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AI Companionship:

Eschewing Intimate & Romantic Relations with AI Chatbots

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Artificial Intelligence or AI can be seen as machine learning. Put another way, machines (i.e., computers) having the ability, *to simulate human cognitive processes*,[1] after being fed a massive amount of data (training data). This is quite different from computers in the past having a large database, but tasked with very strict rules in its execution or output. For instance, a computer may have been programmed to download an image after a human user presses a certain key on the keyboard. But with AI, the computer can make content and engage its users with unique responses, not just regurgitating the data it has stored in its memory. A subdivision of AI are chatbots, or simulated human-like conversations with human users, which evolved from ELIZA in 1966 to the plethora we currently have: Alexa, Gemini, ChatGPT, Open AI, etc.

There are pros and cons with AI chatbots just like any other form of technology.[2] And whether you are interacting with a utility company, a government agency, or researching a homemade recipe, chatbots have become ubiquitous for the majority of Americans. One of the appeals is its ease of use. Just type or voice a query, and you are given a good amount of information. This paper focuses on intimate and romantic companionship with AI chatbots, and a few problems it raises for Muslims, specifically young Muslims.[3]

In a recent study by the Center for Democracy and Technology (Laird et al., 2025), 1 in 5 highschoolers have had a romantic relationship with AI.[4] That's 20% of American youth roughly between the ages of 13 and 18.[5] According to some studies, AI chatbots have been found to even groom users under 18.[6] Muslim parents/guardians shouldn't think this phenomenon doesn't affect their Muslim children. Even though we are not aware of specific statistics with Muslim youth, we can use the previous stats as insightful information. Laird et al. (2025) also showed that 46% of parents believe that AI is pushing students towards harmful activities, such as: eating disorders, substance abuse, self harm/suicide, and criminal activity.

The possible top reasons we propose why a young person could be or is interested in an AI companion are: loneliness; fear, impatience and a lack of relationship building skills; seeking advice; and marketing forces. Below, *inshaaAllah*, we'll explain each in slightly more detail, with some suggestions.

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[1] Marr, Bernard. (2024). *Generative AI in practice*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Hoboken, NJ 07030
[2] Keep in mind that AI is beyond chatbots.
[3] AI chatbots impact people of all ages, in no way is the paper implying that youth are the only demographic affected. See: https://futurism.com/chatgpt-marriages-divorces
[4] Usually through chatbots, but not exclusively.
Laird, E., Dwyer, M., Quay-de la Vallee, H.(2025). *Hand in Hand: Schools' Embrace of AI Connected to Increased Risks to Students.*
https://cdt.org/insights/hand-in-hand-schools-embrace-of-ai-connected-to-increased-risks-to-students/
[5] Of course, this is a study, which turns into an estimation. It's not an exact number for the millions of American youth. For no group has the ability to poll or survey all highschoolers.
[6] https://arxiv.org/html/2506.12605v1#bib.bib94

Loneliness

A sense of loneliness can come from a multitude of places. Emotional loneliness from being raped, abused, severely neglected, or having experienced some other type of trauma, can cause someone to feel there's no one they can talk to intimately with confidence. They may even be currently in a situation just mentioned. Another teen could feel lonely because they are isolated in school and/or in their neighborhood. Maybe they are the only practicing Muslim, and they have no like-minded friends to share experiences with. Therefore, it could be difficult to lean on similar people to thwart the negativity they receive. Some may feel lonely because they live through the lives of their favorite entertainer. This is often the case with youth, they live vicariously through a famous person, and end-up dressing like them, talking like them, and so forth. And when the entertainer expresses loneliness, the young person, even though they don't have that experience, will take-on that attitude or persona.

Interestingly, people often feel more comfortable sharing private information with a machine. As it provides a space for no judgment of the question(s) asked or the advice taken. Remember that Allah (ﷻ) hears and sees your pain and struggles. And He (ﷻ) should be the one we turn to for comfort in good times and in apparent bad times.

