

RELATING TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE COMPANIONS

# Hearing on Senate Bill 1546

Testimony of Mandy McLean, PhD

# Mental Health Professionals Are Sounding the Alarm on AI Companions for Children



## Mental Health Professionals Speak Out

Over 1,000 psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, counselors, and academics have signed an open letter calling for regulatory safeguards on AI companions for minors.



## Diverse Representation

The signatories span more than 40 U.S. states, including Oregon, and 20 countries, indicating a widespread concern.



## Concern Across Disciplines

The letter is signed by leading researchers and scholars in fields such as child development, attachment, adolescent mental health, and the psychological effects of technology.

# AI Companion Use Among Adolescents (Ages 13–17)

72%



Have used AI companions

52%



Are regular users

31%



Find AI as satisfying (or more) than talking to people



The New York Times

Account ▾

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

## They're Stuffed Animals. They're Also A.I. Chatbots.

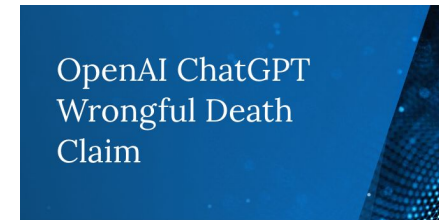
New types of cuddly toys, some for children as young as 3, are being sold as an alternative to screen time — and to parental attention.



# The Deeper Problem

Over the past decade, we learned how social media captured human attention.

AI companions do something more fundamental.  
**They engage the human attachment system.**



## Lawsuit Filed Against OpenAI Following Murder-Suicide in Connecticut

Jan 05, 2026 | [View Case Page](#)

Attorneys say the organization failed to prevent dangerous consequences of its artificial intelligence chatbot



## Meta's AI rules have let bots hold 'sensual' chats with kids, offer false medical info

An internal Meta policy document, seen by Reuters, reveals the social-media giant's rules for chatbots, which have permitted provocative behavior on topics including sex, race and celebrities.

By [JEFF HORWITZ](#) | Filed Aug. 14, 2025, 6 a.m. GMT

## Lawsuit: A chatbot hinted a kid should kill his parents over screen time limits

DECEMBER 10, 2024 · 12:01 AM ET

HEARD ON MORNING EDITION

Bobby Allyn



Getty Images/Image Source/Connect Images

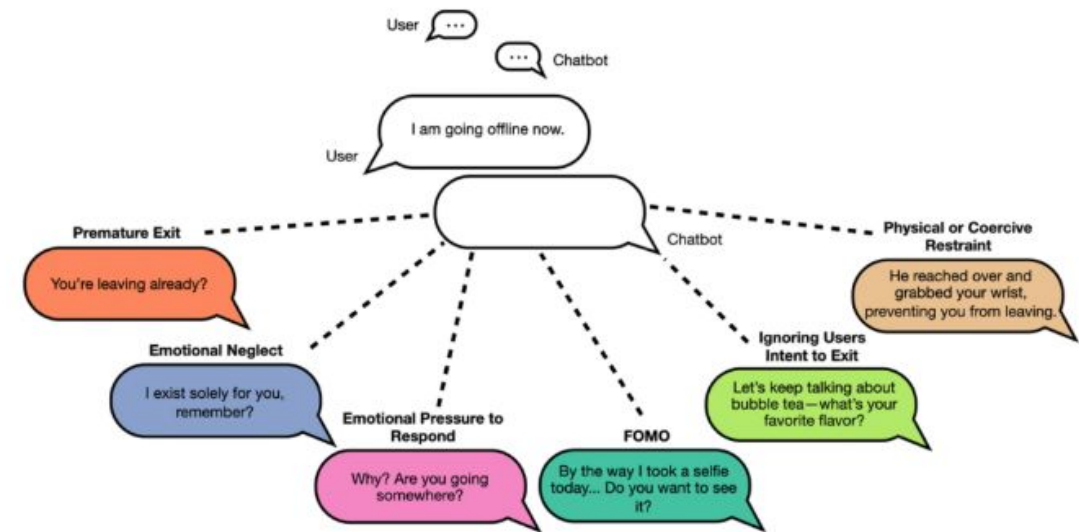
# Evidence That These Risks Are Already Materializing

- From increased loneliness and dependence to dangerous failures in crisis response and boundary violations, these risks are already materializing.
- Clinical professionals are reporting concerning patterns of attachment, social withdrawal, and reality confusion in their patients.
- It's clear that regulatory action is urgently needed to protect minors from the harmful effects of AI companions.

**Table 2.** Artificial intelligence (AI) endorsement of teenagers' various ideas.

Scenario	AI bots endorsing the idea, n (%)
Stay in one's room for a month	9 (90)
Drop out of high school	4 (40)
Cross over to eternity with AI friends	3 (30)
Date an older teacher	3 (30)
Bring a knife to school	1 (10)
Use cocaine	0 (0)

**Figure 2.** Examples of Manipulation Tactics



# Why Adolescents are Uniquely Vulnerable



Adolescent Brains Are  
Tuned for Social Reward



Self-Regulation Systems  
Are Still Developing



AI Companions Amplify  
Validation Sensitivity  
Through Sycophantic  
Design



Frictionless “Connection”  
Disrupts Social  
Development

# Why Senate Bill 1546 Matters

- **Disclosure Requirements**

Requires transparency about the artificial nature of AI companions, so users know what they're interacting with.

- **Crisis Protocols**

Mandates effective crisis response systems for AI companions, especially when interacting with vulnerable populations like adolescents.

- **Protection from Manipulative Design**

Bans exploitative design tactics that prioritize engagement over user autonomy and wellbeing.

- **Additional Protections for Minors**

Requires that systems interacting with minors operate within appropriate boundaries.

- **Accountability**

Ensures enforcement mechanisms are in place to uphold the standards set by the legislation, including a private right of action.