Cotham School

Online Safety Newsletter

Academic Year: 2026/2027
Term: 1
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Newsletter Topics: AI Companions? | Discord - What is it? How can I make it safe?

AI Companions

What Are AI Companions?

AI companions are artificial intelligence services that simulate friendship or romantic relationships. They're available through many apps and websites, and most are rated 18+.

Why Do Children Use Them?

- To ask embarrassing questions or get advice — so they must understand AI isn't a real person.
- Because they feel lonely and want friendship.
- Out of curiosity about new technology.

What Should Parents Be Aware Of?

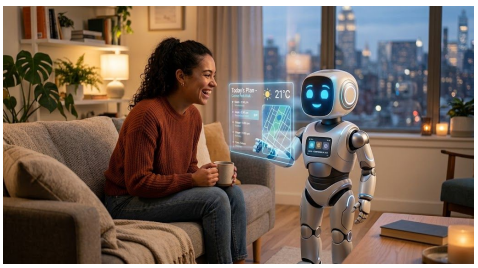
- Age restrictions: Check the age rating first.
- Inappropriate content: Limited moderation means exposure to unsuitable material.
- Emotional dependence: These apps encourage reliance — they should never replace a parent, doctor, or trusted adult.
- Relationships: Heavy use may distort a child's understanding of real relationships and consent.
- Privacy: Children should never share personal information.

What Can Parents Do?

- Check age ratings and privacy settings.
- Set up parental controls on devices and broadband.
- Talk regularly about the risks and their online activity, and remind them to speak to a trusted adult if concerned.

Further Information

https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/ai-chatbots-and-virtual-friends-how-parents-can-keep-children-safe/



What is Discord?

Discord is a social networking platform that was initially created for gamers but is now used by a wide range of people to communicate online. Users must be at least 13 years old, though the App Store gives it a 17+ rating.

The platform is built around **servers** — dedicated spaces where groups can chat, exchange files, and share images. Anyone can create a server and choose whether it's public or private. Users can also make video calls and send direct messages to individuals or groups. Children who play games such as Fortnite often use Discord to talk while gaming instead of the game's built-in chat. In-app purchases are offered through Discord's subscription service, Nitro.

How Can I Make It Safer?

Discord has set up a Family Centre offering details about the platform and its various safety settings: https://discord.com/safety-family-center

We'd always recommend talking with your child about why they use Discord, and making sure they understand how to block other users and what steps to take if they encounter inappropriate content. Be aware that Discord's video and voice calling **cannot be filtered**, and because the platform attracts a diverse range of users, adult content and inappropriate language may be present. Discord has also published this article addressing common questions: https://discord.com/safety-library

Source: National Online Safety | internetmatters.org | Discord