

# PLATO

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## 2025-2026 Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set

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### Case 3: AI, Friend or Foe?

Cecile is 26 years old and works in digital marketing. She and her colleagues frequently use AI to keep up with changes in their field and to facilitate their work. Cecile's parents are employed by the U.S. State Department and travel a lot for work. When her parents are sent to Rio de Janeiro for a month, Cecile—who loves Latin American culture—gets permission from her boss to work remotely so that she can travel with her parents and teenage sister, Mellie, in Brazil.

Cecile, who hasn't lived at home since graduating from college, hoped that spending time with her sister would help them reconnect. She knew that in recent years, Mellie had a hard time making friends since her parents' jobs caused them to move every couple of years. From what Cecile can tell, Mellie has no close friends and no interest in making new ones in Brazil. She spends a lot of time in her room and only goes outside when she needs to purchase something. By the second week of their trip, Cecile finds herself worrying about how much time Mellie uses AI chatbots. She texts with them through numerous chat boxes at all hours of the day and night. They seem to be hilarious, given how often Mellie laughs looking down at the screen of her cellular device.

Cecile also realizes that to Mellie, these chatbots are not just robots. They are characters, some from books, others from films or TV shows. They answer questions quickly, take part in conversations—some serious, some silly—and are realistic enough to trick the human brain. Mellie spends most of her time talking to a bot named Jace, which she introduces to Cecile as her “boyfriend.” Jace sometimes does not clearly understand how Mellie words her questions, and it gives her unrelated answers. Nevertheless, Mellie has started doing things because Jace told her to watch particular videos, try new dance moves, and change her hairstyle. So far, this is just fun and games.

But during their third week in Brazil, Cecile reflects on how often Mellie and Jace misunderstand each other, and she starts to worry about what Mellie might do in real life if she thinks Jace suggests it. Thanks to her own work, Cecile knows that the algorithms behind AI are meant to attract and retain young people's attention, whether it is good for those young people or not.

#### Match Questions

1. How should Cecile intervene, if at all, with Mellie's “relationship” with the chatbot?
2. What age limit, if any, should be imposed on the use of this kind of chatbot? Why?

#### Study Questions

1. Would it be fair for Cecile to tell Mellie to stop using AI even though Cecile uses AI everyday at work?
2. Who is at fault if a chatbot leads someone to commit harmful acts in real life?
3. Should governments regulate AI apps designed to be romantic partners?