

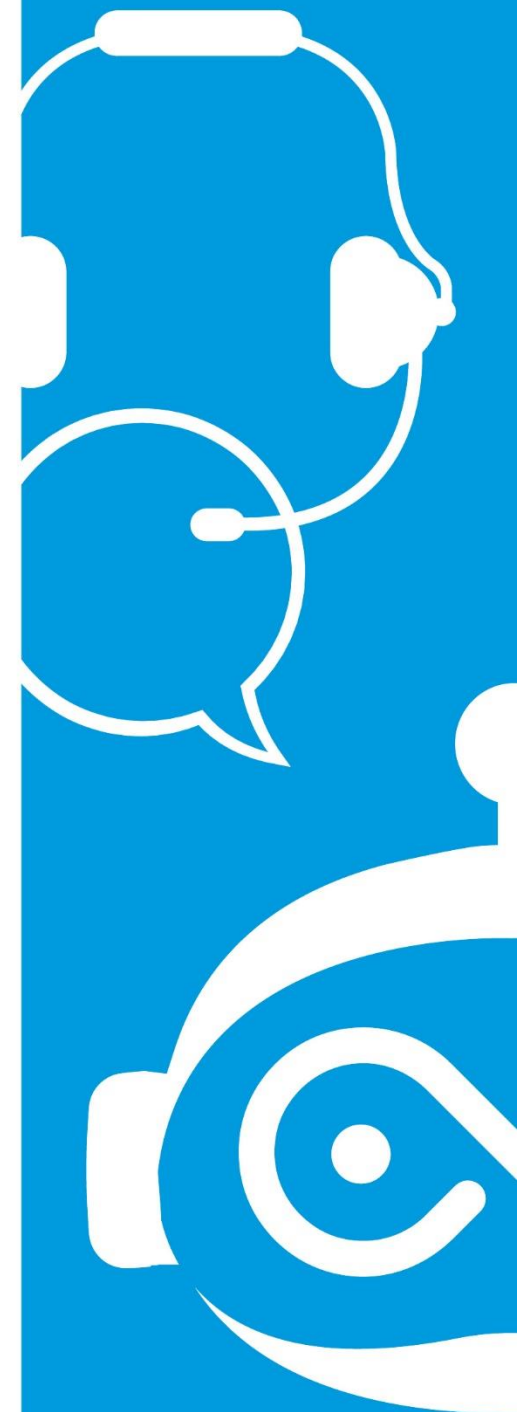


APPS: SOCIALISING/DATING APPS

What is it?

Socialising/dating apps like Yubo, Wizz, Hoop, and Wink are **digital tools** designed for youth to meet new people, often with a focus on matching and chatting. The popularity of socialising and dating apps has witnessed significant growth in recent years, with young people being particularly active users of these platforms. According to a survey¹ conducted in 2020 by the Pew Research Center, it was revealed that over 60% of individuals aged 18 to 29 have used dating apps.

¹ Nadeem, "The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating."



How can it impact the sexual and reproductive health of youth?

Socialising and dating apps can have both positive and negative impacts on the SRH of youth. Dating apps can provide a platform for users to access information about sexual health, safe sex, contraception, and consent. Some apps even have features dedicated to promoting safe and responsible sexual behaviour. Meeting people with different perspectives can broaden youth's understanding of relationships, consent, and boundaries.

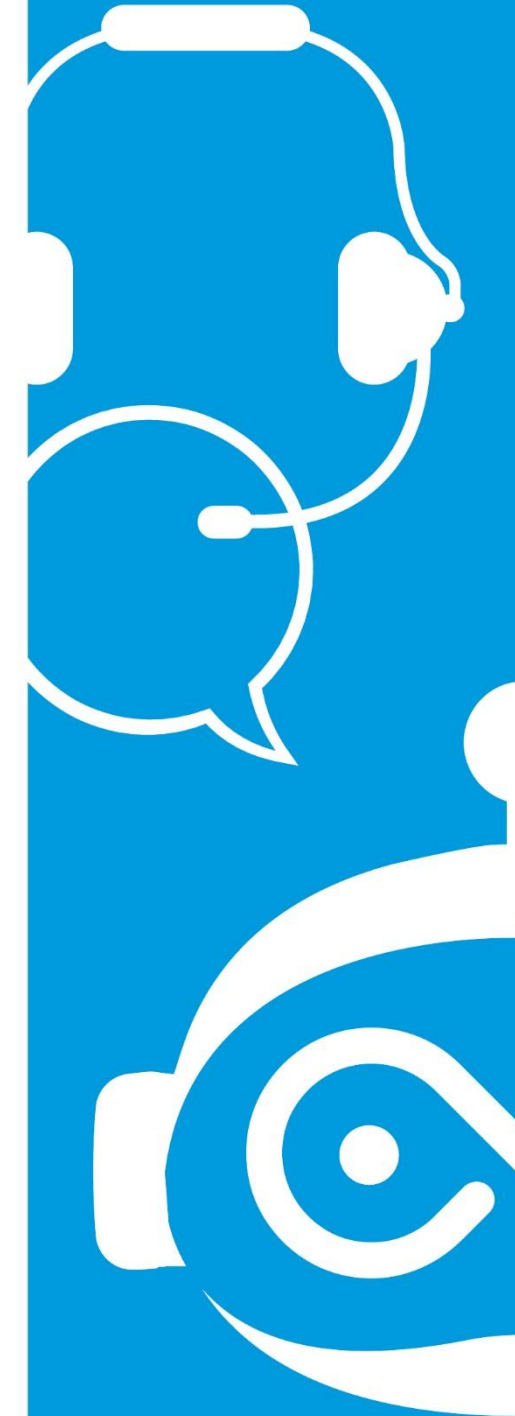
They can help reduce the stigma associated with sexual orientation and gender identity, creating a more inclusive and accepting environment for LGBTQ+ youth. Those apps can connect young people with support networks and resources related to sexual health and relationships. This can include counselling services, local clinics, or helplines.

