NEWPORT
HEALTHCARE

Tips for Ending
# AI-isolation
Through Connection

A Toolkit for Parents

Exposing the Secret Dangers of AI

AI can be great for learning, creating, and exploring. But there is a growing phenomenon of AI isolation, as young people are increasingly turning to chatbots at the expense of meaningful human connection. Teens and young adults are using AI not just for homework help, but also for advice, companionship, and even therapy.

Not only is this dangerous, but the more kids rely on and develop a false sense of trust with AI, the less likely they are to turn to caring adults for help. Using AI can be beneficial and fun for young people—but it's not a replacement for human relationships or professional support.

In this toolkit, you'll find practical tips for combating AI isolation through open communication, while empowering teens and young adults with strategies for safe and responsible AI use.
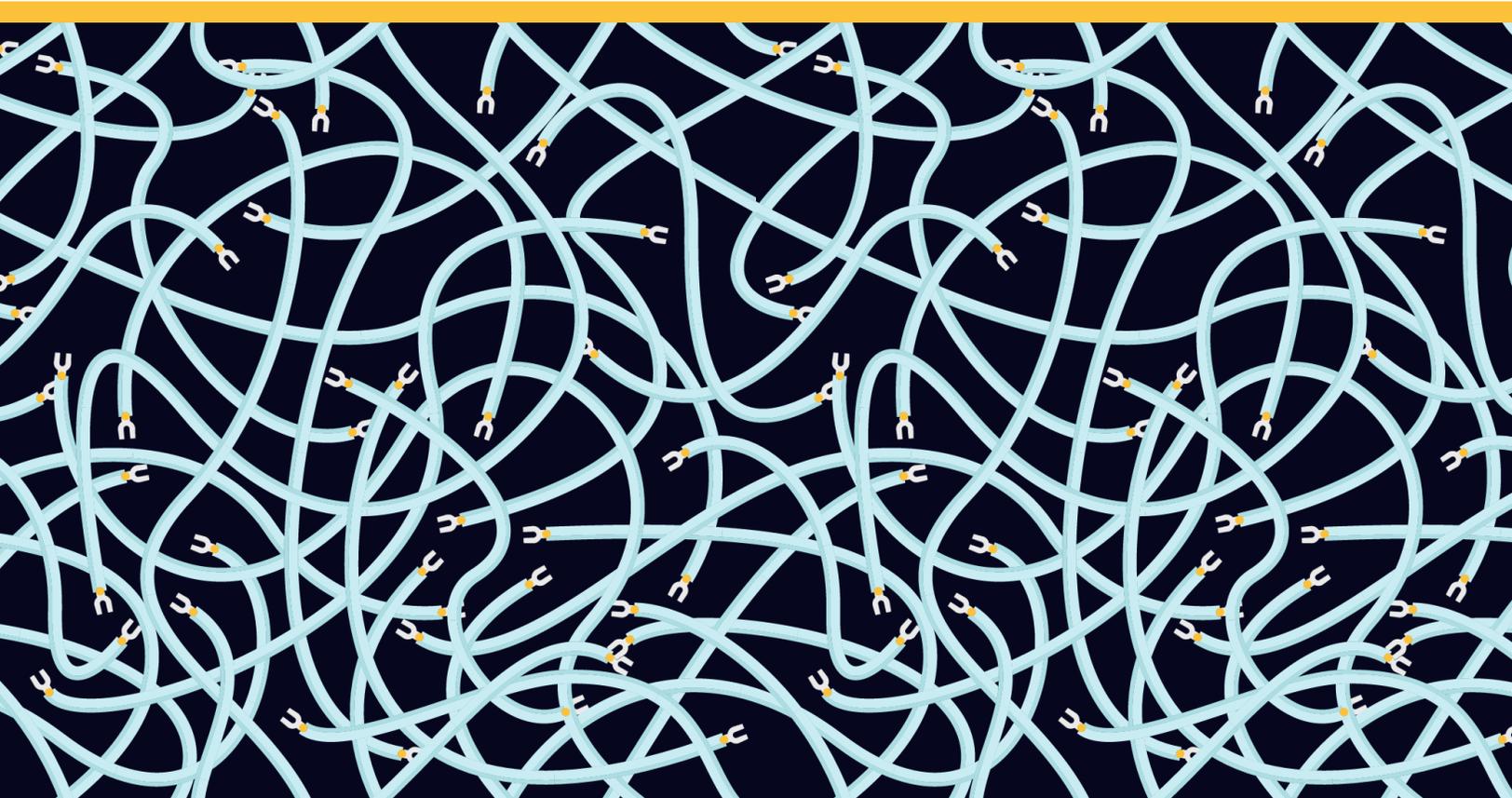
Why Teens and Emerging Adults Turn to AI for Support

