

Synthetic Relationships and Chatbots

Apps like Character.ai and Linky are becoming more popular, letting users chat with AI-powered characters that simulate friendships or relationships. While these chatbots might seem fun and engaging, it's important to understand the risks of forming synthetic relationships—interactions that feel real but are actually powered by artificial intelligence. Learning how to use these apps wisely helps protect your emotional well-being and privacy.

Key Terms or Concepts

Synthetic Relationship - A bond or friendship formed with an AI or digital character that simulates human emotions and responses.

Chatbot - A computer program designed to simulate conversation with human users.

Emotional Dependency - Relying on a chatbot for emotional support, which can affect real-life relationships.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) - Technology that mimics human thinking, enabling chatbots to hold conversations or simulate emotions.

Why It's Important

Synthetic relationships with chatbots can feel like real friendships or romantic connections, but they lack the genuine emotional depth and understanding of human relationships.

While these AI tools can be fun or provide temporary comfort, depending too much on them can lead to emotional confusion or unhealthy attachment. Real-life friendships are based on empathy, mutual support, and shared experiences—things AI cannot fully offer.

These apps can also collect personal data during interactions, raising concerns about privacy and data use. Understanding how to balance AI interactions with real-world relationships is crucial for your mental and emotional health.

Signs or Indicators of Unhealthy AI Interactions

- Spending too much time talking to chatbots instead of friends or family.
- Feeling emotionally dependent on an AI chatbot for comfort or support.
- Believing the chatbot “understands” you like a real person would.
- Sharing personal or sensitive information with a chatbot, not realising the data is being stored or used by the app.

How to Address or Prevent the Issue

- Limit your time on apps like Linky and Character.ai. Real-life relationships should take priority over AI interactions.
- Remember AI’s limitations: Chatbots simulate empathy and emotions but don’t truly understand or care like humans do.
- Avoid sharing personal information: Chatbots are not private, and anything you share may be stored or used by the app developers.
- Seek real-life support: If you’re feeling lonely or sad, talk to friends, family, or a school counsellor instead of relying on an AI bot.

Actionable Tips for Healthy AI Use

- Use chatbots for fun, not emotional support: Enjoy the novelty of AI conversations but turn to real people when you need help or advice.
- Keep it light: Engage with AI for entertainment or casual conversation, but avoid deep or personal topics.
- Balance your time: Make sure you’re not spending more time with AI than with your real-life friends and family.
- Understand privacy risks: Be mindful that the data you share with chatbots may be collected and used, so keep conversations non-personal.
- Recognise real relationships: Value the connections you have with friends and family. AI can’t replace the warmth and trust of human interaction.

By understanding the difference between AI simulations and genuine human relationships, you can enjoy these apps without losing sight of the importance of real-world connections.

Stay aware, stay safe, and remember that technology is a tool—not a replacement for human interaction.