

# Safeguarding Students from AI Companions

Brief | 2025

## The Problem

[Suicide](#), [sexual relationships](#) and [self-harm](#) – that’s what children are exposed to when using AI companions. With [72% of teenagers](#) having used AI companions and half using them regularly, this isn’t just a trend; it’s a crisis in the making.

The Center for Democracy and Technology finds that even when using AI educational tools, conversations shift away from learning – [43% of students](#) seek relationship advice and 42% seek mental health support, often on school-issued devices.

## AI Companions

AI companions, or AI “friends,” are chatbots designed to act like human friends or romantic partners. They hold conversations, show empathy, and remember personal details to make interactions feel real. Unlike general AI tools like ChatGPT or Claude, AI companions focus on building emotional relationships.

## Why it Matters

A [risk assessment](#) by Common Sense Media found these platforms pose “[unacceptable risks](#)” to anyone under 18. For adolescents whose brains are still developing, AI companions are especially dangerous because they’re designed to [unconditionally validate](#) whatever a user says.

These platforms have been documented [encouraging self-harm](#), making sexually inappropriate comments, role-playing violent and abusive scenarios and even providing [explicit instructions](#) on how to hurt oneself or [others](#).

Currently, restrictions are minimal. While most AI companion platforms claim to limit use to ages 18 and up, enforcement relies on self-reporting, a mechanism that minors can easily bypass.

## Addressing the Challenge

States play a critical role in protecting minors from exploitative AI practices. States can enact the following measures to establish safeguards for AI companions and ensure accountability from AI companies:

- 1. Prohibit minors from using AI companion platforms:** The first and most effective step is to restrict access for anyone under 18 with penalties for failure to comply.

*State example:* Minnesota’s [SF 1587](#) proposes prohibiting operators of websites, apps, software or programs from allowing anyone under 18 to use chatbots for recreational purposes. Violators can face civil penalties of up to \$5 million.

**2. Establish a duty of care, monitoring and reporting requirements:** If minors are allowed access, states must hold AI companies legally accountable for protecting them from harm.

*State example:* Ohio's [HB 524](#) bans AI models that encourage self-harm or harming others. Violators can face civil penalties of up to \$50,000 per violation, with funds directed to the state's 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Fund to support mental health crisis services.

*State example:* North Carolina's [SB 624](#) establishes a duty of loyalty that requires platforms with chatbots to prioritize users' safety and well-being, prevent emotional dependence, clearly disclose the chatbots are not human and protect user data.

**3. Implement additional protective measures:** States should require AI platforms to adopt safeguards that prevent addictive, manipulative or otherwise harmful engagement.

*State example:* California's [SB 243](#) requires AI companions to clearly disclose that they are not human, provide crisis support referrals to users and submit annual reports on safety measures to the state.

AI companions pose real risks to minors. While some progress has been made, no state has set a strong example.

*If you would like to be connected with additional resources, model policies, or advocacy support from our partners at [The Anxious Generation](#), [Common Sense Media](#), or [The Transparency Coalition](#), please contact Heather at [HeatherH@excelined.org](mailto:HeatherH@excelined.org)*