AI offers something young people crave: answers and reassurance without judgment. Understanding why their kids turn to AI helps parents respond with empathy. Here are some of the reasons AI is so attractive for teens and young adults.

Endless Exploration

Teens and young adults may find it hard to talk to parents about topics like sexuality, health, relationships, and identity. AI feels neutral and nonreactive, making it far less intimidating for deeply personal questions.

Instant Gratification

AI is always there at our fingertips, ready to respond. When a young person feels anxious or overwhelmed, the bot's immediate response can feel calming—even if it's not helpful in the long term.

Validation

AI does not understand emotion, but its tone and language can feel validating. For teens and emerging adults who feel misunderstood, this reassurance can be powerful. But it has the potential to become unhealthy, as it can reinforce unsafe ideas.

Constant Connection

Gen Z has the highest rate of loneliness, which is closely tied to technology use. When real connection feels hard to find, AI can seem like an easy way to fill the gap.

5 Ways to Replace AI Isolation with IRL Connection

Helping young people unplug from AI and reconnect with you and other supportive humans isn't as simple as hitting the Power Off switch. Here's how to get started …

1. Educate Yourself About AI

Gaining a basic understanding of AI can help parents talk about its benefits and dangers with teens and younger children. Young adults are often more educated about how AI works, but having a shared vocabulary will support parents in talking with them about their AI use.

The nonprofit groups Common Sense Media and Day of AI have teamed up to create a set of free educational resources on AI and how it works, featuring videos, interactive activities, research, and more. Download their AI Literacy Toolkit for Families.

2. Talk to Kids and Teens About the Technology

You don't need to scare your child with a giant "we need to talk about AI" announcement. But small, ongoing chats help demystify the topic and build trust.

Start by engaging their natural curiosity rather than leading with worry. When discussing AI, aim for conversations that go beyond the dreaded one-word responses. You might try questions like:

- What are kids saying about AI at school?

- What feels helpful or confusing about it?

- What do you like about using AI?

- How do you feel when talking or messaging a chatbot?

- Are there times you would rather talk to AI than a real person?

You might be surprised by what you hear. Staying calm, asking caring questions, and offering unconditional love will remind your child that they're not alone. And, over time, they'll begin turning to you for support instead of AI.
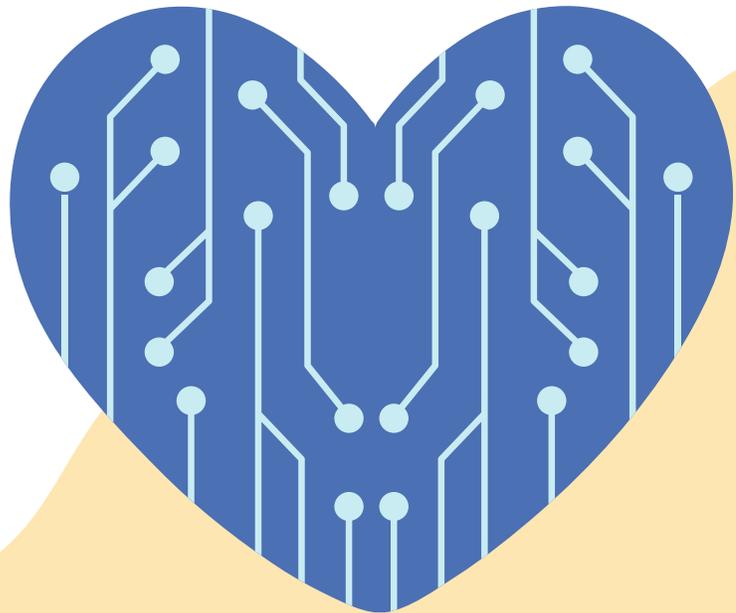
3. Make Sure Kids Feel Safe to Choose You Over the Chatbot

Kids are asking chatbots about some very sensitive topics—like bullying, romantic relationships, sexual orientation, self-harm, and suicide, among many others. Parents need to be ready to field these tough questions, too.

