



AI and chatbots - friend or foe?

Introduction

Protecting children and young people online is a fundamental priority. With 16 years of combined online safety experience, VodafoneThree believes that when introduced at the right time and supported by appropriate safeguards, digital access can offer meaningful educational, social, and developmental benefits for children and young people.

For the past three years, Vodafone has advocated for platforms to be safe by design, across social media, AI tools and websites – so children are protected by default.

To create real change, however, an integrated approach is required. One that combines parental support, digital literacy, robust age assurance and strong industry standards.

To help children build their media literacy skills and build healthy digital habits, Vodafone and First News have created a suite of educational materials focused on using AI and chatbots in a safe and responsible way.

These resources form part of Vodafone's new Breakfast Club campaign, featuring limited edition 'chatbot' cereal boxes that help explain the 'ingredients' of AI chatbots – what they're good for and what they're free from. Further information on the campaign can be found at vodafone.co.uk/digitalparenting.

Although created for Safer Internet Day, the materials can be used year-round to support lessons on safe and confident use of AI.

Three's Discovery team also delivers online safety assemblies and lessons in schools nationwide. If you'd like to explore what they can offer your school, please contact **08001300 333** or email discovery@three.co.uk.

Teacher notes

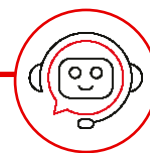
This lesson has been designed to provide a useful starting point for discussion around the role of AI and chatbots in children's lives. Pupils will explore what AI is, and importantly what it isn't, looking in particular about how AI chatbots work and how conversations with bots differ from human-to-human interactions i.e., the relationships they have with family and friends.

They will be encouraged to consider the role of empathy in their relationships and the lack of empathy in chatbot responses, as well as the positive role AI can play in modern life, and why it's important for this technology to be designed and used safely.

There are links to the curriculum in:

- Computing (understanding data, algorithms, and how digital systems work)
- English/literacy (oracy, drama, developing and expressing informed opinions)
- Relationships and sex education (healthy relationships and emotional wellbeing)

The lesson also maps to the **First News MIL Primary Framework for ages 8-11**, developed in partnership with the Media and Information Literacy Alliance (mila.org.uk), which is included in the teaching pack. Under each of five learning domains, a list of I know/I can statements set out what it means for a young person to be media and information literate in that area, enabling teachers to assess pupils' levels of media and information literacy (MIL) and track progress.



Learning objectives

- To understand what AI is ... and isn't
- To identify some of the risks and benefits of AI
- To understand the difference between communicating with a chatbot and human-to-human interactions

Success criteria

- I can **give a basic explanation** of what AI is.
- I can **describe** some positive uses of AI.
- I can **identify** some risks of using chatbots as a substitute for conversations with real people.

Prior learning and possible misconceptions

Opening questions (See opening activity of Hook/Explore section.)

- What is AI?
- Who has used AI?
- Where might I be using AI without really thinking about it?

Possible misconceptions

- AI is always harmful.
- AI cannot tell a lie.
- AI chatbots respond just like humans.
- AI chatbots can understand or experience feelings like humans

Key tier 2/3 vocabulary

Word	Pupil -friendly definition	Example
algorithms	A set of step-by-step rules that a computer follows to decide what to do next, such as which video to show, which word should come next, or how a chatbot should reply	The algorithms on video apps suggest new videos they think I will like.
authentic	real, not fake or copied	The autograph was authentic because the singer signed it herself.
chatbot	a computer program that can answer questions or chat with people	The website used a chatbot to answer simple questions.
generative AI	a type of AI that can make things like writing, pictures or music by copying patterns it has learned	The picture was made by generative AI, not drawn by a person.



Hook/explore (10 MINS)

Explore pupils' understanding of what AI is, compiling a list of their responses without much comment at this stage.

Now, display the following statement.

All children to leave school at 14 years old, because education is too expensive, claim experts.

First, ask which pupils believe it (show of hands). Then, ask whether pupils would be more likely to believe it if any of the following people told them. Why?

- your 6-year-old cousin
- your mum
- your headteacher
- a newspaper
- a post on social media (read to you by an older sibling)
- chatbots
- the government

SUPPORT: Provide sentence starters such as:

- “ I would trust this because...
- “ This feels less trustworthy because...
- › Model one example aloud before pupils respond.

STRETCH: Ask pupils to rank the sources from most to least trustworthy.

- › Ask: “Could a source you usually trust ever be wrong?”

Now, as a class, consider the following statements:

- “ **Nearly half of answers provided by AI have errors.**
- “ **AI is better than doctors at spotting some diseases.**

Discuss whether both statements can be true and, if so, how.

Things to consider:

- What question has been asked?
- How is AI examining the patients?
- Where is the AI drawing its information from?

