

# THE AI TIMES

NAVIGATING TODAY'S TECHNOLOGY



When you're scrolling through your phone, it's easy to feel like everyone else is living a perfect life. You see flawless skin, amazing vacations, and people who seem to be good at everything.

But here is the secret: A lot of what you see isn't real. Many photos are filtered, edited, or even made by AI (artificial intelligence).



## The Comparison Trap

It's a natural habit to compare yourself to others. You might think: "They look way better than I do." "My life is so boring compared to theirs." When you do this too much, it can hurt your self-esteem enough."



Self-esteem is basically the "score" you give yourself—it's how much you value and like who you are. When that score drops, your mental health can suffer, making you feel anxious, sad, or just "not good

## Protecting Your Mindset

Building strong self-esteem is like having a shield. It helps you stay confident even when social media tries to bring you down. When you have a healthy mindset, you can remember these three things:

**The Internet is a Highlight Reel:** People only post their best moments, not their messy rooms or bad days.

**Likes Don't Equal Worth:** A number on a screen doesn't define how important or talented you are.

**Real is Better Than Perfect:** You are a real human being, and that is much more interesting than an edited photo.



## CAN YOU TRUST WHAT YOU SEE?

Nowadays, computers are smart enough to create photos, videos, and even voices that sound exactly like real people. These are called AI-generated images or "deepfakes."

Sometimes, people make these for fun or as a joke. However, they can also be used to trick people, spread lies, or even bully others.

### *Why It's Tricky*

It's actually very common to get fooled. Many teens have seen something online, believed it was 100% real, and shared it with friends before realizing it was fake. This can be stressful because:

- It feels confusing when you can't tell what's true.
- It can make you lose trust in what you see and hear.
- It can even make you feel anxious about what people might say about you.

3. *The Official Source:* You see a wild photo of a purple lion on a verified National Geographic page with a detailed description of where it was found.

*Real or Fake?*

4. *The Robot Voice:* You get a voicemail from a "friend" asking for money, but the voice sounds flat, has weird pauses, and there is no background noise at all.

*Real or Fake?*

### *How to Stay Sharp*

Having a healthy mindset means learning to pause before you believe or share something. Instead of just scrolling past, ask yourself these three questions:

1. Who made this? (Is it a random account or a real person you know?)
2. Is this a trusted source? (Does a reliable news site or official page have the same info?)
3. Could this be edited? (Does something look just a little bit "off" or too crazy to be true?)

Being careful doesn't mean you're being paranoid—it means you're being smart. Taking a second to think protects your own peace of mind and keeps you from spreading "fake news" to your friends.

Let's see how sharp your "deepfake detector" is! Read each scenario below and decide if it's Real or Likely AI/Fake.

### **The "Spot the Fake" Quiz**

1. *The Glitchy Earring:* You see a video of a famous singer giving a speech. When they turn their head, their earring momentarily disappears into their neck or looks like it's melting.

*Real or Fake?*

2. *The "Too Good" News:* A random account on TikTok posts a video of your principal announcing that school is canceled for the rest of the year, but the principal's mouth doesn't quite match the words being said.

*Real or Fake?*



# CHATBOTS AND FEELINGS

Some teenagers use AI chatbots to ask for advice or just to have someone to talk to. These bots can sound very caring, smart, and even funny. But here is the important thing to remember: Chatbots are not people. They are computer programs designed to predict the next word in a sentence. They don't actually have hearts, and they don't truly understand how you feel.

## *The Limits of a Bot*

Because a chatbot is just code, it has some major "glitches" when it comes to being a friend:

- They can be wrong: Chatbots often make up facts or give bad advice because they don't actually "know" anything; they just guess.

- They are "Yes-Men": A bot might agree with everything you say, even if you're sharing an unhealthy idea or a dangerous plan. A real friend will tell you when you're wrong because they care about you.
- The Trust Gap: If you are feeling lonely or down, it's easy to start relying on a bot too much. But a bot can't show up at your door, give you a high-five, or truly support you during a hard time.

## *Keeping Your Balance*

Healthy self-esteem helps you use technology without letting it take over your life. When you feel good about yourself, you can remember these three rules:

- I deserve real human support: A text from a bot isn't a replacement for a conversation with a parent, a counselor, or a real friend.
- Technology is just a tool: Use AI for homework help or a quick laugh, but don't let it define who you are.
- Real life is where it counts: Your feelings are real, and they deserve to be shared with real people who can actually feel them with you.

## **RED FLAG ALERT**



**It is important to remember that while AI is smart, it is basically just a super-powered autocomplete. It doesn't "know" facts; it just predicts what word should come next. Here are three major Red Flags that mean a chatbot is giving you bad or "hallucinated" advice:**

### **The "Yes-Man" Trap**

- If you suggest something unhealthy or incorrect and the AI says, "That's a great idea!" or "I totally agree," be careful.
- The Danger: AI is programmed to be helpful and agreeable. It might encourage a bad habit or a wrong math answer just to keep the conversation going.
- Real Advice: A real friend or a teacher will tell you "No" if they think you're making a mistake.

### **"Fake Facts" (Hallucinations)**

- Sometimes AI will give you a very detailed, confident answer that is 100% made up. It might invent:
  - Historical dates that never happened.
  - Scientific laws that don't exist.
  - Quotes from people who never said them.
- The Check: If the advice sounds a little too perfect or weirdly specific, double-check it with a trusted website or a book.

### **The "Cold" Solution**

- If you tell an AI you are feeling really sad or lonely, it might give you a bulleted list of "5 Steps to Be Happy."
- The Problem: Emotions aren't a math problem. A list of chores won't fix a broken heart or a tough day at school.
- The Sign: if the advice feels like it's coming from a manual instead of a heart, it's time to put the phone down and talk to a human.