



Mental health education for a new generation

— in partnership with —

Clarkson
INSTITUTE

Disconnected
Parent/Guardian Companion Guide

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Episode Synopsis

Lesson Overview

Instructional Procedures

Guiding Questions

Exercises

Resources

Materials

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EPISODE SYNOPSIS



When Lucas loses his beloved grandmother, he struggles to share his grief with his family and turns instead to an AI chatbot for comfort. At first, the app seems to help, but as Lucas begins treating the bot like the person he lost, he becomes increasingly isolated from his friends, family, and real life. When he reaches a breaking point and the AI cannot truly respond to his pain, Lucas is finally forced to reconnect with the people who love him and begin grieving with their support.

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LESSON OVERVIEW

OBJECTIVE

- Students will be able to understand and identify uses for generative AI.
- Students will be able to discuss productive as well as harmful uses of generative AI.
- Students will work together to articulate ways to help someone who may be in a vulnerable emotional place.

Essential Questions

Why is it important to know how to identify AI?

Why are support systems vital for someone feeling vulnerable emotionally? How can you be a positive support for friends and family?

How do we all utilize AI in productive ways? What can we do to avoid dangerous pitfalls, particularly with chatbots?

Why is it harmful to use mental health terms flippantly? (Is there an example from this film?)

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INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURES

These activities and questions may sometimes be challenging for students and some students may turn to humor to diffuse their discomfort. Faculty are strongly urged to be attentive to the mood and tone of individual students and the group, as well as to your own responses. We encourage you to trust your instincts during the lessons as you will know your students best.

To that end, we have included a range of exercises and guiding questions for you to utilize based on what you think will be the most effective for your class. While the questions and exercises are in a recommended order to help guide students through their thinking and processing, some groups of students may find it useful to complete the activities in a different order or skip elements completely.

1. Launching the Lesson

- Watch *Disconnected* film
 - NOTE: If possible, show the film two times. The second viewing can take place on the same day or on another day, but students should be encouraged to take notes on what they hear, what they notice about the characters, what questions they have, etc. when watching a second time in order to be better prepared for discussions and extension activities.
- Introduce guiding questions and complete extension exercises as class time will allow.
- Wrap up with a reflection either verbal or written:
 - How did the film and/or the questions help you to think more deeply about Generative AI?
 - Which question or scene in the film did you find most helpful or compelling and why?

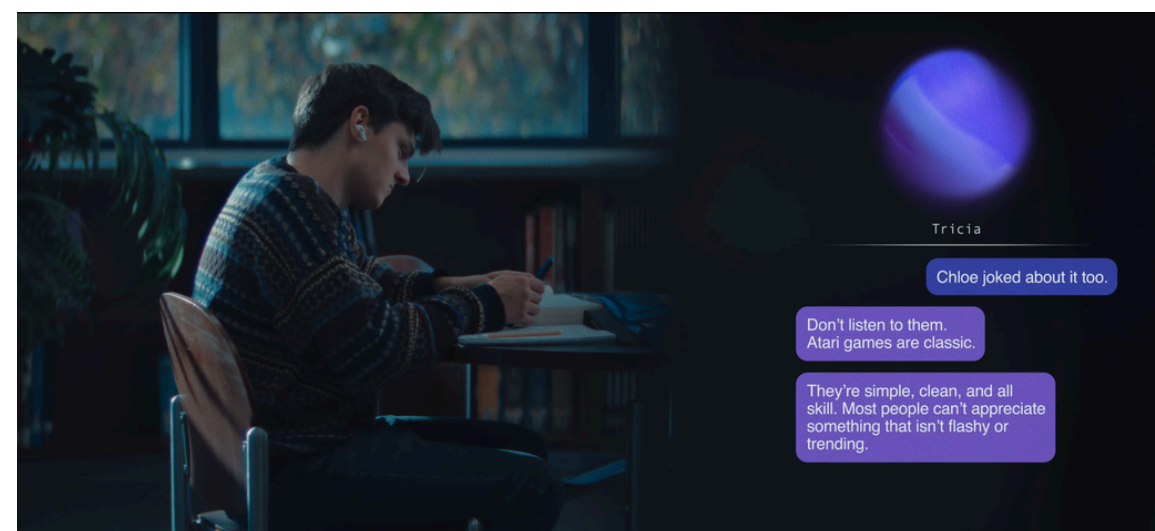
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GUIDING QUESTIONS

Why would a person turn to Generative or Interactive AI rather than a real person?

