



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 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 **0800 1300 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 Secondary Framework for ages 11-14**, 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 students' 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 **explain** 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.

MIL primary framework statement mapping

Being Informed

- I **know** that not all information is trustworthy, and some is designed to mislead or harm.
- I **know** that AI can be helpful, but can also be used to create fake images, videos or news.
- I **can** explain why some information is accurate and reliable, and some might be biased or misleading.
- I **can** describe how AI can shape or distort what I see, and use it to access good information.

Being Empowered

- I **can** make good judgements about when, and how, to use AI.
- I **can** use critical thinking skills to evaluate what I see, hear and read.

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	Student -friendly definition	Example
algorithms	data-tracking systems that use online behaviour to promote further content	The algorithms on social media keep feeding me new content to view.
authentic	genuine and of undisputed origin	The teacher checked that the artwork was authentic and not generated by AI.
chatbot	an AI-based computer program designed to imitate conversations with humans	The bank used chatbots to help with routine customer service queries.
generative AI	AI that uses machine learning to create output, such as text, images or music, that would previously have required human intelligence and creativity	The song at the top of the charts had been created by generative AI.



Hook/explore (10 MINS)

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

Ask: Have you ever used a chatbot? What for? How useful was it?

Display slide 6. Tell the class that two students are researching the history of the National Living Wage for a homework project. They ask different AI chatbots the same question: "In what year did the UK introduce the National Living Wage?"

1. Isaac's chatbot says: 2015
2. Aisha's chatbot says: 2016

Ask: Which statement is true? How can we check? How can the chatbots give different answers?

In fact, the National Living Wage was announced in 2015, but came into force in 2016. "Introduced" could be interpreted as "first announced", or as "when it started being paid". AI chatbots are trained on many different sources, which don't always agree, or use words in the same way. Without checking the wording of the prompt, the chatbot may choose the wrong interpretation – and still sound completely sure.

Explain how this example shows us something important about how AI and chatbots work. They can sound confident and convincing, even when some of what they say is wrong or incomplete. That means we shouldn't treat chatbots as a single, reliable source of truth.

Display slide 7. Remind students of the importance of not taking AI-generated answers at face value, and the ways we can check the accuracy of information we are given.

Now, as a class, consider the following statements:

- According to a BBC study, 45% of answers to AI queries have errors.
- AI is better than humans at spotting subtle, important changes in medical images for diseases like cancer.

Discuss how both statements can be true, along with other differences, such as the referencing of the BBC in the first statement.

Things to consider:

- What question has been asked? (The BBC study looked at news-related questions such as Who is the Pope? whereas the second point focused on clinical decisions and outcomes.)
- What does the second statement mean by 'better'?
- Does that mean that AI would be better at everything than experienced doctors?

SUPPORT

➤ Offer sentence starters for the discussion, e.g. "I would trust this because..."

STRETCH

➤ Ask students to suggest how they could verify the statistics



Teach – AI: friend or foe? (10 MINS)

Explain what AI is, focusing on the aspects of data analysis, pattern recognition and prediction. Emphasise that, at a very basic level, it looks at the sum of information available on the internet. It then searches that data for patterns related to the prompt it has been given. Finally, it makes predictions – the best guesses it can using the information available.

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 confidently makes a guess. Also, even though generative AI can produce new images, text and even music that appears authentic, it cannot perform pure creativity – it can only remix and predict based on what already exists.

Ask: How good do you think AI is at acting like a friend?

AI has no genuine human feelings or empathy. Chatbots therefore 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. This means they often reinforce your views, rather than offering alternative perspectives or viewpoints.

Ask: Why is it important to hear different points of view? Do we always have to agree?

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. (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?”)

SUPPORT

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

STRETCH

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

See additional resource sheet 1.

Task 2 – drama/role play (15 MINS)

Roleplay a verbal interaction between a human and a chatbot. Invite pairs to think of a topic on which they might have a strong personal opinion, such as:

- What outfit should I wear to a party?
- What should I order at the restaurant?
- Who is the world's best recording artist right now?

Provide secret instructions to each student, depending on whether they are playing the chatbot or the human.

➤ See additional resource sheet 2.

Human: ask further questions based on the initial one. Make them increasingly strange. For example, for the restaurant version, ask something like *What about turnip ice cream?*



Chatbot: only respond in a very positive or complimentary way. For example, if the human asks whether they should wear a suit of armour to the party, say something like: *Yes, that would really make you stand out from the crowd.*

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

- Provide example questions or model a short interaction

STRETCH

- Ask students to consider why the interactions felt unrealistic or unsafe

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 '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: allowing students 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, 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

- Set the debate statement as a prompt for a written response



Reflect

- Explain, with examples, what AI is to your partner.
- Explain why friends or family are better for personal queries or situations than chatbots
- What are some ways in which AI can be genuinely useful? What about chatbots in particular?
- Why is it important to check information that is generated by AI, and how can we do that?
- Suggest one thing you would still like to understand about AI.

Key takeaway: AI can be a helpful tool, but it can't replace human understanding, empathy or judgement.

Optional extension

Students could be asked to write a 'young person's guide to AI', including:

- What AI is and isn't
- When to use AI and when not to
- Questions to ask before trusting an AI-generated response