

# AI and School Mental Health

Considerations for Telehealth, Behavioral Health, and School Partners



Heartland  
Telehealth Resource Center

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly being used in education, healthcare, behavioral health, and other areas of everyday life. Young people are also using AI tools for a variety of purposes, including seeking information and support related to physical and mental health. As the use of AI continues to increase, schools, school mental health professionals, healthcare and telehealth providers, and families in rural and urban communities alike will need to consider its possible uses. However, many questions remain about AI's safety, privacy, reliability, and effectiveness.

## What is AI?

There is no one definition of AI because of how varied and broad it has become. Generally, AI is used to describe complex computer and programming systems that can perform tasks using human-like intellectual skills, such as reasoning, learning, and decision-making.

AI can take many forms. For example, generative AI and chatbots respond to questions or prompts from users and can generate text, images, pictures, or videos. Other tools such as prediction models use algorithms or complex mathematical equations to make decisions about possible outcomes or events.



In healthcare and school settings, prediction models may be used to analyze student or patient information to identify patterns or possible concerns. In schools, for example, they might use factors such as attendance or school grades to identify students who may need additional academic support or may be experiencing emotional challenges. AI may also be used to support professionals in these contexts, such as using AI-based tools that help with documentation or translation services.

## Why does this matter now?

AI is becoming increasingly integrated into education, healthcare, business, and other parts of day-to-day life. As AI becomes more widely used, it is important to consider how these technologies are being used, particularly when children and adolescents are involved.

Estimates also suggest that more than half of youth using AI have used it for information or advice regarding their health or body (O'Neil et al., 2026).

More than  
**70%**

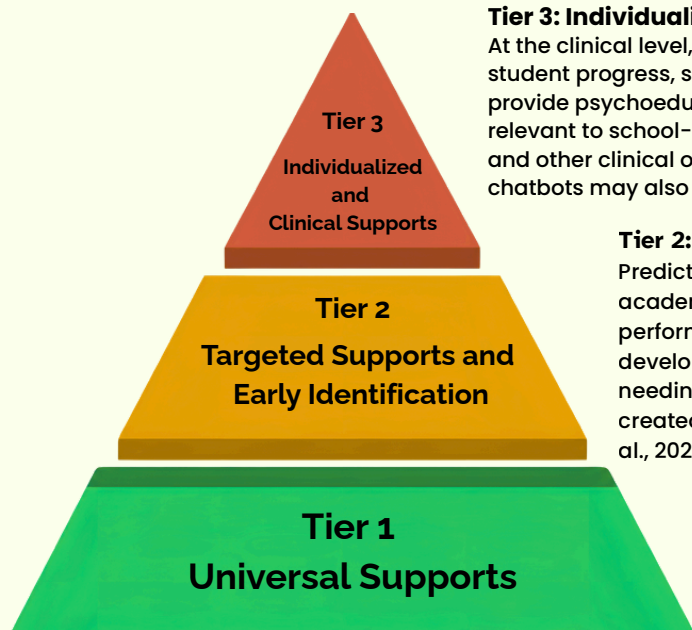
of youth are estimated to be using AI tools such as chatbots, generative AI, and AI learning tools, and many youth use these tools more than once a month (Madden et al., 2024; O'Neil et al., 2026).

Approximately  
**10–20%**

of teens have reported using AI for mental or emotional support (McBain et al., 2025, 2026; O'Neil et al., 2026; SAMHSA, 2026).

## How is AI showing up in mental health and in telehealth?

There are a number of ways AI is being integrated into education and healthcare. Potential applications include administrative tasks, educational supports, clinical assessment, treatment-related activities, and tools that interact directly with students and patients. For school mental health audiences, these examples can also be considered within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. MTSS is a framework used in schools to better understand student strengths and needs and to maximize available resources based on the public health framework (Reichart et al., 2026).



### Tier 3: Individualized and Clinical Supports

At the clinical level, AI may help providers analyze and summarize patient information, monitor student progress, support documentation and note-taking, generate treatment activity ideas, or provide psychoeducation about health conditions. Many of these applications may also be relevant to school-based telehealth. AI may support documentation, translation, data analysis, and other clinical or administrative activities associated with delivering services remotely. Online chatbots may also be used between sessions to provide information or ongoing support.

### Tier 2: Targeted Supports and Early Identification

Prediction models may help identify students who could benefit from additional academic or emotional support based on factors such as attendance, academic performance, or other information. AI-powered tools may support more targeted skill development among large groups of youth who have been identified as potentially needing additional support or services. For example, many different AI tools have been created to support social and emotional wellbeing for autistic youth in schools (Feng et al., 2025; Howorth et al., 2025).

### Tier 1: Universal Supports

At the universal level, AI-powered learning tools may provide mental health education to large numbers of students or offer tailored practice related to skills such as emotional regulation and social skills. AI tools may also help students access information or work through academic questions.

## Potential Benefits and Important Questions

AI may have a number of potential uses in education, healthcare, and behavioral health. These include helping professionals organize and review information, supporting clinical and administrative activities, providing education or opportunities to practice skills, and making information or support available outside of traditional encounters.

At the same time, questions remain about privacy, safety, reliability, effectiveness, and how AI should be used in practice. Both the possible benefits and the limitations of the current evidence should be considered when deciding whether and how to use an AI tool.



### Five Questions to Consider Before Using an AI Tool

Being informed about AI is becoming increasingly important, even if you do not use AI directly. Many professional organizations and communities are developing guidelines and policies for the use of AI in healthcare services, including both in-person and telehealth care. Becoming familiar with these guidelines, recommendations, and policy documents can also be helpful in a school setting.