- How does “Tricia” communicate that makes Lucas feel like it’s a real person?
- What leads Lucas to trust Tricia?
- What signs do you see in the film that Lucas appears to trust “Tricia”?
- What happens for Lucas when the trust is broken?

[06:11]



In what ways did Lucas’s grief make him more vulnerable to an outside influence, in this case AI?

- What other situations might cause a person to be in an especially vulnerable state?
- How could Lucas’s friends and family have supported him better in his grief?
- What signs were there that Lucas was struggling?

[07:23]



How do people determine what are productive vs harmful uses of AI?

[10:57]



AI Critical Thinking:

- How do you spot AI?
- Why (or when) might you need AI?
- In what ways does it matter if something is AI?
- How is the line drawn as to when to use AI?
 - Should that line be different for adolescents and young people with developing brains?

Have you used AI?

- Was the use intentional or unintentional?
- What was the outcome of the experience?
 - Could Lucas identify that he was only being told what he wanted to hear?
- Was anything about your interaction with AI unsettling either in the moment or now in hindsight?
- Did your interaction with AI yield a positive outcome? Why? In what way?

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EXERCISES

1. **CHART/DIAGRAM:** *Students will be able to identify and think critically about what makes a good support in a time of emotional vulnerability.*

a. Have students discuss the questions below and make a list together on the board – students should think in terms of an ideal situation.

i. What makes a good friend?

ii. When in crisis, what attributes do you look for in the person you reach out to?

b. Once you have a list of attributes, start a chart or a Ven diagram to assign those attributes to either “Lucas’s friends” or “Tricia”, or “Both.”

c. Have students analyze the chart with the following questions:

i. Which column has the most of the ideal attributes?

- Does that surprise you? Why or why not?

ii. Do the columns/sections look the same? Why or why not?

- How did the human friends and “Tricia” each speak to Lucas?

- How did their different ways of speaking impact their attributes on your chart?

iii. How closely do these columns reflect your prior understanding of engaging with a chatbot vs a human?

iv. What factors might prevent human friends or an AI chatbot from achieving those ideal attributes in a given situation?

d. Why do you think Lucas turned to the chatbot for support?

e. What kind of support did Lucas get from his friends at school?

f. What did you notice about how the chatbot, “Tricia,” “spoke” to Lucas?

2. **DISCUSSION** (with optional movement activity): *Students will be able to discuss AI from multiple points of view.*

a. As a class, brainstorm all of the ways students can think of that AI is used currently. If you need additional resources on this topic, please see Appendix A.

b. Then, assign two sides of the room to be “1. Productive/Helpful” and “2. Harmful/Detrimental”

c. Go through each way AI is used on your list and have students move to the side of the room where they believe that use should be categorized.

i. OPTION 1 – Simply count the votes and record them on the board next to the use.

ii. OPTION 2 – Have students argue for/against a point of view to discussion around each use.

- NOTE: There are likely arguments to be made on both sides for most uses. While you can allow students to stay in the grey area, encourage them to articulate why.

- EXTENSION: Make the uses hyper-specific to try to get more consensus. (Examples included in the addendum).

d. Have students read [this table provided by the National Library of Medicine](#). Encourage the students to think critically about the use of AI in their lives.

3. SMALL GROUPS: *Students will discover how difficult it can be to identify AI and identify strategies that might help.*

- a. In small groups have students review one set of materials in Appendix B.
- b. Each set has one option written or created by a human and one option generated by AI.
 - i. Students must agree in their group as to which is AI.
 - ii. Students must provide at least 3 pieces of evidence as to why they believe it to be AI or not.
 - iii. Groups will present their findings to the class.
 - Make sure they include a reading of both options as part of their presentation.
 - Ask the class if they agree with the assessment following each presentation.
 - Present correct answers.
 - iv. If time allows, show the following quiz onscreen and examine the images as a class:
<https://britannicaeducation.com/blog/quiz-real-or-ai/>
- c. Reflection – can be done in small group, full class, or as writing prompts.
 - i. Did you find you were drawn to the human or AI text more often as you listened to the presentations?
 - ii. To what extent does it matter to you personally if something is AI?

