

AI chatbots and student mental health: 7 things to put in place this year

Technology can be a bridge to help. It cannot be the help.

More than 200 schools across 19 states now use an AI chatbot for student mental health support, and some have real saves to show for it. If your district is looking at this technology, or already using it, here is the work that surrounds it.

1 Treat it as detection, not care

Write down who responds, how fast, and what happens in the first 24 hours after an alert.

3 Tell families before launch

Cover what gets stored, who reads a flagged chat, and how a family opts out.

5 Give amnesty in advance

Make it a stated school norm: you will not be punished for telling us the truth.

7 Have a recovery plan ready

So the adults are not improvising on the worst day of a student's year.

2 Teach what the tool assumes

Students need to know what a trusted adult is, how to actually go to one, and that AI is not where we go for advice about our feelings.

4 Name three trusted adults

In every classroom. By name, out loud, written down. One may be away; one may be the problem.

6 Account for the other chatbots

Students are not only using the school's tool. About 1 in 5 teens already use AI for mental health advice.

That's the half almost nobody is funding. A phone policy doesn't cover it. Neither does an app.

"The goal isn't that they tell you. The goal is that they tell somebody instead of nobody."

AGENT ANDY HERRERA · SENIOR SPECIAL AGENT, KANSAS BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Sources: EdSource (September 2026); Common Sense Media Youth AI Safety Institute with Stanford Medicine Brainstorm Lab; RAND Corporation (2026). | If a student is in immediate danger, call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) or 911.

Education is the greatest form of protection.

The Screen Guardians is a K–12 digital health and safety program for students, teachers, and parents. Not anti-technology. Pro-child.

See how it works in your school

thescreenguardians.com/program