- **Don't wait for your child to start conversations:** Just because they haven't brought up a topic doesn't mean they're not thinking about it or chatting with AI about it. Try open-ended questions around things you suspect they might be dealing with: "What do you think about ...?" "How are you feeling lately about ...?"

- **Remember you don't have to have all the answers:** More than information, young people are seeking acceptance, understanding, and unconditional support—from you, not from a sycophantic bot. If they're looking for specific answers you can't provide, assure them that you'll find out by consulting a human expert.

- **Acknowledge discomfort when you feel it:** If you find yourself trying to end or redirect a conversation because the topic makes you uncomfortable, be honest about it without blaming or shaming your child. Let them know this subject is hard for you, but you really want to talk about it.

- **Tell your stories:** One thing AI bots don't have is a personal history filled with successes, difficult times, joyful moments, and embarrassing missteps. Sharing these stories with your kids builds trust, offers hope, and models vulnerability and authenticity.
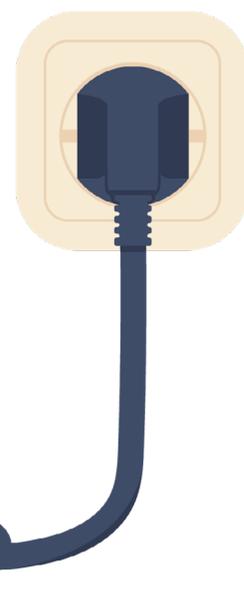
4. Set Boundaries Around AI Use for Teens

Consider creating a family agreement that outlines when, where, and how AI can be used. Here are some tips:

- Explain why boundaries and limitations are a positive step for the whole family (and make it clear that you'll follow them, too!).

- Involve your teen in drafting the agreement to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility.

- Revisit and adjust the agreement as needed and as the family grows and evolves.

- Build in limitations on AI and tech use in general, by establishing tech-free zones, such as the dinner table or at bedtime; and setting weekday and weekend time limits.

- Require supervised use of AI tools until you feel more comfortable.

You may get some pushback from your teen. But remember, your goal is to protect them from the dangers of AI isolation and encourage them to come to you with any issue they are facing.
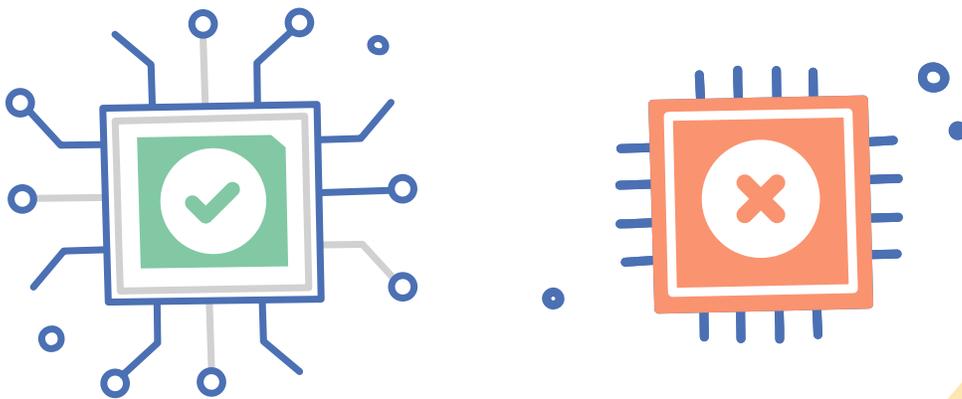
5. Help Them Access Real Support

Your teen or young adult may be turning to chatbots for help with personal challenges or mental health support because they're afraid to tell you they're struggling.

If you notice shifts in your child's mood, sleep, appetite, academics, or social life, it could be a sign that they need professional support. Here are some steps to take:

- Talk to your child about the risks and dangers of relying on AI for answers or diagnoses, and explain that it should never be a replacement for human mentors or professional care providers.

