

YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO NAVIGATE DIGITAL LIFE ALONE, NEITHER SHOULD THE ADULTS WHO CARE FOR THEM



Mindful Media

A NOTE FROM DR. VICKERY, FOUNDER OF MINDFUL MEDIA

You've probably heard the alarming stories about teens and chatbots by now, and adults have reason to be concerned, most bots lack appropriate guardrails that would make them safe. Still, in my experience, the device is rarely the actual problem. Teens turn to AI when they don't feel like they have other options or because it feels safer than a person. Chatbots are an easy way to meet an unmet need, like loneliness, which is a condition we all need to take seriously if we want teens to thrive, both online and offline.

A TEEN'S SOCIAL LIFE SHAPES CHATBOT USE

A California Partners Project survey of more than 1,000 teens found that the loneliest teens used AI chatbots at 48%, compared to 37% overall, climbing to 57% among teens who'd stopped hanging out somewhere because it didn't feel safe or welcoming.

THIRD SPACES ARE VITAL

Third spaces, like parks, rec centers, libraries, and after-school programs, give teens somewhere to gather outside home and school. But the space alone doesn't create belonging, that comes from intentionally creating teen-centered spaces for unstructured time, shared norms, and a sense of purpose.



3 QUESTIONS TO ASK TEENS:

1. Has a chatbot's answer ever surprised you?
2. Are there things you'd tell a chatbot that you wouldn't tell a friend or an adult?
3. Are there places where you feel like you belong? If not, what would need to change for you to feel that?



3 TIPS FOR YOUTH PROGRAMS

From California Partner Project

1. Create opportunities for drop-in unstructured time. Nearly half of teens who use AI chatbots say they'd use them less with more chances to hang out.
2. Treat belonging as an operational priority.
3. Involve teens in shaping the space they use - the norms, values, rules, activities, and design.



3 TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

1. Say yes to unstructured hangouts.
2. Ask how your teen feels in their social world. More than half of teens report loneliness even after spending time with friends.
3. Approach chatbot use with curiosity before concern. Teens often turn to a chatbot when they don't feel emotionally safe.