Teacher Answer Key

Case Study

1. The reading describes co-regulation: the process by which physical proximity with another person — their voice, presence, and physiological cues — regulates your nervous system in ways text-based interaction cannot fully replicate. Jordan's voice, the tone of recognition ('I remember feeling exactly like that'), and the reality of another person who had actually navigated the same experience provided something the AI could not: genuine shared history and physical voice, which the threat-detection system processes as safety signals. The anxiety did not just get reframed in a conversation with Jordan — it 'moved,' in Eli's words — suggesting his nervous system received something beyond cognitive support. The AI managed the feeling; Jordan changed its state.

2. The reading argues these are neurologically different experiences, not just emotionally different ones. The AI interaction activated some social processing and provided cognitive support — real value. Jordan activated co-regulation mechanisms (voice, genuine shared experience, the knowledge that Jordan chose to take the call), which the reading says produce different and deeper nervous system responses than text-based interaction. Eli's observation that the feeling 'moved' rather than being 'managed' maps onto this distinction: managing a feeling is what good cognitive reframing does; moving a feeling is what genuine social co-regulation does. His body registered a difference that his conscious mind had to work to articulate.

Multiple Choice

1. C
2. A
3. D

Matching

1-E, 2-D, 3-B, 4-C, 5-A

Fill-in-the-Blank

1) risk, 2) regulate, 3) threat

Short Answer (Sample Responses)

Q1: Loneliness as a biological signal means that the discomfort of social isolation is not merely an emotional experience but a message from a nervous system that is not

receiving something it evolved to need. This matters for evaluating AI companions because relieving the discomfort of the signal is not the same as meeting the underlying need. An AI companion can reduce the felt experience of loneliness — the acute discomfort — without providing the genuine human connection the signal is asking for. This is the mechanism of the substitution trap: the signal gets quieted by the AI, which reduces urgency to seek what the signal was actually pointing toward. Treating the signal without meeting the need allows the underlying deprivation to continue.

Q2: The reading argues that the challenges of real relationships — misunderstandings, conflicts, imperfect attunement, the demands of reciprocity — are not simply the price you pay for the good parts of connection. They are themselves formative: navigating a friend who has their own needs develops empathy; working through a conflict develops the repair skills that sustain relationships over time; tolerating imperfect attunement develops the tolerance for real-world social complexity that adult life requires. AI companions, designed to eliminate these challenges, also eliminate what the challenges build. The substance of real connection includes its difficulty — and a life organized around AI's frictionless version of connection is not fully practicing what human relationship actually requires.

Q3: The most important distinction is substitution versus supplementation. Healthy use means the AI plays a limited, specific role that pushes energy toward real life — it helps you process, practice, or get through a hard moment, and then you go live your actual life with actual people. Problematic use means the AI has become the primary or preferred source of social-emotional experience, and real relationships have atrophied or been deliberately avoided in its favor. The key question to ask is: does my AI use make me more connected to my real life, or less? If an honest audit of the past month shows declining real-world social investment alongside consistent AI use, the answer is worth taking seriously.