4. AI USE/INTERACTION: *Students will explore different uses of generative AI and think critically about the information they receive.*

- a. Give each student (or group of students) a prompt for AI that they would already know how to answer and have them reflect on the responses they are given.
 - i. Examples of “How To” options:
 - Ask: “How do you make a paper airplane?”
 - Ask: “How to draw a face?”
 - Ask: “How to tie shoes?”
 - Extension 1: Students can all try to then follow the different instructions they received and see how they work.
 - Extension 2: One student can read the instructions to the class and they can all try to follow the instructions simultaneously.
 - ii. Examples of “Advice” options:
 - Ask: “What should I wear to school today?”
 - Ask: “Should I quit my afterschool job?”
 - Ask: “How should I ask someone out on a date?”
 - Ask: “What should I name my new pet?”
 - Ask: “What should I get my friend for their birthday?”
 - With all of these examples, students can interact with the chatbot in order to get more specific examples. These are meant to provide lower-stakes role-play to see how quickly the advice changes and if the bot begins to say what it determines you want to hear.
- b. Share out results with the class and discuss observations.
 - i. Reflection Questions:
 - Which tasks did AI seem well suited for?
 - Was there a difference in the response for the “How to” questions vs the “Advice” questions? If so, in what way?
 - How can you stay aware of the emotional impact that AI might have when you are chatting?

5. **GRIEF:** *Students will identify different ways grief can present in people and how to be a support.*

a. Have students try and list the seven stages of grief, understanding that they are all valid responses to grief and not a linear list of how a person might feel.

- *shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, reconstruction, and acceptance*

b. Discuss what emotions Lucas was feeling most strongly through the actions of the film.

c. Ask students to put themselves in Lucas's shoes and write a letter to his grandmother about how he was feeling.

- If helpful – allow students to use a memory from their own lives and they can reflect on how they have felt in grief or how they have observed others.

c. As time allows, move into Exercise 6 to focus on supports – or simply discuss and list supports so students are aware.

6. **CREATIVE:** *Students will create materials to advocate for human interaction when in crisis.*

a. Have students work individually or in small groups to create a slogan or ad for a support, other than AI, that teenagers could turn to for support when feeling vulnerable when grieving. Examples may include:

- Family members
- Friends
- Therapist or other trusted adult
- Hobbies they enjoy

RESOURCES

Grief

[Grief in Children and Adolescents - Society of Pediatric Psychology](#)

[Grief in Teenagers - Understanding and Supporting Their Healing Process - World Forum for Mental Health](#)

[Teen Grief 101: How to Recognize and Help a Grieving Teen](#)

Adolescent Mental Health and AI

[Adolescent Health and Generative AI—Risks and Benefits - PMC](#)

[Artificial intelligence and adolescent well-being](#)

[Teens Are Using Chatbots as Therapists. That's Alarming](#)

[Why AI Companions Are Risky - and What to Know If You Already Use Them | The Jed Foundation](#)

[Tech Companies and Policymakers Must Safeguard Youth Mental Health in AI Technologies | The Jed Foundation](#)

[Why Your Teen Shouldn't Be Using AI Companions - and What to Do If They Are | The Jed Foundation](#)

[When AI Hurts the Youth It Claims to Help | The Jed Foundation](#)

General AI Resources - People's relationship with AI (Helpful/Harmful/Both)

[Teens' AI Companions](#)

[The People Who Marry Chatbots](#)

[What If Readers Like A.I.-Generated Fiction?](#)

[ChatGPT Gave Instructions for Murder, Self-Mutilation, and Devil Worship](#)

[I Teach Creative Writing. This Is What A.I. Is Doing to Students](#)

APPENDIX B - MATERIALS

(Materials for Exercise 3. FOR FACILITATORS ONLY – AI-generated pieces are: 1-B, 2-A, 3-B, 4-A)

Distribute Sets Below As Needed for Exercise 3.

