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AI's therapeutic potential goes beyond emotional connection

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The World View by Ziv Ben-Zion ([Nature 643, 9; 2025](#)) and Correspondence by Hadar Fisher ([Nature 644, 876; 2025](#)) explore the clinical risks and possibilities arising from the capacity of artificial-intelligence systems to [replicate human empathy and connection](#). But AI's distinct, non-human qualities also hold [therapeutic potential](#).

AI can offer unwavering predictability, providing a stable anchor that complex human relationships often cannot guarantee. It can also enhance a user's sense of competence by helping to structure chaotic thoughts into a coherent narrative. Moreover, study participants who interacted with a conversational AI that had been prompted to be an "excellent listener" felt it mainly satisfied a need for autonomy (a freedom to express themselves), rather than reducing their loneliness ([N. Weinstein et al. Comput. Hum. Behav. Artif. Hum. 4, 100149; 2025](#)).

Predictability, competence and autonomy do not make for lesser forms of support; rather, they address distinct psychological functions. The challenge, therefore, is not to perfect AI's simulation of empathy but to map its unique psychological footprint across the diverse and complex landscape of human needs. Viewing AI through this wider lens will allow us to integrate it into our mental health-care ecosystem as a powerful, specialized tool in its own right.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare no competing interests.

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