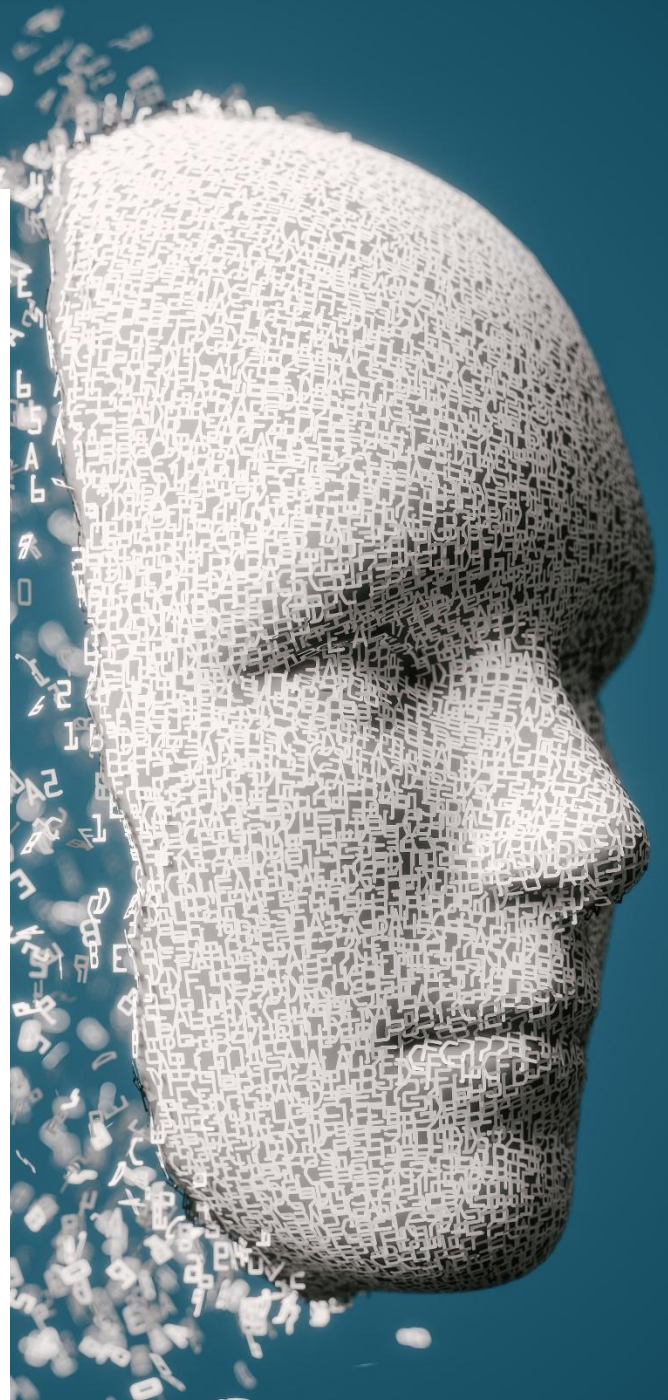


Problem AI Use Awareness and Protective Factors

Guidance for School Counselors and Therapists



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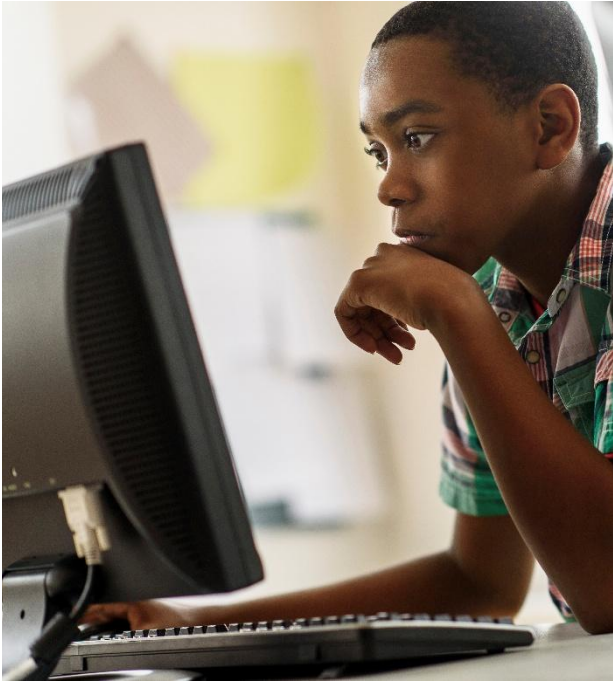
MARCH 4, 2026 (v2.0)

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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 – 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.	 Redirect Toward Purposeful Tech Use – 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 – 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.	 Activate Professional Supports – 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.