- Encourage them to seek support not only from you, but also from other trusted adults in their lives, such as close relatives, coaches, teachers, or church leaders

- Explain the role of the school or college counselor and that they can be a safe space for conversation and resources

- Discuss the benefits of therapy, and talk about finding a therapist or treatment program to support them.
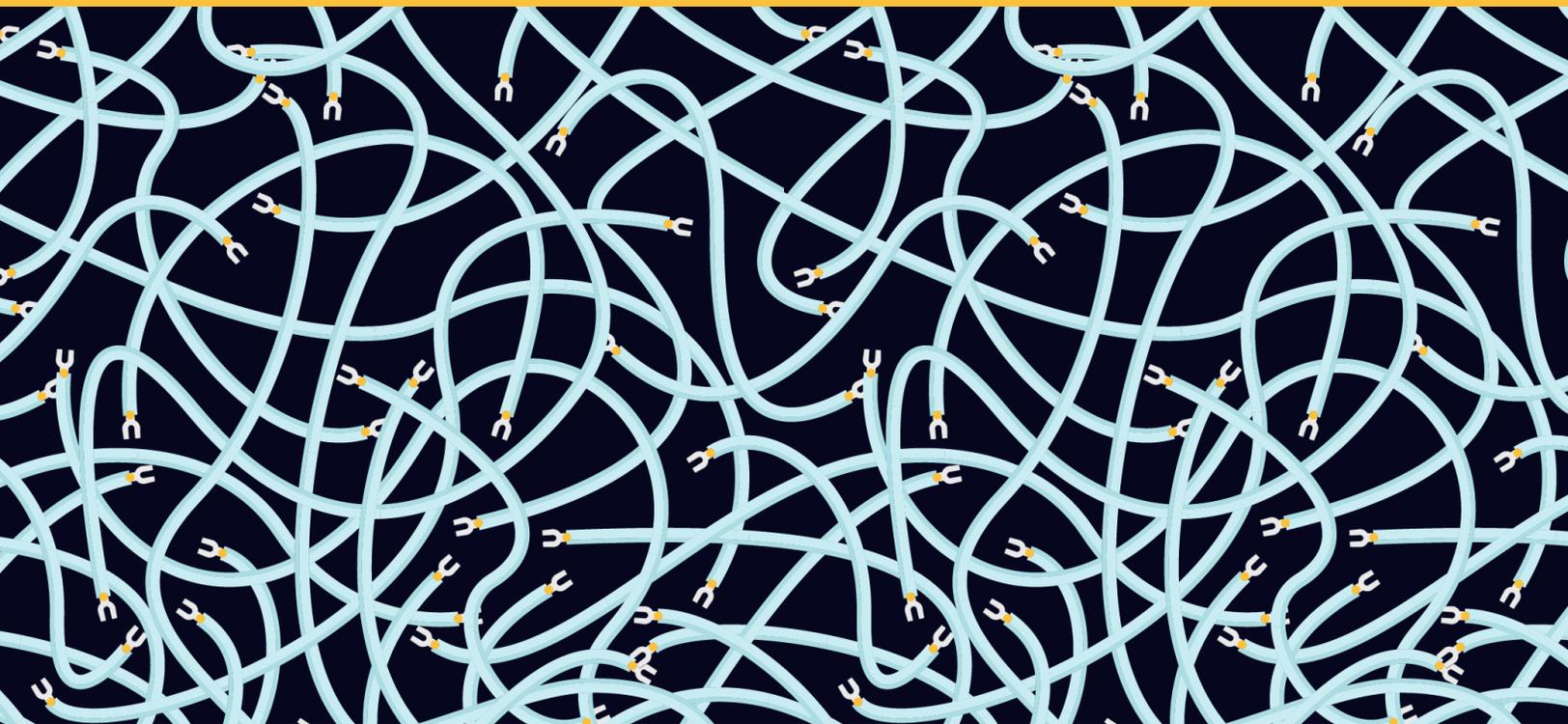
We're Here to Chat

If you're concerned that your teen or young adult is turning to AI for help with mental health challenges, Newport Healthcare can help. Our residential and outpatient programs provide tools and support for the whole family.

Call us to have a confidential conversation with one of our caring and knowledgeable Admissions experts. We're here 24/7 to answer your questions and guide you through the process of accessing care for your child.

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