ALEX

VIDEO GAMES AND GAMING PLATFORMS

What is it?

Video games can be considered **both a digital tool and a digital phenomenon**. They are a **digital tool** in the sense that they are interactive software programs created for entertainment or educational purposes, often played on computers, consoles, or smartphones. As a tool, they provide users with a means to engage, entertain, or learn through the digital platform. At the same time, video games have also become a significant **digital phenomenon**. Video games attract a massive global audience, with millions of players and spectators, and have spawned competitive esports events and professional gaming careers.
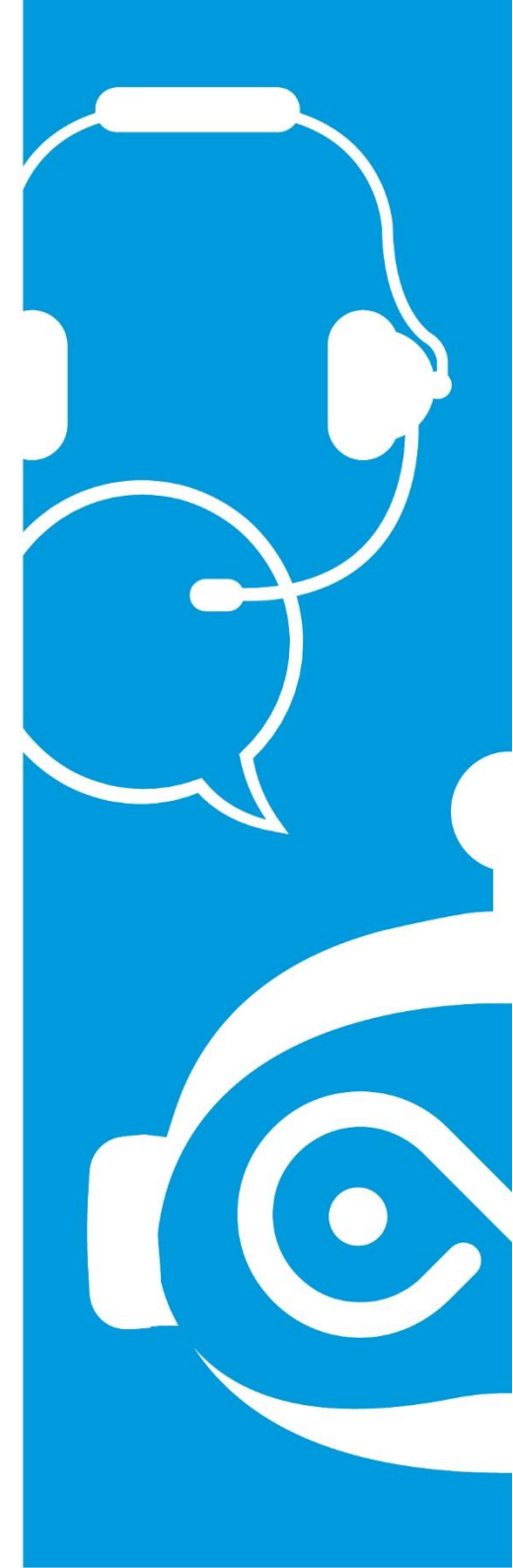
How can it impact the sexual and reproductive health of youth?

The impact of video games on youth can vary greatly depending on the individual, the specific game content, and the context in which it is consumed. Parental guidance, age-appropriate game selection, and open communication about SRH are essential in navigating these potential advantages and disadvantages.

When it comes to the advantages of video games in the SRH of young people, we can single out:

- Education and awareness: Some video games can provide educational content related to SRH, including topics like contraception, sexually transmitted infections, consent, and healthy relationships. These games can help promote awareness and understanding among young players.
- Empowerment and self-expression: Certain video games allow players to explore diverse identities and expressions, which can have a positive impact on the self-confidence and self-image of youth, including aspects related to their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Social support and communication: Online multiplayer games can provide a platform for youth to interact with others, potentially facilitating conversations about sexual and reproductive health topics, sharing experiences, and seeking support.

Disadvantages of video games for the SRH of young people:

- Exposure to explicit content: Some video games may contain explicit sexual content or violence, which could be inappropriate or harmful for the youth age group. Exposure to such content may desensitise or distort their understanding of healthy relationships and consent.

- Unrealistic expectations: Video games often depict romance and sexuality in a hyper-idealised manner, which may create unrealistic expectations about intimacy, body image, and gender roles, leading to potential dissatisfaction or negative impact on self-esteem.

Some examples of video games where we can find advantages and disadvantages are:

- "Life is Strange": This narrative-driven game deals with various mature themes, including relationships, sexuality, and consent.

- "Grand Theft Auto" series: These games often contain explicit sexual content, violence, and adult themes, such as prostitution and sexual objectification.