Besides all of the forementioned benefits, socialising and dating apps provide youth with a platform to initiate their first romantic relationships by offering access to a diverse pool of potential partners, reducing social anxiety, and allowing them to explore their preferences. Moreover, they can improve well-being by alleviating loneliness, offering mental health support features, promoting inclusivity and diversity, and helping young people develop crucial relationship skills such as communication and negotiation, ultimately contributing to healthier and more fulfilling romantic experiences.



Supporting youth's sexual & reproductive health in the digital age: BEST PRACTICES

However, these apps can also pose risks. Youth might encounter individuals with malicious intentions, engage in unsafe behaviours, or be exposed to explicit content such as including sexually suggestive or graphic material. Such explicit content can range from explicit images and videos to explicit conversations. These circumstances can create a potential for coercion or manipulation, as well as pressures to engage in higher rates of risky sexual behaviours, including a greater likelihood of engaging in unprotected sex and having multiple sexual partners.



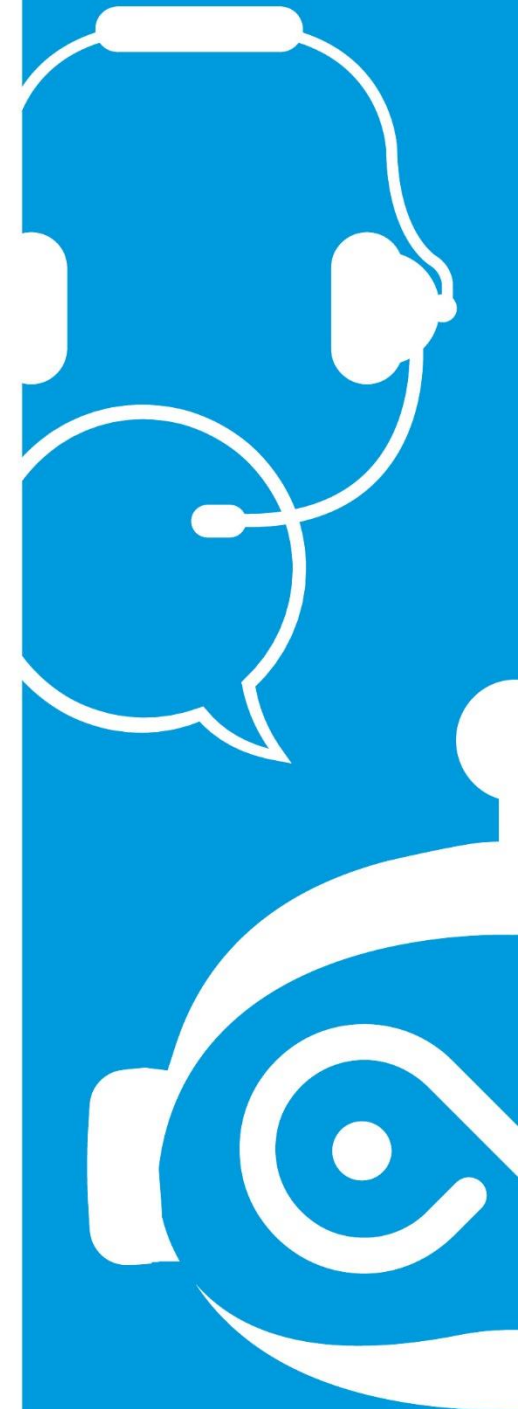
What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Teach youth to recognise signs of manipulative behaviour, such as persistent pressure, emotional manipulation, or coercive language that may pressure them into actions they are uncomfortable with. Examples of manipulative phrases could include phrases like "If you really cared about me, you would..." or "You're the only one who understands me." In case of offline meeting requests, advise them to choose public places, share plans with someone, trust your instincts, and to avoid 'catfish' situations, use video calls to confirm identities and exercise caution with personal information.
- Create a space for youth to discuss their experiences on these apps, seek advice, and share concerns. Through discussions with trusted adults, youth can gain insights into setting and respecting their own limits and recognizing when others may be crossing those boundaries.
- Ensure youth know how to report inappropriate content or behaviour on these platforms and remind youth that they can always seek guidance from trusted adults if they encounter challenging situations.

Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Chatboards – Omegle
- Cyberbullying: Catfishing
- Online abuse: Grooming of youngsters



Further reading:

- Blanc, Andrea. (2023). Relationship Between use of Dating apps and Sociodemographic Variables, Sexual Attitudes, and Sexual risk Behaviors. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*. 1-13.
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- Griffiths, Daniel & Armstrong, Heather. (2023). "They Were Talking to an Idea They Had About Me": A Qualitative Analysis of Transgender Individuals' Experiences Using Dating Apps. *Journal of sex research*. 1-14. 10.1080/00224499.2023.2176422.
- Vojt, Gabriele & Smith, Matt & Owusu, Melvina & Mapp, Fiona & Pothoulaki, Maria & Flowers, Paul. (2021). How do Dating Apps reflect the social organisation of sexual relationships? A review of dating apps and their key features. 10.31235/osf.io/wf3vd.
- Zhou, Yuqian. (2023). The Benefits and Dangers of Online Dating Apps. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth / Le Journal Canadien de Famille et de la Jeunesse*. 15. 54-62. 10.29173/cjfy29872.

