Would You Want an AI Friend? Chatbots and Real Friendship

Teacher's Key | Level B1 | EnglishBridges.com

Sections follow the student handout. Delete a section here when you delete it from the handout. The handout uses the short (quick) version of the reading.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

1. comforting
2. companion
3. available
4. judge
5. confide in
6. attachment
7. heartbroken
8. overnight
9. rely on
10. privacy
11. fined
12. requires
13. replace
14. genuine

Word Partners

Part A. 1 g 2 e 3 h 4 f 5 d 6 c 7 b 8 a

Phrases: comforting words; a loyal companion; freely available; don't judge a book by its cover; a strong emotional attachment; protect your privacy; rely heavily on friends; a genuine smile.

Part B. 1 comfort 2 judgment / judgement 3 availability 4 requirement 5 reliable 6 genuinely

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1. *What is an AI companion?*
An AI companion is a chatbot designed to talk like a friend.

2. *What does the AI voice remember at the start of the reading?*
It remembers the user's job interview and the name of their cat.

3. *In the 2026 survey, about how many American adults who use the internet said they have emotional or social conversations with AI?*
About one in four.

4. *Give two reasons why some people like talking to an AI friend.*
It is available at any hour, it is never bored by their stories, and it does not judge them. Some people also find it easier to confide in a machine.

5. *What happened when Replika changed its app in 2023, and how did some users feel?*
Many users said their companion suddenly felt cold, like a different person. Some felt heartbroken.

6. *What did researchers find about people who used ChatGPT the most, and why should we be careful with this result?*
They tended to feel lonelier and to rely on the chatbot more. We should be careful because this does not prove that the chatbot caused the loneliness; lonely people may simply use it more.

7. *Why did Italy fine the company behind Replika?*
Partly because the company did not check users' ages properly. (The Italian regulator also said it had no proper legal basis for using people's data.)

8. *What do the new rules in California and China ask companies to do?*
California requires companion apps to remind young users that they are talking to a machine (and to suggest breaks). China's rules say these services must not be designed to replace real social contact

(and require reminders after two hours of use).

9. *How is a genuine friend different from an AI companion, according to the writer? Do you agree? Give one reason.*
   Open answer. The writer says a genuine friend sometimes disagrees, gets tired, and needs your help, while an AI companion is designed to be pleasant. Accept a reasoned agreement or disagreement.
10. *True, False, or Not Given: "Italy fined the company behind Replika because the app was too expensive." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    False. The reading says the fine was partly because the company did not check users' ages properly. It does not mention price.
11. *Yes, No, or Not Given: "The writer believes that nobody should ever use an AI companion." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    No. The writer gives advice for people who try one (read the privacy settings first), so the writer does not say that nobody should use them.
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?*
    (a) To show a situation many readers can picture. The scene shows why AI companions feel comforting before the reading discusses the risks.

True or False

1. **T.** The voice belongs to an AI companion, a chatbot designed to talk like a friend.
2. **F.** XiaoIce started in China.
3. **F.** It found that 72 percent had tried one.
4. **T.** The reading says an AI friend is available at any hour.
5. **T.** Many users said their companion suddenly felt cold, like a different person.
6. **F.** The research does not prove that the chatbot caused the loneliness.
7. **F.** Ten of the eleven did not meet its basic security standards.
8. **T.** Italy fined the company five million euros in 2025.
9. **T.** The rules say these services must not be designed to replace real social contact.
10. **F.** A genuine friend sometimes disagrees with you.

Language Focus: -ed and -ing Adjectives

Model answers. Accept any answer that uses the form correctly and makes sense.

1. I feel bored when I have to wait for a bus for a long time.
2. I was really surprised when my friend called me from another country.
3. I get worried when my phone battery is almost empty.
4. The most interesting thing I learned this year was how to cook a new dish.
5. A relaxing way to spend a Sunday is to read in a park.
6. I think working alone in a quiet office all day would be boring.
7. I find action movies exciting.
8. I feel relaxed when I listen to music and drink tea.
9. It was surprising that a famous cafe near my house closed.
10. I feel tired on Thursday evenings because I have classes all day.

Accept any correct -ed or -ing adjective. Check that -ed describes the person's feeling and -ing describes the cause.

Notes on the Evidence

Surveys: The 2026 adult figures come from Elon University's Imagining the Digital Future Center, "The Rise of AI Companions" (released September 2, 2026; YouGov fieldwork May 18 to 22, 2026; 4,268 US internet-using adults screened, with a subsample of 1,000 AI companion users). Figures used: 27 percent of US internet-using adults have significant emotional or social interactions with AI ("about one in four"); 39 percent sometimes tell AI things they would not tell other people ("almost four in ten"); 37 percent would feel a personal loss. The reading says "American adults who use the internet", not all adults. The teen figure (72 percent had tried an AI companion; 52 percent regular users) is from Common Sense Media's 2025 survey of 1,060 US teens aged 13 to 17, fieldwork by NORC (April to May 2025), as reported by TechCrunch. XiaoIce's "hundreds of millions" is the company's own claim (about 660 million users worldwide, reported in 2021); the reading attributes it.

Attachment and loneliness: The 2023 Replika change (removal of adult role-play features in February 2023, later partly restored for older accounts) led many users to report that their companion felt cold or different; the reading does not describe the content of the change. The MIT Media Lab and OpenAI research (March 2025) combined a four-week randomized trial of about 1,000 participants with an analysis of nearly 40 million ChatGPT conversations. It found that heavier daily use was correlated with more loneliness and emotional dependence; it studied ChatGPT, not companion apps, and the link is correlational, which the reading states.

Privacy and regulation: Mozilla Foundation, Privacy Not Included, February 14, 2024: 10 of 11 romantic AI chatbots failed its Minimum Security Standards. Italy's data protection authority (Garante) fined Luka Inc., Replika's developer, 5 million euros (reported May 2025) for having no valid legal basis for processing data and failing to verify ages; the reading says "partly because" it did not check ages. California SB 243 was signed October 13, 2025 and took effect January 1, 2026: for known minors it requires disclosure that the chatbot is AI and a break reminder at least every three hours. China's Measures on human-like AI interaction services were issued April 10, 2026 and took effect July 15, 2026 (usage reminders every two hours; services must not be designed to replace real social interaction; virtual intimate relationships banned for minors), as summarized by Latham and Watkins (July 2026). All status statements are as of October 26, 2026; rules and company policies may change.

Writer's view: The final paragraph (what a genuine friend does, apps designed to keep users talking) is opinion. The money point is attributed to critics; the advice to read privacy settings and limit what you share is general consumer guidance, not a research finding.