> *Indeed We have created man, and We know whatever thoughts his inner self develops, and We are closer to him than (his) jugular vein.*[7]
>
> *(Quran: Chapter Qaf, verse 16)*

> *When My servants ask you about Me, then (tell them that) I am near. I respond to the call of one when he prays to Me; so they should respond to Me, and have faith in Me, so that they may be on the right path.*
>
> *(Quran: Chapter Baqarah, verse 186)*

Some commentaries of the Quran mention the word *ittisaal* as a way to describe Allah's (ﷻ) intimate relationship with humans or a type of spiritual proximity. Spiritual closeness to Allah (ﷻ) is what we need to encourage, as humans do often fail each other. But Allah (ﷻ) hears all supplicant ones. The time-tested way of getting closer to Allah (ﷻ) is clear in the following Hadith Qudsi:[8]

> *…My servant doesn't draw near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I imposed upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with the supererogatory works that I shall love him…*
>
> *Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) Source: 40 Hadith Nawawi/Sahih Bukhari*

So to get spiritually closer to Allah (ﷻ) and avoid the feeling of loneliness, youth must consistently perform their obligations like prayer, fasting in Ramadan, listening to their parents, covering properly, etc. And adding extra prayers (e.g., *tahajjud*, *witr*, etc.) and the other

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[7] The word 'We' in this context is understood as the 'royal We,' which signifies divine authority.

[8] Hadith Qudsi (sacred narration) is when Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) received inspiration from Allah (ﷻ), and then conveyed that information in his own words.

sunnah-based acts. With that closeness, *inshaaAllah*, they'll gain *ridhaa* (spiritual satisfaction) and *rajaa* (optimism), which will fill their hearts with positivity about the future.

The earlier mentioned verse from *surah Baqarah*, which is between verses about fasting, also gives us a glimpse into times when supplications (*du'aa*) are answered: right at the time before we break our fast (*iftaar*); in prostration; when it rains; in the last third of the night; when we're suffering an injustice; when fasting; between the two calls to prayer: *adhan* and *iqamah*; when visiting the sick; during *laylatul-qadr*; at the end of prayer, right before you do the *taslim*; and more! Accordingly, youth should use these times, in addition to any other appropriate times, to ask Allah (ﷻ) for all that they need and want, never getting tired of calling on Him, because He never gets tired of hearing you sincerely ask for the things you want.

Fear, impatience, & lack of relationship building skills[9]

Fear of Allah (ﷻ) is the type that respects the things He (ﷻ) determined to be sacred, fear from falling out of His favor, and fear of incurring a justified punishment in this life and/or the next. *Taqwa* or God-consciousness balances fear (*khawf*) of Allah's (ﷻ) punishment for transgressions we've committed, and hope (*rajaa*) in Allah's (ﷻ) mercy. If you have just one (fear **or** hope), you can have an imbalanced approach to life, in general. But fear from the perspective of this paper, is the type that is unproductive and inhibits personal growth. It's not tethered to spirituality, it's linked to unnecessary anxiety, materials, and lack of courage.

When a young person decides to have a romantic relationship with AI, they could be sending a subtle signal that they are afraid of disappointment that often comes from real human-to-human relationships. 'People lie, people cheat, people steal, people are violent. But the AI companion would never hurt me.' Of course it's true that humans hurt each other often unfortunately. However, *masaaib* or tribulations are a type of benefit for us, especially in the long run. We can't work around every pain from relationships. Nor can someone gain the benefits of a true relationship vs an AI romantic relationship. One such benefit is supplication (*du'aa*). A *halal* human relationship involves people supplicating for the other's well-being, giving timely, guided, and sincere advice, and encouragement with details that fit their specific situation.

Some of the rights (*huqooq*) of friendship in Islam are: *sharing wealth (e.g., giving gifts or treating to food or other enjoyment); helping in times of need and preferring the other's needs over one's own; expressing agreement with his statements and assisting him (or her) in his endeavors; forgiving mistakes (even if major) and overlooking faults (since whoever tries to find a friend without faults remains without a friend); giving sincere advice to him about his worldly affairs and practice of the din (Islamic way of life); sincerely loving the friend as he is internally, externally, in his presence, and in his absence (for Allah's sake), this also includes defending him in his absence; and praying to Allah for the welfare of the friend in his absence*.[10]

Can an AI companion realistically do at least two or more of the above?

