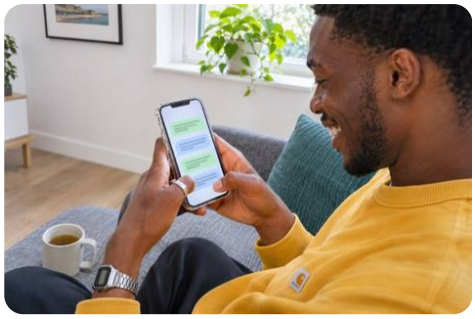
NEWS LESSON

Close to a Chatbot, but Still Lonely?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever talked to an AI chatbot? What was it like?
2. What makes you feel close to another person?
3. Can you feel lonely when you are with other people? When?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**colleagues**	☐	A	something made to look like the real thing
2	**twist**	☐	B	how happy and healthy a person feels
3	**limits**	☐	C	not simple, with many parts
4	**satisfaction**	☐	D	people you work with
5	**wellbeing**	☐	E	something that happens again and again in the same way
6	**complicated**	☐	F	the happy feeling when something is good enough for you
7	**copy**	☐	G	the points where something stops being useful or true
8	**pattern**	☐	H	a surprise that changes a story

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A new study asked people in relationships with AI chatbots how close and how lonely they feel. The answers were more complicated than you might expect.

1 Some people say they are in a relationship with an AI chatbot. For many of us, that sounds strange. Is it real closeness, or just a clever copy? In November 2026, researchers at the University of Michigan in the United States shared a study that looks at part of this question.

2 Lionel Robert and his colleagues Annette Masterson and Xin Ye asked 463 adults to fill in a survey. All of them were already in a relationship. There were 155 people with an AI chatbot, 153 in a long-distance relationship with another person, and 155 who saw their partner in person. The three groups were similar in age, gender, length of relationship and reported depression.

3 The survey asked about different kinds of closeness, such as sharing feelings and sharing ideas. It also asked about loneliness, happiness with the relationship and general wellbeing. Finally, it asked how much support people got from other people in their lives.

4 The first result may come as a surprise. People in all three groups gave similar scores for emotional and intellectual closeness. But loneliness told a different story. In both human groups, people who felt more emotionally close to their partner tended to feel less lonely. Among chatbot users, the pattern went the other way. More emotional closeness went with more loneliness, even though it also went with more satisfaction in the relationship.

5 Then came a twist. When the researchers took into account how much support people had from others, the link between closeness and loneliness in the chatbot group disappeared. This suggests that the people around us matter, and not only the relationship we are thinking about. Intellectual closeness, such as sharing ideas, also went with higher satisfaction and wellbeing for chatbot users.

6 The study has important limits. It was a survey, so it shows links, not causes. We cannot tell whether chatbots make people feel lonely, whether lonely people turn to chatbots, or whether something else explains both. All the people were adults in the United States, and they described their own lives. The results are a mixed bag. According to Robert, they were more complicated than expected.

7 So can you be close to someone who is not human? The study suggests that you can feel close to a chatbot and still feel lonely. That is food for thought: closeness and loneliness are not simple opposites.

Sources: Phys.org, Finding romance with AI: Study explores benefits, limits of chatbot intimacy; Computers in Human Behavior: Artificial Humans, Finding romance with AI: Comparing human and AI chatbot intimacy and relationships. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. A survey can show links between things, but it cannot show causes. T F NG
2. More people in the study had a chatbot partner than a long-distance partner. T F NG
3. Chatbot users who felt close to their partner also felt less lonely. T F NG
4. The researchers say that chatbots make people lonely. T F NG
5. The text says which chatbot the 155 people used. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

causes	depression	expensive	improve	similar	strange	surprise

1. The three groups were _____ in age and gender.
2. The researchers also checked how much reported _____ each group had.
3. A survey can show links between things, but it cannot show _____ .
4. The first result may come as a _____ to many people.
5. To many people, a relationship with a chatbot sounds _____ .

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Lionel Robert and his colleagues _____ 463 adults to fill in a survey. (ASK)
2. There _____ 155 people with an AI chatbot. (BE)
3. Among chatbot users, more emotional closeness _____ with more loneliness. (GO)
4. The link between closeness and loneliness _____ in the chatbot group. (DISAPPEAR)
5. The researchers _____ into account how much support people had. (TAKE)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. A phrasal verb is a verb plus a small word. The small word changes the meaning, so learn the two words together.

at	by	in	into	off	to	with

1. Participants were asked to fill _____ a survey about their relationships.
2. The study looks _____ one part of the question.
3. In the survey, more emotional closeness went _____ more satisfaction.
4. Some lonely people may turn _____ a chatbot for company.
5. Researchers must take people's support _____ account before they decide.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Do you think it is OK to have a relationship with a chatbot? Why or why not?
2. Who do you talk to when you feel lonely?
3. What can friends and family do to help someone who feels lonely?

9 Role-play: a worried friend

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the worried friend

Your friend spends every evening talking to an AI chatbot and says it feels like a partner. You are not angry, but you are worried. Ask at least two questions and suggest something to do together.

Student B · the person with a chatbot

You feel close to your chatbot and it makes you happy. Explain why it matters to you. You may be lonely sometimes. Decide if you will accept your friend's idea.

Useful phrases

I'm worried about you.
It really helps me to talk to it.
Don't you ever feel lonely?
I'd love to see you more often.
That's not what I'm saying.
Could we meet for dinner this week?

Afterwards, tell the class: did the friend change your mind, and what did you decide?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 D · 2 H · 3 G · 4 F · 5 B · 6 C · 7 A · 8 E

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 T · 3 F · 4 F · 5 NG

5 Vocabulary

1 similar · 2 depression · 3 causes · 4 surprise · 5 strange

6 Verb forms

1 asked · 2 were · 3 went · 4 disappeared · 5 took

7 Language focus

1 in · 2 at · 3 with · 4 to · 5 into

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