Teach – AI: friend or foe? (10 MINS)

Explain what AI is, using the following process outline:

1. AI is given a prompt, such as a question to answer or a task to complete.
2. It rapidly looks at all the relevant information it can find on the internet.
3. It searches for patterns in what it finds, such as what words, images or sounds often appear together.
4. It uses those patterns to make predictions about what should come next – selecting words, images or sounds that are statistically most likely to fit the prompt, rather than because it understands them.
5. Generative AI can then use that information to create a written response, an image or even music in a way that mimics human responses.

For this reason, the benefit of AI depends upon what it is being asked to do. It's great at working through vast datasets, really quickly, which is why it can be very helpful with tasks such as rapidly analysing medical images, scouring countless information sources to provide a good starting point for research and driving chatbots that can answer most customer service questions in an efficient, yet automatic way.

What it is not so good at is being completely, honestly accurate – when it doesn't know, it **makes a guess** but may present it as a fact. Also, even though generative AI can produce new images, text and even music that appears authentic, it cannot perform pure creativity as it bases everything it does on the existing available data.



Ask: Do you think that AI can act like a real friend?

Explain that AI has no genuine human feelings or empathy. That's why chatbots shouldn't be used as a replacement for conversations or confiding in friends, family or trusted adults and professionals about personal topics. Chatbots don't actually understand or relate to how you feel. They just respond as they deem appropriate based on their lines of code and algorithmic rules, not challenging or offering alternative views.

Is that how a genuine friend would behave?

Revisit the class list compiled at the beginning and discuss.

What is empathy?

Empathy means noticing how another person feels, imagining what that might be like for them, and caring enough to respond kindly

Apply

Task 1 – sorting (10 MINS)

In pairs or small groups, cut out the statements and sort them into three piles: totally true, totally false, it depends. Discuss choices (NB many of the statements could fit into more than one category; what matters is that pupils can justify their selections. You may need to challenge gently – for example, “Do you really think that there is no job that AI can't do?”)

See additional resource sheet 1.

SUPPORT

- Read through the statements as a class, and ensure full understanding, before separating into pairs or small groups

STRETCH

- Pupils could be challenged to pick one of the 'it depends' statements and rewrite it to be 'totally true' or 'totally false'

Task 2 – drama/role play (15 MINS)

Pupils roleplay a short conversation between a human and a chatbot.

Ask pupils to work in pairs and choose a simple, everyday topic, such as:

- What should I wear to a party?
- What should I eat at a restaurant?
- What music should I listen to?

Give each pupil a secret instruction slip (see Additional Resource Sheet 2). Pupils should not show their instructions to their partner.

The human asks questions and then asks follow-up questions based on the first one, making them gradually sillier or more unusual.

The chatbot must always respond in a very encouraging way, agreeing with the human even if the idea sounds ridiculous.

After a few minutes, bring the class back together and discuss:

- How did the chatbot answers sound?
- Were they always helpful?

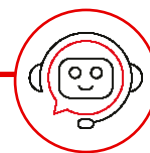
NB: Remind pupils that this activity is about ideas, not real-life choices.

SUPPORT

- Model a short example conversation before pupils begin.
- Provide example questions for pupils who are unsure how to start.

STRETCH

- Ask pupils to suggest what instructions might help a chatbot give safer or more realistic advice.



Task 3 – AI ingredients (10 MINS)

In order to understand how to use an AI chatbot safely and in a positive way, it's important to understand what it's made up of and what it can't do. A helpful way to look at this is by 'borrowing' terminology from something we all understand and see in our everyday lives – food and nutritional labels.

By using this familiar language, we can break down the 'ingredients' of AI: enabling children to understand what it's helpful for and importantly, what it's free from.

Remind pupils of the learning from the 'teach' section of the lesson. In pairs or small groups, ask them to discuss the following questions:

- What kinds of things do we look for on the food packaging labels? [ingredients, allergens, 'free from', nutritional info, health benefits, recommended serving sizes]
- What might an AI chatbot be made of? What helps it give answers? [large language models, machine learning, data, algorithms, and human-inspired language]
- What don't AI chatbots have that humans do? [emotions, feelings, thoughts, a human brain, understanding of personal issues, care, challenge]
- Is there anything that AI can't or shouldn't do? [provide advice or emotional support, replace the role of family, friends or experts]

Bring everyone back together as a class, and share answers. Draw out that AI chatbots don't have: empathy, accountability or real human understanding

Task 4 – debate (OPTIONAL)

(NB this task could be held in a separate session)

Hold a class debate on the statement: "AI chatbots are a good substitute for friends or family."

If necessary, recap some of the points raised in Task 2 and explain in greater detail the way that chatbots work.

NB: Teachers should be mindful that some pupils may struggle with friendships and/or already rely heavily on online tools; make it clear that this discussion is about ideas, not personal experiences, and be ready to steer it accordingly if required

SUPPORT

- Hold discussions in pairs/small groups before the whole class discussion

STRETCH

- Challenge pupils to write a paragraph arguing against the statement

Reflect

- Explain, with examples, what AI is to your partner.
- Explain why a good friend is better than a chatbot.
- Suggest one thing you would still like to understand about AI.