Problem AI Use Awareness and Protective Factors

Guidance for School Counselors and Therapists

Being Human
With AI
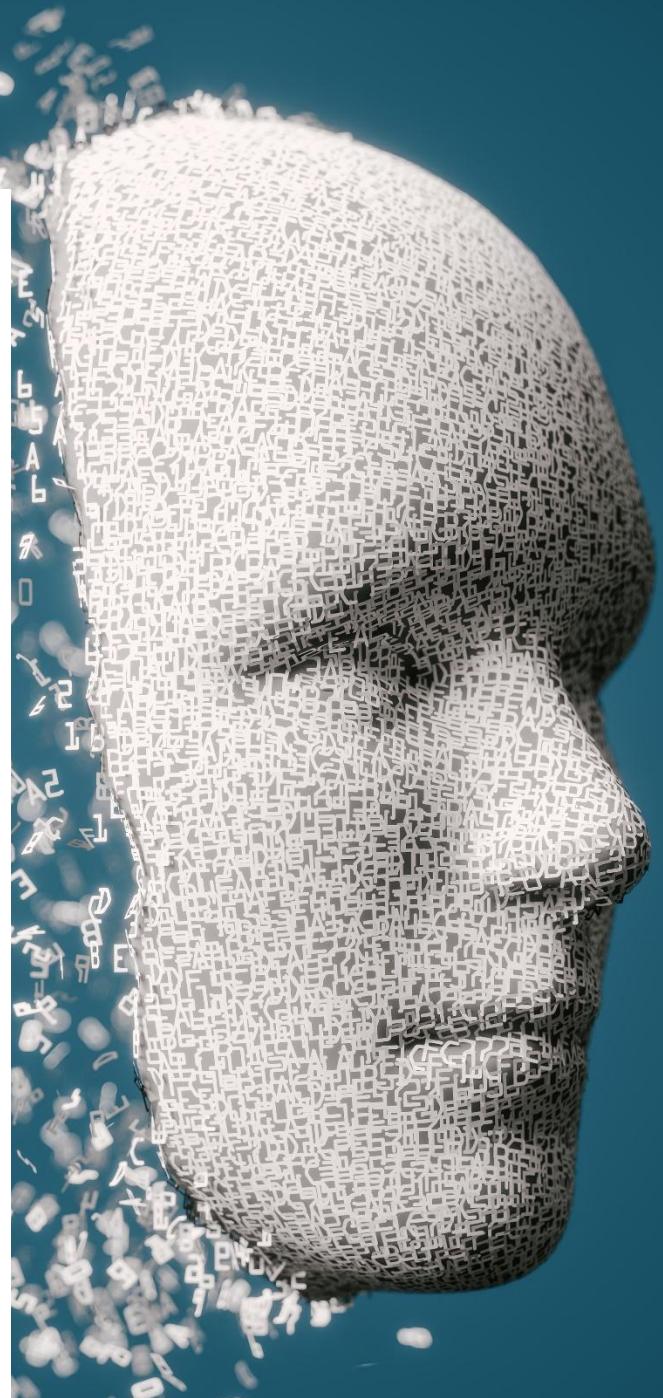
Understanding Problematic AI Use in Schools and at Home
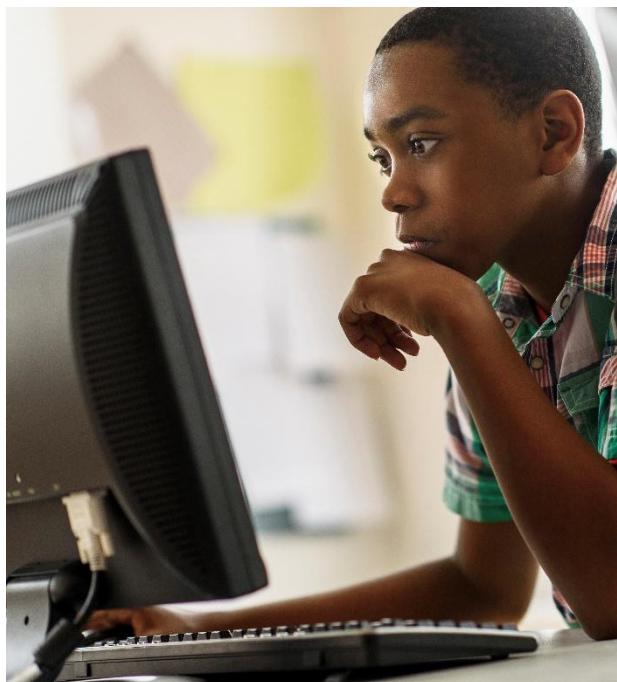
This guide aims to help counselors, teachers, and parents recognize early signs of AI dependency and activate school-based supports that restore balance, belonging, and human connection.

What is problem AI use?

Problem AI use refers to patterns of AI interaction that disrupt a student's well-being, academic performance, and social relationships.

The Problem AI Use Severity Index (PAUSI) is a rapid screening tool designed to identify patterns of problematic AI use and support healthy boundaries.

The PAUSI results reveal that AI's convenience comes at a measurable psychological cost, proving that dependency is not a hypothetical risk, but a common pattern of emotional escape and loss of control, mirroring the core pathology of behavioral addictions.

Three Domains of Concern

1 Time & Control	2 Emotional Dependence	3 Real-World Consequences
• Excessive time spent online • Difficulty disengaging • Neglect of offline activities • Decline in physical health • Sleep disturbances • Lying about usage	• Mood changes with tech • Anxiety when offline • Seeking validation online • Fear of missing out (FOMO) • Cyberbullying involvement • Online relationships replacing real-life ones	• Academic decline • Social isolation • Family conflict • Financial strain • Legal issues • Exposure to inappropriate content

Conversation Starters

- "I've noticed you've been spending a lot of time online lately. How are you feeling about that?"
- Ask, don't accuse: "What do you enjoy most about using AI?"
- "Are there things you're missing out on because of your online activities?"
- Normalize: Curiosity about AI is normal; the goal is balance.
- "How can we work together to find a healthier balance?"
- Guide: "How could you use AI to make something real?"
- Escalate when needed: If AI use replaces human contact or increases distress.

Protective Factors Within a School's Control

🛡 **Foster Belonging and Connection**	🛡 **Redirect Toward Purposeful Tech Use**
– Connect student to peers with similar interests (clubs, study groups, mentorship). – Encourage participation in social or service projects that use tech for good. – Pair with a trusted adult mentor at school who checks in weekly.	– Encourage CS, robotics, or AI literacy electives. – Suggest BHWAI's AI Boundaries & Use Checklist or Healthy AI Habits videos. – Invite student to design a "good AI" project that benefits the school or community.
🛡 **Engage Family & Community Support**	🛡 **Activate Professional Supports**
– Share BHWAI's Parent AI Dependency Support Guide. – Refer to local Internet & Tech Addicts Anonymous meetings if needed. – Offer gentle coaching to parents: balance curiosity with limits, avoid shame.	– Coordinate with school psychologists and teachers across subjects. – Refer to the AI Dependency Network of Therapists (via Dr. Rachel Wood). – If underlying home neglect or abuse is suspected, follow CPS protocols.