To help with making decisions around the use of AI, we reviewed relevant AI recommendations, guidelines, and policies from multiple professional and healthcare-oriented organizations. From this review, we created five possible questions you can ask yourself about AI use. Although not intended to be comprehensive, these questions may provide a helpful starting point.

#### What is the purpose of this AI tool and for whom was it developed?

Many AI tools, including generative AI and large language models such as ChatGPT or Claude, were not developed specifically for mental health, yet they could be used to ask a mental health question. Other AI technologies have been developed specifically for mental health purposes or for healthcare settings where mental health services may occur.

Before using an AI technology, review relevant informational guides about the program's approach and its intended purpose and functions. You may also consider whether there are specific issues related to the age or technical experiences of the students who will use it.

#### If I use this AI tool, what will human involvement look like?

Recommendations suggest that AI tools provide support rather than take over human decision-making, interactions, and involvement. There are also concerns about inaccurate information being produced by AI technologies, sometimes referred to as AI "hallucinations." Information or recommendations produced by AI should therefore be available for review by an appropriate professional before reaching the hands of students, families, or other individuals.

Some elements of school mental health should not be delegated to AI, including the trusted relationship between a student and a school professional, family and student voice, professional judgment, and clinical oversight.

#### How was this AI tool developed and tested?

Take time to learn about how an AI tool was developed. This includes considering the data used to train algorithms, what happens to information entered into the technology, and what is known about the tool's reliability and validity.

Developers should provide information about how their systems were developed and tested. Difficulty finding answers to these questions may be a reason for caution, especially in academic settings. Information about testing should also be revisited as new findings are published and AI models are updated.

#### If I use this AI tool, how will I let patients, students, and families know?

Transparency is key. Users of AI should have clear plans for documenting and informing patients, students, families, and others about how AI may have influenced or been involved in the services they received.

This information should be provided in a way that is understandable. Transparency also includes educating staff and others within an organization about how AI may influence services, workflow, decision-making, and organizational factors.

#### What is this AI tool's regulatory status, and what other requirements apply?

In the absence of detailed federal guidance, it is important to consider an AI tool's regulatory status. As of June 2026, there were no U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-authorized therapy chatbots, and many AI products describe themselves as "wellness" tools, which can have implications for regulatory and liability requirements (SAMHSA, 2026). Questions about liability involving AI in mental health also continue to evolve.

It is also important to look beyond how a product is marketed. For example, a company's statement that an AI tool is compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) does not automatically mean that the tool is HIPAA compliant for the specific services being provided (American Medical Association [AMA], 2024). Telehealth-specific state requirements, such as consent and modality rules, apply in addition to these questions. Some states have also enacted laws restricting the use of AI in mental health services, and requirements differ by state.

#### For schools, there may be additional questions.

School mental health professionals should also consider how the use of an AI tool fits within requirements and guidance that apply specifically to their setting.

Depending on the application, this may include:

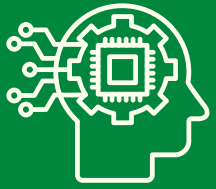
- The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and HIPAA
- State department of education guidance related to AI
- Local school district AI, technology, data, and privacy policies
- National and state professional association guidance
- School board policies and direction
- District or school AI literacy efforts

Understanding how the broader school system is approaching AI can also help school mental health professionals use common language and work more effectively with teachers, administrators, families, and other partners.

## What Don't We Know Yet?

There are still important questions about the use of AI in mental health and telehealth, including questions about privacy protection, safety, reliability, and effectiveness (Choi et al., 2025; Pool et al., 2024).

Evidence about the effectiveness and safety of AI in school-based settings is also limited. As AI technologies continue to develop and change, it will be important to consider what is supported by evidence, what remains uncertain, and whether findings about one type of AI tool or setting apply to another.



## Consider the Student and Family Perspective

Because the use of AI is changing quickly, it may be helpful to continue talking with students and families about the tools they are using and how they perceive those tools as affecting their mental health, both positively and negatively.

The Missouri School Boards' Association created an [AI Toolkit for K-12 Education](#) that may be helpful.

These conversations can help school mental health professionals better understand how AI is being used by the students and families they serve.

Questions might include:

- What is AI?
- What AI tools are students using?
- Do students have access to these tools and to reliable internet?
- What are they using them for?
- What do they find helpful?
- What concerns do they have?
- How do they think AI affects their mental health?



## Learn More



Professional organizations and federal agencies are developing guidelines, recommendations, and resources related to AI, healthcare, mental health, and work with children and adolescents.



- [Artificial Intelligence in Mental Health Services: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Directions](#)
- [Online Health and Safety for Children and Youth: Best Practices for Families and Guidance for Industry](#)



- [Artificial Intelligence in Pediatric Health Care Webinar Series](#)
- [Experts Discuss Potential Benefits, Harms, Safeguards of Using AI chatbots for Mental Health](#)
- [Generative Artificial Intelligence: Implications for Families and Pediatricians](#)



- [Artificial Intelligence in Rural Health](#)
- [Health Care Artificial Intelligence Toolkit](#)



- [Bringing AI to school: Tips for school leaders.](#)
- [Students from All 50 States Produce National Framework for AI in America's Schools](#)



- [Augmented Intelligence in Medicine](#)
- [AI Chatbots for Health: How to Use Them Safely and Effectively](#)
- [AMA Center for Digital Health and AI](#)



- [Ethical Guidance for AI in the Professional Practice of Health Service Psychology](#)
- [APA Guide to Navigating AI-Generated Advice Thoughtfully and Safely](#)
- [Artificial Intelligence in Mental Health Care](#)

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