

CHATBOT Act

Children's Health, Advancement, Trust, Boundaries, and Oversight in Technology Act

Introduced by Senators Ted Cruz (R-Texas), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii),
John Curtis (R-Utah), and Adam Schiff (D-Calif.)

The Problem

A majority of American teenagers and a large percentage of children now report using AI chatbots. These tools can offer immense possibilities for education, creativity, and exploration. But they can also pose serious risks, when left unchecked.

Reports have alleged that some AI chatbots have encouraged self-harm, fostered emotional dependency, and exposed minors to sexually explicit content. Research notes that chatbots may also pose developmental risks, such as weakening memory recall and ability to distinguish between human and non-human relationships. Those dangers can grow more acute during prolonged interactions. Some companies use rewards, nudges, and notifications that can keep children hooked on conversations. They may even exploit a child's or teen's data for targeted advertising and incentivize minors to spend money inside these systems.

In addition to questions about whether design choices have considered the wellbeing of children, parents should be empowered to limit harmful features, protect privacy, and guide how these systems interact with their children. Policymakers, educators, and families need greater insight into how these tools can be safely used by children while protecting mental health and social development.

The Solution

The CHATBOT Act empowers parents to easily ensure that AI chatbot interactions prioritize the safety and wellbeing of children. The bill would require safe design choices, strong privacy safeguards, and further study of chatbot harms and best practices.

Specifically, the bill would:

1. Require Family Accounts for children under 13 to use AI chatbots, ensuring safeguards and parental involvement for the youngest users.
2. Establish common-sense safeguards for children and Family Accounts. Family Accounts allow parents to vet safeguard features, set by default to the most protective setting:
 - a. The ability to disable rewards and other maximum-engagement incentives, turn off notifications and push alerts, block financial transactions, and require clear disclosures that a chatbot is artificial intelligence, not a person.
 - b. Time and memory limits to help prevent unhealthy interactions, which can result from prolonged conversations that increase the risk of chatbot drift and other unsafe behavior, without impacting chatbot functionality; and
 - c. Tools that allow parents to easily monitor, analyze, and understand a child's or teen's chatbot use at scale.
3. Provide the option of Family Accounts for teens who use AI chatbots. For teen accounts that are not connected to a Family Account, the safeguard account features would be fixed at the most protective settings.
4. Require parental notice and verifiable parental consent before a minor can create an AI chatbot account.
5. Prohibit the use of minors' personal data for targeted advertising.
6. Support continued oversight by directing the National Science Foundation to study how chatbots affect children's mental health, relationships, and social development, and requiring the Government Accountability Office to report on compliance with the Act and the effectiveness of family account settings.