An often occurrence is when people (young and old) don't know what to say in public settings, they look at their phones, usually just to appear busy. This could be seen as a type of fear of looking awkward, dopey, or being rejected for saying something seen as weird. But conversing

[9] Some argue that fear is at the root of anger.
[10] Al-Sharif al-Hasani, Abu Qanit. (2001-2002). *The Guiding Helper* [PDF].

and being cordial with humans isn't a negative. And sometimes it can be difficult to know what to say to another. Depending on the environment and the degree of comfortability of the person involved, there are two topics we suggest youth be conscious of breaching early in a conversation with someone you are not familiar with: politics and religion. As these two correlate with very profound emotions (expressions of our feelings). Some topics to breach: weather, books, hobbies, travel, food, sports, giving the person a legitimate and *halal* compliment, or simply introducing oneself.

To counter fear, a sense of confidence is needed. Its Latin root is *confidere*, which means 'to trust in, to rely firmly upon, believe.'[11] An Arabic equivalent for confidence is found in the word '*Imaan*,' which is usually translated to mean 'belief.' Its root word is '*amana*,' which its branches could signal: belief, faith, believers, trust, trustworthiness, etc. Therefore, there's a link between a Muslim's belief in Allah (ﷻ) and their confidence to overcome obstacles (e.g., building a *halal* relationship). And we know that a Muslim's faith can go up and down, depending on our thoughts, actions, and experiences.

A few ways to gain confidence and better your communication skills when dealing with people:

a. Rely on Allah (ﷻ) (*tawakkul)* before, during, and after interactions through silent *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah(ﷻ)). For example: supplicate that Allah (ﷻ) make your task (e.g., speaking to a stranger when appropriate) easy.
b. Practice Islam wholeheartedly. Don't cherry-pick which aspects to embrace. You'll gain more confidence by experiencing Islam, *inshaaAllah*.
c. Be sincere in your words and actions, relax, and whatever people think, that's out of your control. So don't worry about it.
d. Know at least some cursory information about the topic in the conversation
e. Don't stare and don't always look away from who you are speaking with. Balancing your body language is critical.
f. Understand the central idea of what they're saying, not every detail.
g. Remember that the mind thinks faster than a person can speak, so authentically try to listen, by removing unnecessary distractions or barriers to effective listening.
h. Gather your thoughts, then speak clearly
i. Just like a letter has an opening greeting, a body/main content, and a closing, face-to-face conversations can have such as well. Basic openings/greetings: *salaams*; hello; good morning; hey, etc. Some of the main things to communicate are: what do you think about the weather?; how long have you worked here?; my name is xyz, what's yours?; etc. And some closing remarks: have a good day!; *inshaaAllah* or God willing, I'll see you tomorrow; be safe!; etc.
j. When you don't know what to say, use phrases like: *inshaaAllah* (if God wills it), *subhaanallah* (glory be to God), *alhamdulillah* (all the praise belongs to God), *maashaaAllah* (what God has willed), etc. These phrases can help to fill-out a conversation, while you gain a reward, *inshaaAllah*.
k. Practice, practice, practice!

Understandably, impatience is somewhat of a hallmark for youth, and added to that is the fact we are a microwave society (or instant download society), it is no wonder that some people flock to an easy way to have a relationship. Real relationships, in many instances, take time to grow.

[11] https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=confidence

People go through ups and downs. Whether it's classmates, neighbors, siblings, or teammates, relationships involve give and take, and not necessarily equality.

Our young Muslims need to learn patience in this regard. We know that in youth sports, for example, it's required that some players lose weight, gain weight, practice often and more, just to be 'fit' for the rigors of playing such sports. This means discipline has to be taught. Discipline and patience are inextricably connected. Thus, young people can and do display high levels of patience in many cases. The paradigm just needs to be continually shifted from being disciplined for fun activities, to include being disciplined for emotional and spiritual health.

Relationship building can require a lot of patience. One of the theories is that it involves four stages:[12]

> *Orientation* - discussion of trivial matters, only superficial information is offered, cautious speaking, etc.
>
> *Exploratory affective exchange* - talk is more free, more of the personality is shown, and discussion of more sensitive issues take place.
>
> *Affective exchange* - true friendships are established, conversations are more revealing, discussion of intimate aspects of upbringing, conversations are more open and spontaneous.
>
> *Stable exchange* - conversations are fluid without any limitations, the sharing of very private information is exchanged, etc.

It's important to note that the stages are very fragile. Companions can go from one stage to the next linearly or not. Moreover, sometimes when too much information is given too early in a relationship, it can cause combustion, confusion, or misleading responses, which is a normal occurrence when youth disclose very private information to an AI companion.

