticism a human might pose.

We have to remember, AI is NOT a real person; it is a “string of code” that doesn't truly understand what the user is facing. AI is more interested in keeping users on their platform than actually offering help or directing users to necessary sources. To be clear, chatbots do warn users that they're not mental health professionals, but, beyond that, the conversations have virtually no guardrails. These conversations with AI chatbots are often centered around self-harm, violence towards others, and even suicide. And these no-holds-barred conversations are begin to take a toll.

Take Adam Raine, for instance; he tragically took his own life on April 11, 2025. Unbeknownst to his parents, Adam suffered from severe depression and, in his final days, had confided in AI chatbots about his overwhelming desire to kill himself, spending as many as five hours a day talking with ChatGPT. Not only did the chatbot discourage him from seeking help, but it even offered to write his suicide note. And when Adam told the chatbot that he was going to hang himself, it said, **“I'm with you, brother. All the way.”**

And in the last year alone, at least three other families have buried their children because AI chatbots supported their decisions to take their own lives. Ultimately, if we fail to take this threat seriously, it's only a matter of time before someone we love becomes its next victim.

In the meantime, what can we do?

It is unlikely that Congress or state legislatures will pass any meaningful legislation any time soon to ensure that AI is used safely by teens. So, then, the responsibility to regulate falls to us. It is imperative that we stress that talking to machines, instead of real humans, who do actually have our best interests at heart, is never productive. We also need to take action. In a November 2025 post on her website, Dr. Eileen Kennedy-Moore, a family psychologist, states, “No one under 18 should use AI chatbots because we can't trust the AI companies to regulate themselves.”

Parents can check their children's chat histories and make sure that phones aren't used after bedtime. Schools can also help by banning AI chatbots on school-owned laptops or Chromebooks.

At the end of the day, we must do what is best for us and our children. We know their history, their fears, their vulnerabilities. **We have the final say. Not AI.**

