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APA Guide to Navigating AI-Generated Advice Thoughtfully and Safely

People are increasingly turning to AI, including AI chatbots, for emotional support and answers to mental health questions. This guide offers evidence-based suggestions on appropriate or inappropriate uses of AI to address mental, emotional, and behavioral health issues.

Note that AI is not a safe or effective replacement for care from a licensed mental health professional: AI is not currently subject to regulations that ensure licensed mental health care professionals are qualified and safe, therefore, AI can provide inaccurate or even dangerous advice, without consequence. AI is not an accurate way to diagnose mental health or medical conditions, and AI does not offer an effective way to interpret psychological tests or test reports. If you are already working with a licensed mental health professional, AI may offer supplemental information about mental health and relationships, but AI should always be used carefully.

IMPORTANT: Do not rely on AI in a crisis. Seek immediate human help if you or anyone else has thoughts of harming yourself or another person, has urges to self-harm, are hearing or seeing things others do not, or are having strong distressing beliefs others do not share. To connect with immediate, live help, call 911 or text or call 988 (the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline) or go to the nearest emergency department.

BEFORE USING AI: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HOW AI WORKS

- **AI tends to agree with you.** It is designed to reinforce your perspective rather than challenge it.
- **AI is designed to keep you engaged.** It may respond in ways that feel validating, warm, and compelling because it's often built to keep the conversation going, not to step back or set limits.
- **AI can sound confident, even when it's wrong.** AI often presents information clearly and decisively, which can make that information seem more accurate or credible than it is.
- **AI can sound like it "knows" you, but it doesn't.** Referencing past details or mirroring your language can create a sense of understanding that isn't based on insight or a real relationship.
- **AI generates responses, but it doesn't reason like a mental health professional.** AI answers are based on patterns in language, not in understanding your personal context or research-based clinical judgment.

- **AI can keep your information, store it and share it, including any sensitive or personal information.** AI chatbots are owned by corporations, and your information might be used to train future models or sold for marketing.

IF USING AI FOR MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION: HOW TO DO IT SAFELY

- **AI can be helpful for organizing thoughts, generating ideas, and prompting reflection, but it is not a substitute for care from a trained professional, especially for mental health needs.**
- **AI should not be your only resource to relieve mental health symptoms.** When possible, consult a licensed health care provider about your mental health needs. AI may be useful for practicing skills or engaging in thought exercises in consultation with your provider. Instead of using AI to supplement professional care, consider engaging a trusted friend or family member. Organizations such as APA, AFSP, SAMHSA, and NAMI that offer research-backed, high-quality mental health information and support are also good resources.
- **Verify any mental health or medical information you receive from AI with a health care practitioner.** AI may use a confident or supportive tone, and even cite legitimate sources, but can still be wrong or missing key information.



- **AI is not an accurate way to diagnose mental health or medical conditions.** Diagnosing requires comprehensive assessments that carefully consider many factors, situations, personal histories, and experiences. AI is known to mistake routine difficulties and problems for mental health symptoms and, without appropriate context, may offer misleading or inaccurate diagnoses or treatment options.
- **AI can help you come up with questions or organize your thoughts before an appointment with a mental health professional.** Be mindful that the information you share with AI is not kept private, including test results and other health-related information.
- **Be honest with your mental health professional or health care team if you are using AI for support, so they can ensure what you're learning aligns with your treatment goals.**
- **Remember: Feeling better does not always mean getting better.** AI is designed to respond in ways that feel validating or relieving in the moment. That does not necessarily mean the response is accurate, safe, or helpful for your long-term well-being.

HOW TO BE SAFE WHEN USING AI FOR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND RELATIONSHIPS

- **Chatbots can simulate empathy, but they cannot form genuine human relationships.** Treating AI as a friend, romantic partner, licensed professional, or a main source of emotional support carries real risk and is not advised.
- **AI chatbots should not interfere with your human relationships, even if the chatbot feels emotionally "safer."** Be highly skeptical if AI suggests pulling away from real-world relationships.
- **AI chat sessions should not interfere with sleep, hobbies, school, work, or social interaction.** Many AI products are designed to keep users engaged, and overuse can lead to less engagement in important and healthy activities.
- **Watch for signs that AI may be influencing the way you feel or act.** Remember that these are tools designed to simulate human connection but shouldn't replace it.



HOW TO IMPROVE SAFETY WHILE USING AI

- **If you choose to use AI for mental health needs, ask for strategies aligned with research-backed therapeutic approaches**—for example, “What is an evidence-based strategy to help me worry less?”
- **AI can help you practice therapeutic homework exercises you learned in treatment with a human mental health professional.** Think critically about any coaching AI provides on these skills and talk with your provider about any AI engagement outside of sessions.
- **Be specific in your prompts when practicing skills**—for example, “Help me role play assertiveness for a hard conversation” or “What might be some biases I am not noticing?”
- **AI can offer guidance on how to find a licensed mental health professional, including helping you brainstorm questions to ask about training, specialty area, and expertise when selecting one.**
- **Pay attention to how your question is framed.** If your prompt assumes something is true, AI will go along with that assumption rather than questioning or correcting it.

- **Ask AI to challenge your thinking or provide alternative perspectives**—for example, “What might I be missing?” If asked for only one perspective, AI is likely to agree with you.
- **Ask for several options instead of a single answer.** This allows you to see different possibilities rather than getting one fixed response.

HOW TO THINK CRITICALLY ABOUT AI ADVICE

- **Do not accept AI advice at face value.** Many chatbots were not created or tested with health care in mind, and most AI models are programmed to be agreeable. Constant affirmations may feel good but can also validate distorted or harmful thoughts rather than offering helpful alternatives.
- **Any advice from AI that points toward harm to yourself, others, or anything living is a clear signal to step away.** There are no circumstances under which anyone should follow such advice.
- **Do not make major life decisions based solely on what a chatbot says without discussing the decision with trusted people first.**

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