



## Can ChatGPT Substitute Human Companionship for Coping with Loss and Trauma?

As the educational technology director of our institution, I often find myself at the forefront of discussions surrounding the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and its impact on our lives. Recently, a former student approached me with a thought-provoking question: *"In times of grief and loss, can ChatGPT offer the comfort and consolation we seek?"* The weight of this inquiry bore down on me, for I realized that answering it was not a task I could take lightly. I hesitated, acutely aware that I was not a health professional equipped with the expertise to navigate the depths of grief and loss. Moreover, my role as an educational technology director means that I have had the opportunity to witness the transformative potential of AI, leading me to wonder whether I possess a natural inclination to embrace technology as a solution. Therefore, I felt compelled to engage health professionals, the true authorities on matters of emotional well-being and mental health, to join me in an open and honest exploration of this complex question.

From my perspective, I see ChatGPT as having several undeniable advantages in assisting individuals coping with loss and trauma. I believe it can serve as an ever-present confidant, offering round-the-clock support without judgment and with limitless patience. With its vast knowledge and data, ChatGPT can provide valuable insights, practical suggestions, and access to resources that may aid the healing process. It can even simulate conversation that creates an illusion of a compassionate presence. While it may not possess genuine empathy, it can mimic empathetic responses that offer a semblance of understanding and validation. Additionally, the anonymity provided by ChatGPT might help some individuals feel more comfortable expressing their deepest emotions, as the fear of being vulnerable to judgment is eliminated. The absence of face-to-face interaction can alleviate social anxieties and allow for a greater sense of comfort and safety in expressing raw emotions. It could also undermine the avoidance strategies that individuals often adopt after traumatic experiences, such as isolating themselves from social interactions and minimizing exposure to reminders of the trauma (Solomon et al., 2015). Overall, this enhanced privacy can foster a more open and honest exploration of grief and trauma, thereby facilitating the healing process.

On the other hand, I also acknowledge the inherent complexities of human emotion and the irreplaceable value of genuine human connection. Loss and trauma are deeply personal experiences that shape our identities and leave lasting imprints on our hearts and minds. While ChatGPT can offer simulated empathy, it lacks the depth of emotional understanding that only a fellow human being can provide. Even as a potential source of informal social support (Gear, 2014), the interaction between ChatGPT and its users does not occur naturally. Furthermore, ChatGPT lacks the capability to initiate the dialogue autonomously, which is particularly crucial when grieving individuals find themselves in solitude. The vulnerability, shared experiences, and nuanced understanding that accompany human connection foster healing

and growth in ways that algorithms cannot replicate. Trust, a cornerstone of human relationships, may prove elusive in the realm of AI, leaving individuals vulnerable to additional emotional distress. No matter how sophisticated, ChatGPT's responses are derived from its training data, thereby lacking the intuitive and spontaneous nature of human responses. This limitation can result in misinterpretations, missed cues, or insensitivity to the intricacies of each person's unique journey through adversity. Given that ChatGPT is not a licensed medical professional, lacks up-to-date medical knowledge, and cannot guarantee its accuracy and reliability (Chow et al., 2023), caution must be exercised when relying on it for addressing complex emotional needs.

Therefore, I beseech health professionals to explore the question with a critical eye and an open mind. The immeasurable impact of human companionship is an indisputable justification. However, in this age of rapid technological advancement, we must recognize that some individuals may be drawn to seek solace in the arms of technology (Van Bulck & Moons, 2023). As experts skilled at navigating the intricacies of the human psyche, you possess the qualifications and understanding necessary to delve into this complex subject. We need your expertise to examine the benefits, limitations, and ethical considerations surrounding this topic. It is imperative that we develop evidence-based guidelines and policies that govern the integration of AI, such as ChatGPT, in supporting individuals during times of grief and loss. As of this writing, comprehensive research and data are scarce regarding the efficacy, ethical considerations, and long-term impacts of AI-based interventions in this sensitive domain.

By joining forces and bridging the realms of technology and human connection (Sv et al., 2023), we can collectively navigate the complexities of this issue and strive to foster healing and well-being in a world forever transformed by the collision of innovation and emotion. For only through this collaboration can we truly grasp the gravity of the human experience and ensure that our technological advancements serve as tools of compassion rather than replacements for the irreplaceable bonds of empathy and love.

## Notes on contributor

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