

A Parent Coach Says a Third of Teens Are Using AI Chatbots For Emotional Support and Parents Must Learn About AI Trend

Pew found 64% of teens use AI chatbots while 51% of parents believe their teen does. Parent coach Mike Barsamian says the reason behind it deserves attention

CHINO, CA, UNITED STATES, October 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Parents are underestimating how much their teenagers use artificial intelligence, and they disapprove most of the use they know least about.

A Pew Research Center survey of 1,458 American teens aged 13 to 17 and their parents, conducted in fall 2025 and published in February 2026, found that 64% of teens said they use AI chatbots. Among parents, 51% believed their teen did.

The gap widens on the personal uses. Twelve percent of teens said they had used a chatbot for emotional support or advice. Fifty-eight percent of parents said they were not comfortable with their teen doing so.

A separate 2025 survey by Common Sense Media of 1,060 U.S. teens found that 72% had used an AI companion, meaning an app built for ongoing, relationship-style conversation. About one in three of those users said they had chosen to discuss something important or serious with an AI companion instead of a real person.

Mike Barsamian, a parent coach for parents of teenagers who has worked with teenagers and families since 2003, said the finding most parents react to is not the one that matters.

"Everybody fixates on the technology," Barsamian said. "The number that should stop you is the one in three. A third of the kids using these apps had something serious to say and chose a machine to say it to."

He said the useful question is not what the chatbot did.

"It is what made the machine feel like the safer option," Barsamian said. "That is not a question about software. It is a question about what happens in your house when your kid brings you something difficult."

Why taking the phone backfires

Barsamian said the instinct to restrict is understandable and rarely works.

"A parent hears this and immediately wants to take the phone," he said. "I understand it. But the phone is not where the conversation went wrong. A teenager who feels safe bringing things to you has less reason to take them somewhere else. One who does not will find somewhere else, with or without the app."

He said the pattern he sees is consistent.

"These are not neglectful parents. They are usually the opposite. They are capable, hardworking people who are doing everything they can think of," Barsamian said. "And somewhere along the way their kid learned that bringing something home costs more than it is worth."

He said teenagers make that calculation quietly.

"No teenager announces that they have stopped telling you things. They just stop," he said. "And most parents notice long after it started."

Why a chatbot feels different

Barsamian said the appeal is not mysterious.

"It does not get disappointed. It does not bring up last time. It does not need to be reassured that it is a good parent," he said. "That is a low bar, and a lot of us are not clearing it at eleven at night on a Tuesday."

He said parents can clear it, and that most are closer than they think.

"The repair is not complicated. It is just uncomfortable," Barsamian said. "It usually starts with listening to something you disagree with all the way to the end, without solving it."

What to do instead of confiscating

Barsamian said he encourages parents to ask about it directly, and without consequences attached.

"Ask them what they use it for. Genuinely curious, not gathering evidence," he said. "If they tell you the truth, you have learned something. If they do not, you have also learned something."

Pew's survey found the most common teen uses were searching for information, at 57%, and help with schoolwork, at 54%. Sixteen percent reported using chatbots for casual conversation.

"Most of it is homework," Barsamian said. "The part that matters is the small slice that is not, and you won't find that slice by checking their phone."

Barsamian holds a Master of Arts in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary. He is a licensed and commissioned pastor and a Maxwell Leadership Certified Coach. He is a coach, not a therapist or a licensed clinician, and says parents who suspect something deeper is going on, including self-harm or substance use, should seek clinical support first. He created The PACE Setter Method™ and hosts the Present Solution Podcast.

Parents looking for more on this topic can read *My Teenager Won't Talk to Me*.

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