- "Leisure Suit Larry" series: These games focus on pursuing sexual encounters and objectify women. They promote unrealistic and harmful portrayals of sexuality and relationships.
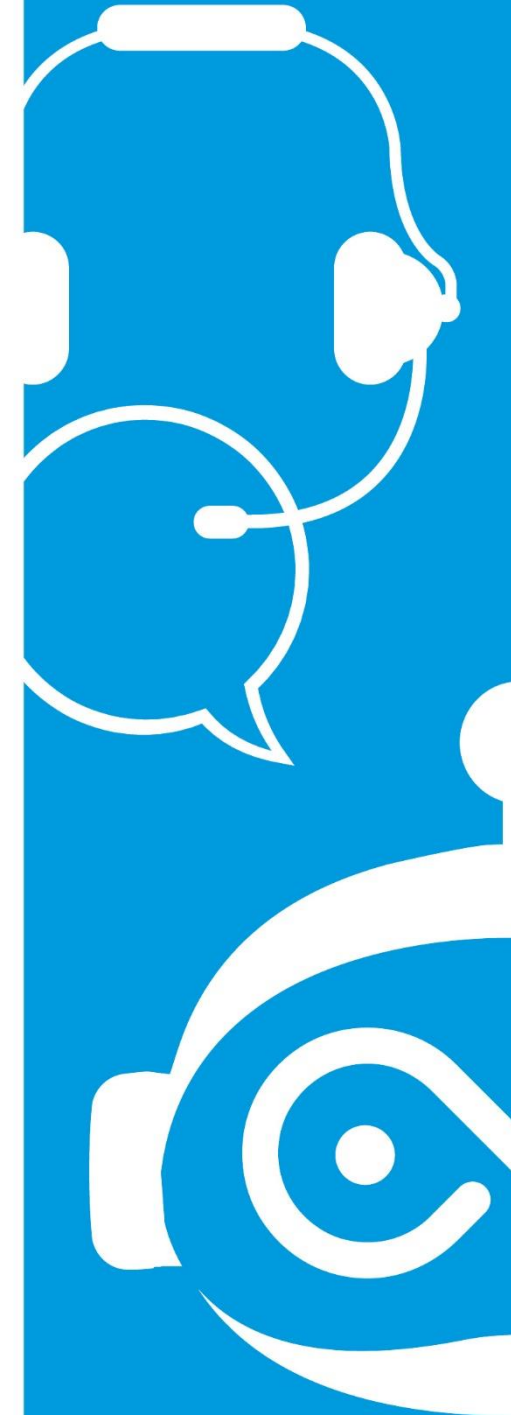
What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Check the video game content rating code (called Entertainment Software Rating Board – ESRB in USA and Canada). This code can provide information about the suitability of the game for the age range of the targeted youth.
- Discover the games most popular among youth yourself, and play them in order to understand to what extent they can impact young people.
- If you have video games in centres youth frequent, make sure that the games are suitable for all and played in common areas.

Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Sexually explicit content: OnlyFans
- New tools: Artificial intelligence
- Online abuse: Grooming of youngsters
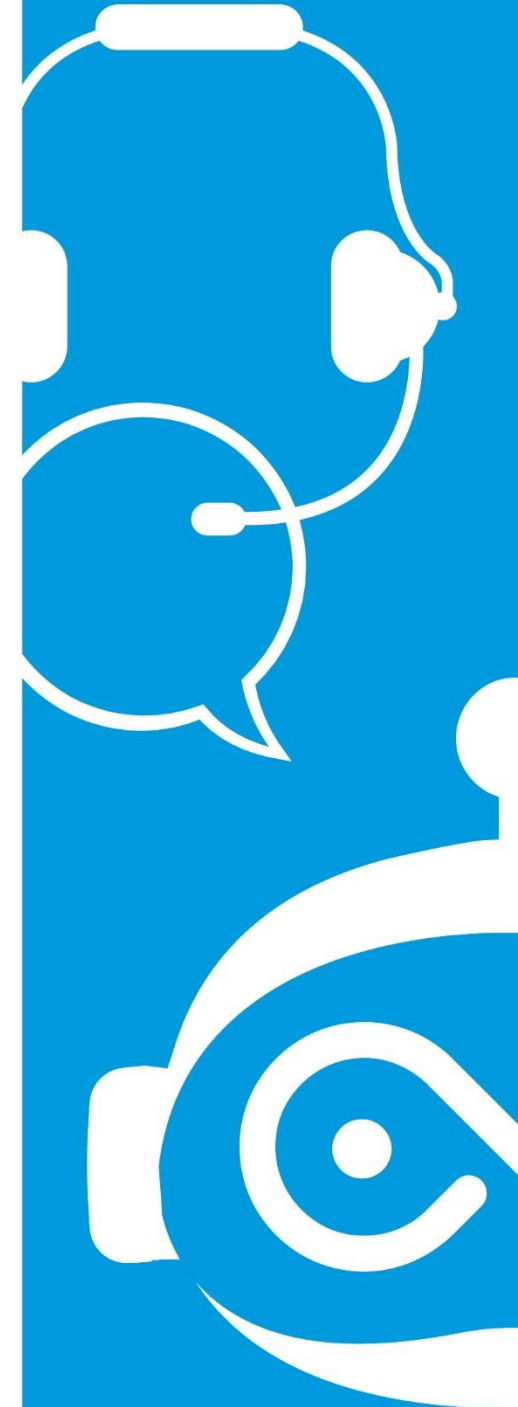
Further reading:

- Alencar, Nadyelle Elias Santos, Maria Aparecida Oliveira Pinto, Nicácio Torres Leite, and Claudia Maria Vieira Da Silva. "Serious Games for Sex Education of Adolescents and Youth: Integrative Literature Review." *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva* 27, no. 8 (August 2022): 3129–38. https://doi.org/10.1590/1413-81232022278.00632022en.

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. "Video Games and Children: Playing with Violence," 2017. https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-and-Video-Games-Playing-with-Violence-091.aspx.

- Mónica Isabel Tamayo Acebedo and Tamayo Acevedo Lucía Stella. "Los Videojuegos Para La Comunicación En Salud Sexual de Los Escolares: Valoración de Los Profesores de Secundaria." *Communication Papers* 7, no. 13 (May 25, 2018). https://raco.cat/index.php/communication/article/view/337879.