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ADVICE

Help! My friend is replacing me with AI.

What to do if your friends are confiding in ChatGPT instead of you.

by **Allie Volpe**

May 7, 2026, 8:30 AM EDT





Allie Volpe is a correspondent at Vox covering mental health, relationships, wellness, money, home life, and work through the lens of meaningful self-improvement.

In February, the TikTok creator Brittany Panzer posted a video over five minutes detailing the unraveling of her friendship. There was no disagreement, no blowup, not even ghosting. Panzer felt she'd lost her friend to ChatGPT.

At first, Panzer's friend used artificial intelligence for relationship advice and casually mentioned that she'd consulted the technology in conversation. But over time, Panzer suspected her friend was questioning her own emotions, and perhaps the counsel of friends too; eventually, she hardly recognized the person on the other end of the phone.

“Rather than talking to friends, she talked to ChatGPT,” Panzer says in the video. “After all, in her mind, it was able to do what no human could: be an objective best friend in her pocket.”

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Increasingly, people are outsourcing the basic functions of friendship to AI, and getting reassurance, advice, and camaraderie from the likes of ChatGPT, Replika, Claude, and Copilot. According to a 2025 scientific paper, people commonly interact with AI to address loneliness, to self-disclose about mental health and personal issues, and to garner emotional support and empathy. It's easy to see why: The technology is always available and generally says what people want to hear. But once you've become accustomed to on-demand validation, the appeal of human conversation — with its mess and imperfection and two-sidedness — can start to wane.

Although they may mimic human responses, AI chatbots are not, in fact, human, and a lot of humans find them off-putting. Who wants to give a friend a pep talk only for them to turn around and ask ChatGPT to hype them up, or weigh in on a friend's important life decision, just for them to say, “Let me see what Claude thinks”? If you

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“People are limited in ways that idealized AI chatbots are not,” [Naomi Aguiar](#), the associate director of research at Oregon State University Ecampus, tells Vox by email. “We may want perfect friendships, and AI companions might convince us that they are indeed more human than human, but the reality is, we need imperfect, complicated, and messy human relationships in order to learn, grow, and thrive.”

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Sure, they may be performing some of the duties of friendship, but AI chatbots aren't going to stand next to your friend at their wedding or drop off soup when they're sick. While the jealousy or frustration you may feel watching this play out is very real, what you're envious of is not, and no matter how good technology gets, there will always be a need for *actual* friends. “This is really just an information repository,” [Skyler Wang](#), an assistant professor of sociology at McGill University, tells Vox. “It's a relational agent.

but lately I've noticed we don't have that same openness. Is there anything you want to talk about?" It's always a good idea to use "I" statements in moments like this. "I would try to keep the focus on myself and my own experiences of what is going on, and avoid placing shame, blame, or judgment on the other person, and I would try to approach the conversation with openness and curiosity," Aguiar says.

You can choose whether you want to address their AI use outright based on how you think they'll respond. If there's a chance they might feel judged and attacked, it's probably best to avoid mentioning it. But it can be helpful to approach the topic openly and in a way that positions the use of chatbots not as something that's negatively impacting your friendship, but an element that's changed the nature of how you communicate. You can also make a breezy quip about their chatbot habits if you observe them utilizing it, Wang says. "Be like, 'Wow, is this really happening? You're asking chat after I just gave you what I thought you might need?'" he says. "Then just unpack that interaction."

The goal isn't to guilt your friend into confiding in you, but to remind them you're always there for them — maybe not to the extent that ChatGPT is, though. But you have something a chatbot will never have: a deep, shared history with them in the real world.

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