

Don't Fall for Fake: Activity 3

About those bots

Children are interacting with more and more nonhuman “voices” coming out of devices, apps, and sites these days – mostly at home, but perhaps increasingly at school. Sometimes they’re called “chatbots,” sometimes “virtual assistants,” often just “bots.” This is a simple Q&A activity designed to get children to think out loud together (or simply with you) about interacting with bots.

Note: Try to keep the discussion open-ended; this activity is designed to engage critical thinking, not deliver any conclusions.

Goals for children



- ✓ **Learn** about this interactive technology showing up in more and more places in students’ lives.
- ✓ **Identify** experiences with bots of various kinds.
- ✓ **Analyze** the impact these technologies can have on daily life – both positive and negative.

Let's talk



More and more people use bots these days. Have you heard that word used? Some people call them “chatbots” or “virtual assistants.” They’re used for a gazillion things: playing games, checking the weather, answering questions, getting directions, notifying you when time’s up, etc. Sometimes they have a human name, other times their names just describe what they do, such as Dog A Day, a bot that sends a photo of a dog every day. Bots can be on mobile devices, online, in cars, or they can be special devices people keep in different rooms of their home. Let’s chat about what experiences your children have had with bots and get our thinking about them rolling. Here are some questions for us to consider:

- Do you know what a bot is?
- How many of you have talked to a bot? On what kind of device?
- Who wants to tell us what that’s like?
- What do you think bots work best for (examples to get people thinking: ask for the weather report, get the news, play a game, ask for information)?
- Bots use what’s called AI, or artificial intelligence. In a way, AI learns from what you ask so it can get better at helping you. To do this, bots sometimes “remember,” or record, what you ask and say. Does that make you think about what you’d tell a bot? If so, what would you tell it and what kind of information would you keep to yourself?
- Do you think it’s like talking to a human being? How is it and how is it not like that?
- How do people you know treat or talk to their bots?
- How would you talk to it? Would you be kind, or would you sometimes yell at it?
- Is it okay for people to yell at bots? Why or why not? (Is it like practicing a certain kind of interaction?)

- Sometimes really little kids think bots are humans. What would you tell a little sister, brother, or cousin to help them understand what they're chatting with?
- If bots can learn from us humans, can you think of something we shouldn't say because you wouldn't want your bot to learn it? (Hint: Think back to the activities in "Share with Care" and talk about how they relate to this.)
- Is it possible to classify information as "good or bad" or "real or fake"? How can we try to answer these questions?

Activity



After the discussion, on your home devices, search for images of bots and information (including news coverage) about them. Search terms might include "bots," "chatbots," "digital assistants," or "virtual assistants." Decide in family if the information is good and write a one-paragraph summary about.

Takeaway

Critical thinking is one of the best, most long-lasting "tools" we have for keeping our tech use positive – and the great thing is that it's a tool that gets better every time we use it. Thinking out loud together is a powerful, fun way to use and improve that tool.