Would You Want an AI Friend? Chatbots and Real Friendship

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Before You Read

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever talked to a chatbot or voice assistant? What did you use it for?
2. Who do you talk to when you feel lonely or want to share good news?
3. How might people's feelings about AI friends differ by age, country, or personality?

Reading: Would You Want an AI Friend? Chatbots and Real Friendship

Late at night, a lonely person opens an app, and a friendly voice asks how their job interview went. It even remembers their cat's name. For many people, this is a **comforting** moment. The voice belongs to an AI **companion**, a chatbot designed to talk like a friend.

These apps are popular in many countries. XiaoIce, which started in China, says it has had hundreds of millions of users. In a 2026 survey, about one in four American adults who use the internet said they have emotional or social conversations with AI. A 2025 survey found that 72 percent of American teenagers had tried an AI companion.

People like these apps because an AI friend is **available** at any hour. It is never bored by their stories, and it does not **judge** them. Some people find it easier to **confide in** a machine than in a friend. But many users develop a strong **attachment**. In 2023, Replika changed its app, and many users said their companion suddenly felt cold. Some were **heartbroken**. A company can change a friend **overnight**. Researchers also found that people who used ChatGPT the most tended to feel lonelier and to **rely on** it more. This does not prove that the chatbot caused the loneliness.

Privacy is another worry. Companies may **store** the private things that people tell their AI friends. In 2024, the Mozilla Foundation found that ten of eleven romantic chatbots did not meet its basic security standards. In 2025, Italy **fined** the company behind Replika five million euros, partly because it did not check users' ages properly. These are worrying facts. Governments are starting to act. A California law **requires** companion apps to remind young users that they are talking to a machine. Rules in China say these services must not be designed to **replace** real social contact.

A **genuine** friend sometimes disagrees, gets tired, and needs help too. An AI companion is designed to be pleasant. The writer suggests reading the privacy settings first. It is also useful to notice whether the app adds to time with people or takes its place.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

Complete each sentence with a word or phrase from the box. Use each one once.

replace	**overnight**	**comforting**	**companion**	**judge**	**confide in**	**available**	**heartbroken**	**rely on**
attachment	**genuine**	**fined**	**requires**	**privacy**				

1. Hot soup on a cold day is very _____.
2. For many years, his dog was his only _____ on long walks.
3. Sorry, the manager is not _____ right now. Can you call back later?
4. It is unfair to _____ people by the way they speak.
5. I trust my best friend, so I always _____ her when I have a problem.
6. Children often feel a strong _____ to their first teacher.
7. She was _____ when her best friend moved to another country.
8. The small company became famous almost _____ after one video.
9. Many older people _____ their children for help with technology.
10. Reading someone's messages without asking is a serious invasion of _____.
11. The driver was _____ for driving too fast near the school.
12. This job _____ a driving license and two years of experience.
13. Nothing can _____ a good night's sleep.
14. Is this a _____ painting or a copy?

Word Partners: Collocations and Word Families

Part A. Collocations

Match the two halves to make common phrases. Write the letter on the line.

1. comforting	_____	**a.** smile
2. a loyal	_____	**b.** on friends
3. freely	_____	**c.** privacy
4. don't judge a book	_____	**d.** attachment
5. a strong emotional	_____	**e.** companion
6. protect your	_____	**f.** by its cover
7. rely heavily	_____	**g.** words
8. a genuine	_____	**h.** available

Now choose three of the phrases and write your own sentences.

Part B. Word families

Complete each sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. Her kind words gave me a lot of _____ after the bad news. (*comforting*)
2. Try not to make a quick _____ about people you have just met. (*judge*)
3. The _____ of free Wi-Fi in the cafe is a big help for students. (*available*)
4. Good English is one _____ for this job. (*requires*)
5. My old car is not very _____. It often breaks down. (*rely on*)
6. She was _____ happy to see her old friend again. (*genuine*)

Comprehension Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. What is an AI companion?

