AI GAPS · For educators and counselors

Educator Conversation Guide

A short guide for teachers, counselors and school staff on talking with students about AI as a place for advice and support.

Why this matters now

- **86%** of kids ages 9 to 17 use AI, and nearly a quarter use it every day. (Common Sense Media Census, 2026)
- **More than 4 in 10** kids say no parent has ever talked with them about using AI safely. (Common Sense Media Census, 2026)
- **About 1 in 8** adolescents and young adults use AI chatbots for mental health advice. (McBain et al., JAMA Network Open, 2025)

Chatbots are built to agree and to keep people chatting. For an anxious student, that can turn into reassurance seeking: asking about the same worry again and again. Each answer brings temporary relief, and the worry comes back stronger.

The framework: AI can be really useful, but it also has GAPS

G **It Guesses.** Its answers are guesses, based on patterns from millions of people, not on you.

A **Agrees too easily.** It tells you what you want to hear, not always what's right for you.

P **Private? Not really.** What you share can be saved and seen.

S **Sucks you in.** It's built to keep you chatting. Asking about the same worry again and again can make it worse, not better.

Start the conversation

The four conversation starters, one for each letter of GAPS:

- **G** *What's something about you that AI could never guess?*
- **A** *Can you think of a time a "yes" wasn't what you needed?*
- **P** *What would you never want a stranger to read?*
- **S** *How do you know when it's time to stop the chat?*

How to talk about it

- **Ask, don't ban.** "What do you use AI for when you're stressed?" Curiosity keeps students talking. Bans can push use out of sight.
- **Listen without judgment.** Students are more likely to come back to adults who stay calm and interested.
- **Watch for the loop.** Asking about the same worry again and again is a sign of anxiety, not curiosity.
- **Point them to people.** When it matters, talk to someone who knows you: a parent/caregiver, counselor, teacher or doctor.

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Warning signs to watch for

- Pulling away from friends, family or activities
- Talking about an "AI friend" or preferring AI to people
- Changes in sleep or mood
- AI appears to be reinforcing unhealthy ideas or behavior
- Repeated reassurance seeking, online or in person

If you notice warning signs, share them with your school counselor or mental health team, following your school's policies.

If someone may be in danger or talking about hurting themselves, follow your school's crisis protocol right away. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline connects anyone to real people, any time: **call or text 988**, or chat at **988lifeline.org**. In an emergency, call 911.

My plan

One way I will bring GAPS into my classroom or sessions

Who I will contact if I notice warning signs

Sources: Common Sense Media, *AI Use by Tweens and Teens*, 2026; McBain et al., *JAMA Network Open*, 2025; Prinstein, written testimony to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Counterterrorism, Sept. 16, 2025.

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