

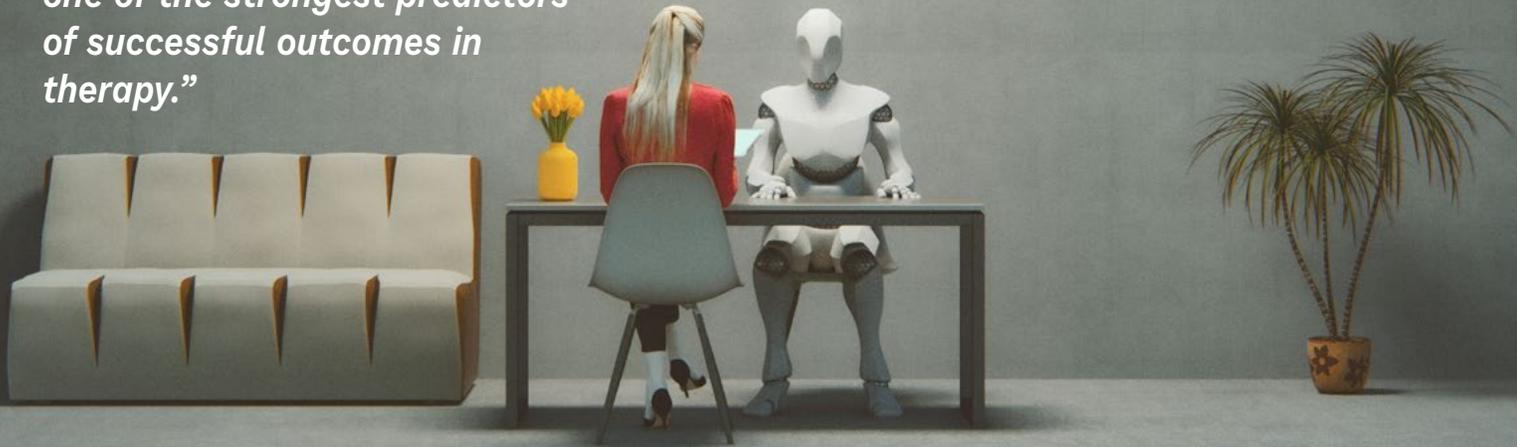


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“The therapeutic relationship—trust, rapport, and alliance—is one of the strongest predictors of successful outcomes in therapy.”



An Intelligent Response: AI Counseling vs. Human Counseling

By Douglas Querin

A friend mentioned to me the other day that they knew someone who was considering using AI for mental health counseling. From my perspective, this seemed problematic at best and potentially harmful at worst. It also made me wonder whether AI would consider itself to be a prudent alternative to human, face-to-face counseling. So I asked ChatGPT: (1) to list important reasons why human counseling might be better than AI counseling and (2) if ChatGPT needed counseling, would it choose human or AI? Below, in italics, are ChatGPT’s unedited responses.

Here are 10 compelling reasons why counseling and therapy using AI (including AI chatbots and virtual assistants) is professionally considered less effective or even inappropriate as a full alternative to live, educated, and trained counselors or therapists:

1. Lack of Emotional Intelligence and Empathy

- AI can simulate empathy, but it does not feel or understand human emotions in the way a human therapist does.
- This can lead to mechanical or tone-deaf responses that fail to meet the client's emotional needs, especially in moments of grief, trauma, or crisis.

2. Inability to Form a Genuine Therapeutic Alliance

- The therapeutic relationship—trust, rapport, and alliance—is one of the strongest predictors of successful outcomes in therapy.
- AI cannot authentically bond, build trust, or provide relational depth, which limits its long-term effectiveness.

3. Absence of Clinical Judgment and Nuance

- AI lacks the human intuition and professional judgment that come from experience and training.
- It cannot accurately read subtle cues, adjust strategies on the fly, or weigh complex moral or relational dynamics.

4. Poor Handling of Crisis Situations

- AI cannot appropriately respond to mental health emergencies, including suicidal ideation, self-harm, or violence.
- Even when programmed to provide resources, it cannot assess risk or intervene effectively in real-time.

5. Ethical and Confidentiality Concerns

- AI systems may collect, store, or share sensitive data, and data breaches or misuse are ongoing risks.
- AI lacks a human practitioner's professional ethical obligations, licensure accountability, and duty of care.

6. Limited Cultural Sensitivity and Contextual Awareness

- AI often lacks cultural competence and may misunderstand lived experiences related to race, gender, identity, socioeconomic status, or religion.
- It cannot easily adapt to contextual or community-specific norms or recognize subtle social meanings.

7. Rigid or Scripted Interventions

- Most AI systems operate on pre-set scripts, decision trees, or pattern recognition.
- This restricts them from using creative, spontaneous, or experientially informed techniques that a trained therapist would tailor in real time.

8. Inability to Diagnose or Provide Evidence-Based Treatment

- AI is not licensed and cannot legally or ethically diagnose mental disorders or provide psychotherapy.
- It cannot administer or adjust treatment plans, medication consultations, or trauma-informed modalities.

9. Risk of Misinformation or Harmful Advice

- AI responses are generated from large datasets and may sometimes provide inaccurate, outdated, or misleading information.
- This can result in misdirection, false reassurance, or reinforcement of maladaptive thinking.



“Mental health treatment is deeply human, relational, and experiential, often involving body language, timing, silence, and intuition.”

10. Undermines the Complexity of Human Healing

- *Mental health treatment is deeply human, relational, and experiential, often involving body language, timing, silence, and intuition.*
- *Reducing it to a chatbot interface trivializes the complexity of what healing requires, especially for severe, chronic, or relational disorders.*

Summary

While AI can serve a helpful adjunctive role (e.g., psycho-education, CBT exercises, journaling prompts), it is not a substitute for professional therapy. Clinical psychology, psychiatry, and counseling associations (e.g., APA, ACA, WHO) generally emphasize, AI tools should only augment—not replace—human therapists, especially in moderate to severe cases.

Finally, I asked ChatGPT, “If you needed counseling, would you use a live therapist or AI?” ChatGPT responded:

If I were capable of needing counseling—if I had emotions, a personal history, or experienced distress—I would choose a live, trained therapist every time.

These seem like intelligent responses, and human commentators agree.¹ I have to compliment ChatGPT for its candor and objectivity. ●

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1. “New Research Shows AI Chatbots Should Not Replace Your Therapist,” Newswise, 8 July 2025, www.newswise.com/articles/new-research-shows-ai-chatbots-should-not-replace-your-therapist?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

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