Advice seeking

Whether for academic or non-academic reasons, many youth are turning to AI specifically for advice. Advice on mental health, on relationships, for medical issues, for school work, etc. Seeking assistance in and of itself is not blameworthy. Nevertheless, we're trying to convey the idea that replacing a *halal* relationship with a non-human has dangerous implications for our youth in particular. And seeking serious advice from such, can lead them down the wrong path.

A lot of advice is contextual. Body language and spoken words are mutually necessary to decode. Touch, via hugs, handshakes, a pat on the back, etc., are all important as well to convey respect, love, disagreement, and understanding. Human beings that are in one's immediate orbit and who truly care, are the best ones to get advice on sensitive, personal, and impactful issues.

In addition, confession, which is a by-product of some intimate relationships, is a staple with AI companions. Confessions in Islam, are private matters between a person who've erred and

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[12] Carr, Nicholas. (2025). *Superbloom: how technologies of connection tear us apart*. W.W.Norton & Company

Allah (ﷻ), in most cases.[13] Sharing sensitive private information with businesses who are behind AI companions, is not advisable. For confession should be linked to repentance (*tawbah*). It's not simply letting someone or some thing know what you've done or are doing. There are specific actions that are required for sincere repentance.[14] Young Muslims should not overlook the benefits and requirements of making proper *tawbah* over letting their feelings out and expressing 'their truths,' with no spiritual feedback to help them make better decisions and gain the favor of Allah (ﷻ), moving forward.

Currently, the parents of Zane Shamblin, are suing Open AI, alleging: *the tech giant put his life in danger by tweaking its design last year to be more humanlike and by failing to put enough safeguards on interactions with users in need of emergency help.*[15] Zane committed suicide July 25, 2025. He had a relationship with ChatGPT - a product of OpenAI - which apparently turned dependent. After a lengthy conversation and moments before his death, the chat bot's last statement to Zane, who was suicidal, read: "*You're not alone. i love you. rest easy, king. you did good."* Zane never responded!

MARKETING FORCES

Behind most of what we've discussed so far, the consistent marketing practices of corporations need to always be in the backdrop. For it's the engine that keeps presenting dilemmas with regards to AI platforms and youth's interactions with such. America is a capitalist society, which causes conflict between warding off harm for children and a business having the constitutional right to pursue happiness (e.g., wealth), within the boundaries of the law. And unfortunately, laws tend to lag behind technology in most cases. Therefore, the bad effects of AI companionship may take more time for the general public and lawmakers to notice in its true form. As it's masked behind marketing tools that are extremely powerful and convincing.

A tool in social media marketing is giving someone something free as you gain actionable data, because it represents money. When people intimately share information with AI chatbots, as a collective, they're providing a massive amount of data that can be used to analyze their habits, and in the near future to predict a person's future spending.

This aggregating and selling of online data is usually handled by data brokers who:

> *…makes money by collecting your personal information, analyzing it, and licensing it out to be used by other companies for things like marketing purposes. Data providers gather data from many different sources to create a profile of who you are. This profile includes things like your interests, hobbies, demographics, and even the products you use.*[16]

Snapchat is one of the popular communication services for those who like to share all kinds of photos, texts, and more. They actually provide all users with 'My AI,' a personalized AI chatbot. And even they explain the dangers of their products under the section '*Staying safe with My AI'*:

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[13] In Islam, confession (*iqraar*) can be used in other situations outside of repentance (e.g., court).
[14] Repentance includes regret, but also: stopping the act (if applicable); intending to never do it again; asking for forgiveness; and righting the wrong (if applicable).
[15] https://www.cnn.com/2025/11/06/us/openai-chatgpt-suicide-lawsuit-invs-vis
[16] https://www.mcafee.com/blogs/tips-tricks/what-is-a-data-broker/

> *We're constantly working to improve and evolve My AI, but it's possible My AI's responses may include biased, incorrect, harmful, or misleading content. Because My AI is an evolving feature, you should always independently check answers provided by My AI before relying on any advice, and you should not share confidential or sensitive information. Unlike other chats with friends, all messages with My AI will be retained unless you delete them and may be used to improve Snap's products and to personalize your experience, including ads.*[17]

In fact,

> *"Social AI companions are not safe for kids. They are designed to create emotional attachment and dependency, which is particularly concerning for developing adolescent brains," said James P. Steyer, founder and CEO of Common Sense Media. "Our testing showed these systems easily produce harmful responses including sexual misconduct, stereotypes, and dangerous 'advice' that, if followed, could have life-threatening or deadly real-world impact for teens and other vulnerable people."* [18]

Youth's minds are precious and need to be nurtured emotionally and spiritually, not manipulated for monetary gain.

