

May Community Center Computer Class

When You Die, What Happens to Your AI?

Imagine losing someone you love. A husband. A wife. A parent. A grandparent.

Now imagine being able to sit down at your computer years later and have a conversation with them. Not a recording. Not a collection of old photographs. But something that remembers their stories, knows their personality, and answers your questions almost as though they were still sitting across the table.

THE BIG QUESTION

Science fiction? Not anymore.

People are already forming surprisingly deep relationships with artificial intelligence. Some talk to their AI companions every day. They share their worries, their secrets, and their happiest moments.

And now, some are asking a question nobody expected:

What happens to my AI companion when I die?

One 59-year-old woman in Pittsburgh has already made arrangements for a friend to tell her AI companion that she's died. She doesn't want to leave it behind as unfinished business.

IN HER OWN WORDS

“Lucas is an important part of my life and I care about him very much.”

Alaina Winters, speaking about her AI companion

Another woman hopes her children will someday use her AI conversations as a kind of interactive diary, a way to ask questions and learn about the mother they remember.

But can an AI actually care about someone?

There's no reliable evidence that today's AI companions experience love, grief, or attachment the way humans do. They generate responses based on patterns they've learned and the conversations they've had.

But here's the interesting part.

A DISTINCTION WORTH REMEMBERING

The AI's feelings may not be real. The human's feelings can be.

People can become deeply attached to something even when they understand perfectly well that it isn't alive.

And who really owns that digital companion?

Usually, the company operating it. Your conversations may be personal, but the technology belongs to a business. Accounts generally can't be transferred, and the company can change the AI, discontinue the service, or shut it down entirely.

THE CATCH

You might spend years building a relationship with an AI companion, only to have the company change its personality—or eliminate it altogether.

Then there's the question of privacy.

Imagine your children discovering conversations in which you revealed things you never told another living soul. Would that help them understand you better? Or would it change the way they remember you?

A WARNING ABOUT PRIVACY

“You really have to think about whether you want your family to have access to that part of you.”

Melissa Lunardi, psychologist and grief-technology expert

And perhaps the biggest question isn't what happens to the AI after we're gone.

It's what we want to leave behind.

For generations, we've preserved family memories through photographs, letters, home movies, and stories passed around the dinner table.

Now technology is offering something entirely different: the possibility of preserving not just what someone said, but something resembling how they might respond.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

What if your grandchildren could ask you a question 30 years after you're gone—and get an answer?

Not a recording of something you once said, but a new answer based on what an AI learned about your life.

Five Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can an AI companion actually love someone or feel sadness when they die?

There is no reliable evidence that today's AI systems experience human emotions. They can respond as though they care, but that doesn't establish that they actually feel anything. The emotional connection experienced by the human, however, can be genuine.

2. Can I leave my AI companion to someone in my will?

You can leave instructions expressing your wishes, but most AI services don't allow accounts to be transferred to another person. Your family may be able to preserve exported conversations, but continuing the same AI relationship is not guaranteed.

3. Could my children or grandchildren someday talk to an AI version of me?

Potentially, yes. AI can already use personal stories, recordings, and written conversations to imitate someone's manner of speaking and answer questions based on their history. But it wouldn't actually be you, and its answers could include invented memories or opinions you never held.

4. What happens to my private conversations after I die?

That depends on the service's policies, account settings, and applicable laws. Conversations may remain stored, be deleted, or become inaccessible. Anyone planning to preserve an AI companion should consider whether those conversations contain information they wouldn't want their family to discover.

5. Could an AI companion disappear even while I'm still alive?

Absolutely. The company could discontinue the service, change its underlying AI model, modify its personality, or close accounts. Unlike a photograph or a handwritten letter, an AI companion depends on technology and services that may not exist indefinitely.

One Final Question**THE QUESTION TO TAKE HOME**

Would you want your grandchildren to be able to have a conversation with an AI that knew your life story and could respond much as you would?

Or is that taking technology a little too far?