

THIS WEEKEND'S FAMILY ACTIVITY

The Warm Handoff

ROLE-PLAY

SKILL: HUMAN-FIRST

45-60 MINUTES

RECOMMENDED AGE RANGE

Ages 6–12. Young enough that the habit of reaching for people is still forming, and old enough to notice the difference between a scripted response and an unscripted one.

WHAT YOU NEED

8–10 index cards

A marker

A timer

A flat surface to spread cards on

ACTIVITY STEPS

- 01 Write one emotional scenario on each index card. Good examples: “I scored a goal in my game today.” “My best friend said something that hurt my feelings.” “I’m really nervous about something happening tomorrow.” “I finished something I worked really hard on.” “Something confusing happened and I don’t know how to explain it.” Fold the cards and put them in a bowl.
- 02 One family member volunteers to play “the AI.” Their job: respond to every scenario with calm, patient, supportive language. No personal stories. No opinions. No “I remember when I...” Just support and practical suggestions. The AI player should sound helpful but not personal.
- 03 One player draws a card and reads the scenario aloud as if it happened to them today. Start the timer. The AI player responds for 60 seconds. Everyone else listens without interrupting. When time is up, the group stays quiet for 15 seconds and notices how the response felt.
- 04 Same scenario card. This time, a different family member responds as themselves, with no rules. They can share a memory. They can ask a question. They can say they don’t know what to say. 60 seconds. Let it go wherever it goes.
- 05 After both rounds, everyone writes one thing the human response did that the AI response could not. Go around the table and share. Common answers: the human remembered something real, the human admitted they were not sure, the human made it about both of us. Rotate who holds the scenario card and who plays the AI. Repeat until cards run out.

THE DEEPER LESSON

AI companions are being designed to respond more perfectly than any real person ever could. The NPR story behind this issue called that design a “Trojan Teddy Bear” because what looks like perfect patience is also a quiet displacement of the real thing. When a child notices what a human response did that the scripted one could not, they are building a preference no AI can manufacture for them: the expectation that a real person is worth reaching for.

CONVERSATION STARTER

What is one thing a person you care about can do in a conversation that you would not want a robot to do instead?