



Online Safety News

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When an AI Chatbot Starts to Feel Like a Friend



AI chatbots are increasingly being used for much more than homework.

Research from Internet Matters found that 35% of children who use AI chatbots said talking to one can feel like talking to a friend, while 23% had asked a chatbot for advice. Among children classed as vulnerable in the research, half said chatting with AI felt like talking to a friend.

For some teenagers, an AI chatbot can feel easier to talk to than a person. It responds immediately, doesn't appear to judge them and is always available.

But it's important that young people understand what is actually happening.

What are the risks?

AI chatbots may:

- give inaccurate or inappropriate advice
- generate harmful or sexual content
- encourage children to disclose extremely personal information
- blur the distinction between a real relationship and an artificial one
- become somewhere a vulnerable young person turns for emotional or mental-health support.

NSPCC advises parents to remind children that AI tools aren't trusted adults and to encourage them not to share personal information or rely on AI when they need support.

[Talking to children about AI | NSPCC](#)

Meta AI: Parents Can Now See More

There has also been a significant change to Meta's parental supervision tools.

Parents supervising a Teen Account can now see the **general topics their teenager has discussed with Meta AI during the previous seven days**.

This feature is available in the UK.

Parents still cannot simply open and read the full AI conversation.

Meta has also announced additional safeguards where a supervised teenager's conversation with Meta AI suggests they may be at risk of suicide or self-harm. In those circumstances, Meta says it can notify the supervising parent and provide support resources.

The fact these protections are being introduced is another reminder that AI conversations are not always about facts or homework — teenagers may use them to discuss very personal issues.

A Better Approach Than Monitoring Everything

Knowing these controls exist can be useful, but supervision works best alongside conversation.

Try:

"If you ever asked AI something really personal, is there anything you'd be worried about telling me?"

Creating that route back to a trusted adult is more important than trying to see every conversation.

Source: Meta, April and July 2026 updates on teen AI supervision.

[Meta – Parent insights into teen AI conversations](#)
[Meta – Distress alerts in teen Meta AI conversations](#)



iOS 27: Parental Controls Have Changed

If your teenager uses an iPhone or iPad, Apple's latest update is worth checking.

iOS 27 introduces a redesigned version of Screen Time, including:

1. Time Allowances

Parents can set limits across categories such as:

- Social Media
- Games
- Entertainment

Different schedules can also be created for different times of day – for example before school, after school and bedtime.

2. Ask to Browse

Parents can require approval before a child accesses a new website in Safari.

3. Stronger Communication Safety

Apple's Communication Safety feature can now intervene when it detects **gore or violent imagery**, as well as nudity, in supported images and videos.

Parents can also approve new contacts and temporarily pause device access.

For Teenagers, Use Controls With Them — Not Just on Them

As children get older, online safety increasingly becomes about helping them manage their own choices.

Instead of simply imposing a limit, try agreeing:

- when phones stay out of bedrooms;
- when notifications are switched off;
- which limits genuinely help;
- when a restriction can gradually be handed back to them.

The goal is not permanent parental control. It is helping teenagers develop the ability to manage technology themselves.

Important: Apple says all relevant devices within Family Sharing need to be running the latest version 27 software to use the redesigned Screen Time experience.

Quick Update: Threads Parental Supervision



Meta began rolling out **parental supervision on Threads globally in September.**

When supervision is set up, parents can:

- ✓ see how much time their teenager spends on Threads
- ✓ set daily time limits
- ✓ block access at certain times
- ✓ manage sleep mode
- ✓ control some tagging, privacy and sensitive-content settings

For teenagers under 16, parents can also prevent some safety settings being made less restrictive.

If your child uses Instagram and Threads, parental supervision can be managed through Meta's Family Center.

Source: Meta, updated 15 September 2026.
[Meta – Threads parental supervision](#)

Try This Conversation

Teenagers need increasing independence online – but independence doesn't mean dealing with everything alone.

Controls and age checks can reduce some risks. They cannot tell you when a friendship has become controlling, an AI conversation has become too important, or something online is making your child anxious.

Regular, calm conversations still matter.

Instead of:

"Let me see your phone."

Try:

"Anything online been particularly good, annoying or weird lately?"

You may learn far more.

Sources: Apple, 14 September 2026; Apple Support UK.

[Apple – New child safety features](#)
[Apple Support – Parental controls](#)