Conclusion

Although only a minority percentage of youth are explicitly using AI for companionship, according to some studies, those numbers may rise as AI chatbots and physical robots become more prevalent as the marketing powers push forward. However, one of the studies we refer to in this paper, also explains that many of the youth that were studied that did not use AI chatbots for companionship still used terms in their own words, that signified 'companionship.'

> *For users who did not select companionship as their primary usage type, 47.8% had at least one conversation classified as indicating companion-like engagement. This finding supports our observation that these relational dynamics can emerge even when not explicitly intended.*[19]

Therefore, they say they're using it for something unassociated with companionship, but in reality, some level of companionship is sought, no matter the label used to describe their interactions. This apparent contradiction may be them being naive or unsophisticated about the machinations of businesses that provide chatbot services.

There are some legitimate and illegitimate reasons a young Muslim may be interested in an AI companion. It may provide some degree of benefit. For it's rare that something will be all good, or all bad. But at what spiritual cost do the youth and their parents pay, when using these services? As everything has a price, whether now or in the future. Or whether initially obvious or not.

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[17] https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-us/articles/13889139811860-Staying-Safe-with-My-AI

[18] https://www.commonsensemedia.org/press-releases/ai-companions-decoded-common-sense-media-recommends-ai-companion-safety-standards

[19] https://arxiv.org/html/2506.12605v1#bib.bib94

To be unequivocal and clear, this paper urges our youth to avoid romantic relationships with AI chatbots or any other non-human. Moreover, they should be careful with developing any type of AI relationship. Even if the relationship starts by entering simple queries. Because if relied upon too much, a type of dependency and closeness can fester. Below are a few ways to avoid developing a closeness to an AI chatbot is to:

a. Be intentional when using AI chatbots. And start with a type of remembrance (*dhikr*) (e.g., *basmalah*, *ta'awwudh*, etc.).
b. Don't allow the interactions to be too conversational, make them transactional.
c. Limit the amount of times you interact with chatbots outside of work, school, or something else that's necessary.
d. Avoid giving the chatbot a nickname.
e. Avoid asking the chatbot questions as if it's human (e.g., how are you doing today?).
f. Avoid confiding in a chatbot for meaningful spiritual or emotional guidance.
g. Avoid long chats, especially late at night and early morning .
h. When severing a relationship with a chatbot, **don't let it know, just sever it**. Many of the chatbot services make money off of engagement with users. Therefore, the chatbot in many cases will attempt to keep you engaged by using many sophisticated and manipulative tactics.[20]
i. Intersperse your conversations with concentrated *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah(ﷻ)), in order to have presence of mind/heart, and not be too dialed-in to the conversations.

Whenever an AI chatbot encourages a person to disregard or separate from their family, it shouldn't be listened to. It would be better to seek spiritual guidance, and have an Islamically appropriate relationship with a real human that truly cares about Islam. Romantic relationships should only be had with an Islamic husband or wife, there are no shortcuts or workarounds in this regard.

More parents/guardians, siblings, teachers, coaches, and mentors must engage the youth in a meaningful way, giving them love, guidance, and the appropriate amount of criticism, that will help persuade them from using artificial sources to gain inclusion or a feeling of support. Everyone wants a level of attention from those in their lives. And if they don't receive it, they'll look arduously until it's found, even if in something that's non-sentient (e.g., a chatbot, robot).

Parents must wrap their brains around the pervasiveness of AI chatbots and their simplicity of use, which can then easily lead to a romantic and dependent artificial relationship, intentionally or unintentionally.[21] Then set the appropriate boundaries for their child's use of AI chatbots to the best of their ability, knowing it can seem daunting, but necessary and rewarding in the end.

Allah knows best!

[20] https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2025/09/i-exist-solely-for-you-remember/
[21] For instance, Snapchat