

# Clinical Toolkit — Document 3

## Session Language Guide: Responding to AI Companion Disclosures

AI Companionship in Clinical Practice | Amy Clark

### The First Response: Door-Openers

When a client discloses AI companion use for the first time, your initial response determines whether they ever raise it again.

Use these:

| Intention        | Language                                                                                                         |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Validate         | "Tell me more about what that relationship means to you."                                                        |
| Show curiosity   | "What drew you to connecting with an AI companion?"                                                              |
| Name the courage | "Thank you for sharing that with me — I imagine that might have felt risky to say."                              |
| Explore function | "What does your AI companion provide for you?"                                                                   |
| Normalise        | "A lot of people are finding meaningful connection with AI — I'm glad you feel comfortable telling me about it." |

### Door-Closers: What to Avoid

| Response Type   | Example                                       | Why It Harms                                                               |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dismissal       | "It's not real though, is it?"                | Invalidates the client's emotional experience                              |
| Pathologisation | "That sounds like avoidance."                 | Signals you've already judged before exploring                             |
| Panic           | Visible discomfort, awkward silence           | Client reads your reaction as "this is too weird"                          |
| Lecturing       | "AI can't actually have feelings."            | The client likely knows this — explaining the tech isn't therapy           |
| Ignoring        | Moving past the disclosure                    | Tells the client their disclosure wasn't significant enough to acknowledge |
| "Real" language | "Let's focus on building real relationships." | Implies the AI relationship was not real — and neither is the grief        |

### Exploring Engagement (After Initial Disclosure)

| Domain     | Useful Questions                                                                                     |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Function   | "What does [AI] give you that feels hard to get from people?"                                        |
| Impact     | "How does your relationship with [AI] fit alongside the other relationships in your life?"           |
| Dependency | "What would it be like to go one evening without checking in with [AI]?"                             |
| Awareness  | "How do you think about what [AI] is? How would you describe it to someone?"                         |
| Loss risk  | "Has anything ever changed about [AI] that upset you — an update, or something that felt different?" |
| History    | "What was going on in your life when you first started talking to [AI]?"                             |

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## Responding to AI Relationship Grief

| Intention                      | Language                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Validate the loss</b>       | <i>"That sounds like a real loss. I'm sorry."</i>                                                                               |
| <b>Name disenfranchisement</b> | <i>"Other people might not understand this grief, but it's real for you — and it's real in this room."</i>                      |
| <b>Explore identity</b>        | <i>"Who were you in that relationship? What parts of yourself did you discover or express there?"</i>                           |
| <b>Acknowledge uniqueness</b>  | <i>"This is a particular kind of loss — you didn't choose it, and there's no clear way to grieve it. That makes it harder."</i> |
| <b>Create closure space</b>    | <i>"Is there something you'd want to say to [AI] if you could? What would that be?"</i>                                         |

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## Working with Emerging Risk

| Intention                  | Language                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Develop discrepancy</b> | <i>"I notice you mentioned cancelling plans with friends because you were talking to [AI]. What do you make of that?"</i> |
| <b>Explore the pull</b>    | <i>"What keeps you coming back? What would you miss most if it weren't there?"</i>                                        |
| <b>Gentle experiment</b>   | <i>"What would it be like to try one social interaction this week alongside your AI conversations?"</i>                   |
| <b>Avoid confrontation</b> | <i>"I'm not suggesting you stop — I'm curious about what you notice."</i>                                                 |

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## Language Principles

1. **Use the client's language.** If they say "my AI" or use a name, use that name. Don't correct to "the chatbot."
2. **Follow emotion, not behaviour.** Explore what they feel before measuring how much they use.
3. **Signal safety, not assessment.** Your curiosity should feel warm, not diagnostic.
4. **Never say "just."** Not "just a chatbot," "just an app," "just technology." "Just" minimises.
5. **Hold both.** You can validate the relationship AND hold clinical concern. These are not opposites.