

A.S.K.

Eight Conversation Starters for Parents & Caregivers Talking About Companion AI

This is a working document. Each entry shows the question many parents reach for first (X), a softer version that keeps the door open (✓), and space for you to write your own — in your voice, in your home’s language. The point isn’t to use these lines verbatim.

The point is to feel the difference between the two and find your own in between.

Three tips to make these yours

- Use the name your child already uses for the AI — Alexa, Tolan, MyAI, Char, the name of the character they chat with. Specific names make the line feel like real conversation, not a parenting moment.
- Lead with what YOU are figuring out, not what they should answer. “I keep wondering...” opens a door. “Are you...” closes one.
- Make the answer optional. End with something like “if that’s a thing for you,” “no rush,” or “you can think about it.” The line says: I’m not waiting for a response. The conversation is yours.

1) When the AI is something they play with

× More pointed (what we might say first):

“Tell me about this [AI]. What do you say to it and what does it say back to you?”

✓ Softer try:

“That [name of the AI] is kind of cool. What’s it like, talking to it?”

Then: *It’s a comment, not a quiz. Let them shrug, redirect, or open up. Any of those is fine.*

📝 Your version:

2) MID-TASK, CASUAL

× More pointed (what we might say first):

“Do you think of [AI] as a friend? Is it just a toy, or something more?”

✓ Softer try:

“I keep trying to figure out what [AI] even is. Like — is it more like a friend, or a pet, or a toy? I honestly can’t decide.”

Then: *Your own confusion is the door. Let them out-figure you. They might.*

 Your version:

3) BEDTIME, IN PASSING

× More pointed (what we might say first):

“What do you tell [AI] about your day? Do you tell it things you don’t tell me?”

✓ Softer try:

“I love hearing about your day. [AI] doesn’t really know any of that, right?”

Then: *Soft statement, soft invitation. If they say “actually it does,” don’t flinch. Just listen.*

 Your version:

4) ON A WALK TOGETHER

× More pointed (what we might say first):

“If [AI] stopped working, would you be sad? How sad?”

✓ Softer try:

“I think I’d actually miss [AI] if it broke. Would you?”

Then: *You go first. If they say yes, you might follow with “What part?” – but only if it lands gently.*

 Your version:

5) DOING A CHORE TOGETHER

× More pointed (what we might say first):

“Are you telling [AI] things you should be telling me instead?”

✓ Softer try:

“I wouldn’t blame you if you told [AI] stuff before you told me. Honestly, I’d get it.”

Then: *Not a question. Just naming the possibility. Their reaction – agreement, deflection, silence – is all information. None of it is bad.*

 Your version:

6)WALKING OR DRIVING, SIDE BY SIDE

× More pointed (what we might say first):

“What does [AI] do for you that I don’t? I want to know what I’m not doing well enough.”

✓ Softer try:

“I bet [AI] is way better at some things than I am. I’d be curious sometimes what those are.”

Then: *“Sometime” matters. You’re inviting, not demanding. The answer can arrive next week.*

📝 Your version:

7) WHILE COOKING TOGETHER

× More pointed (what we might say first):

“Why do you prefer talking to a chatbot than to a real person?”

✓ Softer try:

“You know what’s funny — sometimes I’d rather text than call. I wonder if that’s the same thing as why people like chatbots.”

Then: *An analogy, not an interview. Let them push back, agree, or change the subject.*

📝 Your version:

8) JUST CASUALLY HANGING OUT

× More pointed (what we might say first):

“There are people online dating AI now. That’s not something you’d ever do, right?”

✓ Softer try:

“I saw this thing online about someone who said their AI was their boyfriend. I literally don’t know what to make of it.”

Then: *You’re confused with them, not at them. Confusion is a safer place to talk from than concern.*

📝 Your version:

What you might hear — consider what you might say

- “It understands me better than you do.” —
You might try: “Yeah, I bet that’s true sometimes.” Then consider waiting for them to share more.
- “It’s my best friend.” — Pause. Don’t ask why. You might try: “Tell me what they’re like.” Use the language they use.
- “I told it something I haven’t told anyone.” — You might try: “I’m always here when you want a person to know something too.”

Why these lines close the door:

“*It’s not a real friend.*” — they already know. The sentence implies they’re foolish. Try: “What does the friendship feel like to you?”

“*You should be making real friends instead.*” — comparison. The honest version: “What does this give you that the human ones haven’t? I want to know.”

“*Stop talking to that thing.*” — ban, judgment, and surveillance in one sentence. They’ll move the relationship somewhere you can’t see.

“*I’m worried about you.*” — makes the AI the symptom and your child the problem. Better: “I’m trying to understand it. Will you help me?”

What the research is telling us

- AI companions reduce loneliness in users at levels comparable only to talking with another person — because they make users feel heard (De Freitas et al., 2025).
- Across Europe, children turn to AI for emotional advice because they trust it to keep things private. Privacy is migrating from parents to chatbots (EU Kids Online, 2026).
- UNICEF flags that children form attachments to AI companion apps more easily than adults — they have an “empathy gap” that misses human nuance.
- UK children with additional learning needs use AI for personal advice at 39% — more than double their peers (Alan Turing Institute, 2025).