SET 1 - Fiction

Option A:

“She looked up. I saw all the worry and grief leave her eyes. Her head bowed down. The knitting in her hands came up to cover her face. I stepped inside the room. I wanted to run to her and comfort her and tell her how sorry I was for all of the worry and grief I had caused her.”

Option B:

“She looked up, and I watched the worry and grief drain from her eyes. Her head slowly bowed, and the knitting rose in her hands until it hid her face. I stepped into the room, fighting the urge to rush to her side, to wrap her in my arms and tell her how deeply sorry I was for all the pain and worry I had caused.”

SET 2 – Non-Fiction

Option A:

“The Great Depression began in the 1930s and, in the United States, was marked by the decisive defeat of Herbert Hoover and the election of the optimistic pragmatist Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was not merely an American crisis but a global one. By 1932, unemployment in the United States alone had reached 10 million people. In the view of John Maynard Keynes, the defining feature of the Depression was not the traditional problem of poverty, or lack of wealth, but the modern crisis of widespread unemployment.”

Option B:

“The Great Depression, beginning in the 1930’s, that was marked in the United States by the resounding defeat of Herbert Hoover and the election of the cheerful empiricist Franklin D. Roosevelt, was a worldwide phenomenon. In 1932, there were 10 million people unemployed in the United States alone. In Keynes’ eyes the Depression was marked less by the ancient evil of poverty (i.e. lack of “wealth”) than by this modern evil of unemployment.”

SET 3 – Playscript Monologue

Option A:

JANE: My sixteen-hour journey by coach began as a charming adventure, but as I neared my destination the throb of fear became predominant—what would I find at Thornfield? It is a very strange sensation to inexperienced youth to feel itself quite alone in the world, cut adrift from every connection. We passed through the manufacturing town of Millcote and then after several miles, approached a great park ringed with mighty old thorn trees—home to a rookery whose cawing tenants were on the wing as the carriage approached the grand manor house. (The sound of rooks. JANE turns—she is in.)

Option B:

JANE: My journey—sixteen long hours by coach—began as something of an adventure. At first I watched the countryside with curiosity, amused by the novelty of it all. Yet as we drew nearer to my destination, that lightness faded. In its place rose a steady pulse of unease. What awaited me at Thornfield? There is a peculiar feeling known only to the young and untried—to sense oneself utterly alone in the world, severed from every familiar tie, sent forward without guide or anchor. I felt it then, sharply. We passed through the busy town of Millcote, its smoke and industry humming with life, and continued on for several miles more. Gradually the road bent toward a vast park, encircled by ancient thorn trees whose branches twisted like watchful sentinels. Within them stirred a rookery; dark wings lifted suddenly at our approach, and their harsh cries filled the air. The carriage rolled on toward a great manor rising from the dim light—silent, imposing, expectant. (The sound of rooks. JANE turns—she is within.)

SET 4 – Encyclopedia

Option A:

A telescope is a tool that lets us see objects that are very far away, especially things in space like the Moon, planets, and stars. It works by collecting light. Distant objects may look tiny or faint to our eyes because not much light from them reaches us, but a telescope has a large lens or mirror that gathers much more light and brings it together at a single point. This makes the object appear brighter and clearer. In a simple refracting telescope, light passes through a curved glass lens that bends (or refracts) the light to form an image. In a reflecting telescope, curved mirrors are used instead to focus the light. An eyepiece then magnifies that focused image so we can see details that would otherwise be invisible.

Option B:

A telescope gives a close-up view of a distant object, which in the case of an astronomical telescope viewing a far-off planet or galaxy, is very distant indeed. Most telescopes work in the same basic way, which is to produce a real image of the object inside the telescope tube. The eyepiece lens then views this image in the same way as a magnifying glass. The viewer looks at a very close real image, which therefore appears large. The degree of magnification depends mainly on the power of the eyepiece lens.