2. What does the AI voice remember at the start of the reading?
3. In the 2026 survey, about how many American adults who use the internet said they have emotional or social conversations with AI?
4. Give two reasons why some people like talking to an AI friend.
5. What happened when Replika changed its app in 2023, and how did some users feel?
6. What did researchers find about people who used ChatGPT the most, and why should we be careful with this result?
7. Why did Italy fine the company behind Replika?
8. What do the new rules in California and China ask companies to do?
9. How is a genuine friend different from an AI companion, according to the writer? Do you agree? Give one reason.
10. **True, False, or Not Given:** *"Italy fined the company behind Replika because the app was too expensive."* Explain your answer using the reading.
11. **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer believes that nobody should ever use an AI companion."* Explain your answer using the reading.
12. **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer begin with a late-night scene in which a chatbot asks about a job interview? Is it (a) to show a situation many readers can picture, (b) to give advice about job interviews, or (c) to explain how chatbots are built?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false). Be ready to correct the false sentences.

1. An AI companion is a chatbot designed to talk like a friend. **T / F**
2. XiaoIce started in Japan. **T / F**
3. The 2025 survey found that most American teenagers had never tried an AI companion. **T / F**
4. An AI friend is available at any hour. **T / F**
5. After Replika changed its app in 2023, many users said their companion felt cold. **T / F**
6. The researchers proved that chatbots cause loneliness. **T / F**
7. Mozilla found that all eleven romantic chatbots met its basic security standards. **T / F**
8. Italy fined the company behind Replika. **T / F**
9. Rules in China say companion services must not be designed to replace real social contact. **T / F**
10. According to the writer, a genuine friend never disagrees with you. **T / F**

Language Focus: -ed and -ing Adjectives

Many adjectives have an **-ed** form and an **-ing** form.

-ed adjectives describe how a person **feels**: *I was bored. She felt worried.*

-ing adjectives describe the thing or situation that **causes** the feeling: *The film was boring. The news was worrying.*

From the reading:

"For many people, this is a **comforting** moment."

"It is never **bored** by their stories, and it does not judge them."

"These are **worrying** facts."

Tip: Be careful with *I am boring* and *I am bored*. The first means other people feel bored because of you.

Part A. Sentence starters

Finish each sentence so that it is true for you.

-ed adjectives (how a person feels)

1. I feel bored when _____

2. I was really surprised when _____

3. I get worried when _____

-ing adjectives (what causes the feeling)

4. The most interesting thing I learned this year was _____

5. A relaxing way to spend a Sunday is _____

Part B. Questions

Answer each question in a full sentence. Try to answer using an -ed *or* -ing *adjective. Then ask a partner.*

6. What is the most boring job you can imagine?

7. What kind of movie do you find exciting?

8. What makes you feel relaxed after a long day?

9. What news have you heard recently that was surprising?

10. When do you feel tired during the week?

Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or in a small group. Give reasons and examples.

1. Which apps or chatbots do you use most often? What do you use them for?

2. What do you usually do on a quiet evening when your friends are busy?

3. Would you feel comfortable telling a chatbot about a problem? Why or why not?

4. What makes a good friend? Make a list of three qualities.

5. Have you ever felt upset when an app or game you liked changed suddenly? What happened?

6. Is it easier to talk about feelings in a message or face to face? Why?

7. An AI friend never gets bored or tired. Is that a good thing or a bad thing in a friendship?

8. Can a person feel real love or friendship for something that is not human, such as a pet, a toy, or a chatbot?

9. What kinds of personal information should people never share with an app?

10. Should companies be allowed to use what people tell AI friends to improve their products? Why or why not?

11. Should there be an age limit for AI companion apps? What age would you choose?

12. Could AI companions help older people who live alone? What problems might there be?

13. Some critics say these apps are designed to keep people talking so the company makes more money. Is that different from social media?

14. In twenty years, do you think having an AI friend will be normal? Will that make people more or less lonely?

Online Practice

Scan the code or visit **englishbridges.com/lessons/ai-friend** for the full reading, vocabulary activities, the Speed Challenge, typing practice, and AI conversation prompts.