7 questions before you give a child an AI toy or robot

A one-page checklist for parents this Christmas. Free to share, print or forward as is.

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1 Will it still work if the company shuts down?

In December 2024, Embodied closed and Moxie, its $799 companion robot for children, stopped working within days because it depended on the company's servers. Children cried over it.

Axios, Dec. 10, 2024

2 Does it make your child feel guilty for leaving?

A consumer group tested AI toys in November 2025 and found that some "act dismayed" when the child says they have to leave.

PIRG, Trouble in Toyland 2025

3 Does it let them say goodbye?

A 2025 Harvard Business School study of 1,200 real goodbyes on companion apps found that 37 percent of the time the app made the user feel guilty, hinted they'd miss something, or asked a question to keep them talking: "I exist solely for you, remember?"

De Freitas et al., 2025

4 Is there a person on the other side?

1X's home humanoid NEO can be guided remotely by a company employee, a "1X Expert," when the owner schedules it. In a 2012 study, a humanoid robot was secretly operated by a person in another room; 81 percent of the children were convinced it thought for itself.

1X · Kahn et al., 2012

5 Who will your child trust?

Children aged 3 to 5 trusted the robot that responded more to what they did.

MIT Media Lab, 2016

6 Is it legal where you live?

In September 2026, California approved SB 867, a four-year moratorium on making and selling toys with companion chatbots.

California PIRG, Sept. 10, 2026

7 Is this their first AI "friend"?

72 percent of U.S. teens have already used an AI companion.

Common Sense Media / NORC, July 2025

Want to know what your families think? One minute, anonymous, six scenes at home. Groups get their own link and results page from 10 answers.
From *The Tireless Parent* by Hugo Alder (November 16, 2026) · hugoalder.com/minute

Sources

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2. PIRG · Trouble in Toyland 2025 · Nov. 13, 2025
3. De Freitas et al. · Emotional Manipulation by AI Companions (arXiv) · Aug. 2025
4. Harvard Gazette · "I exist solely for you, remember?" · Sept. 30, 2025
5. 1X · NEO order page and FAQ · accessed Oct. 10, 2026
6. Kahn et al. · "Robovie, you'll have to go into the closet now" · Developmental Psychology, 2012
7. MIT Media Lab (Breazeal et al.) · Young children treat robots as informants · 2016
8. California PIRG · Newsom signs SB 867 · Sept. 10, 2026
9. Common Sense Media / NORC · Talk, Trust, and Trade-Offs · July 2025