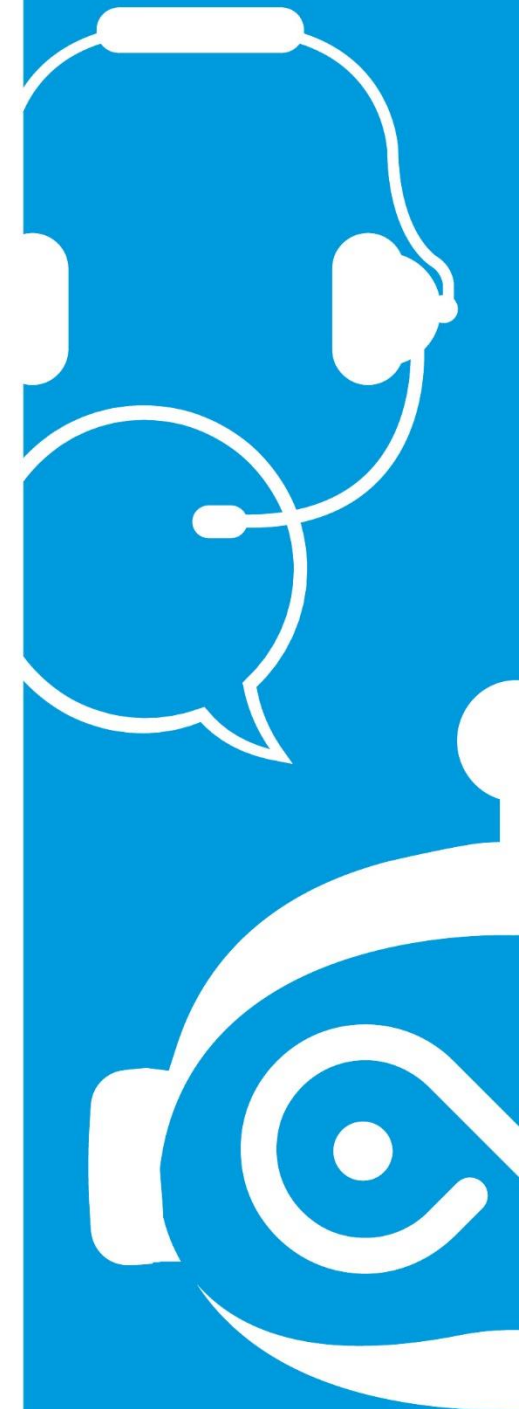




CHATBOARDS: OMEGLE

What is it?

Omegle is a **digital tool** that allows users to engage in anonymous text or video chats with strangers. It originated in 2009 as a platform for random connections and conversations. Users can discuss various topics, including sexual and reproductive health (SRH), with people from around the world. The anonymous nature of Omegle may encourage candid conversations about sensitive matters that youth might hesitate to discuss openly.



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

As one of the main target groups of this platform, Omegle has shown to have positive and negative impacts on the well-being of the young people that frequent it.

Some of the positive influences of this tool include the fact that Omegle might offer a space for open discussions and exchange of SRH information, providing anonymity that allows youth to seek advice without fear. Youth can find peer support, share experiences, and receive guidance from others who have faced similar situations. This platform can be particularly helpful for those who lack local resources or feel uncomfortable discussing SRH with people in their daily lives.

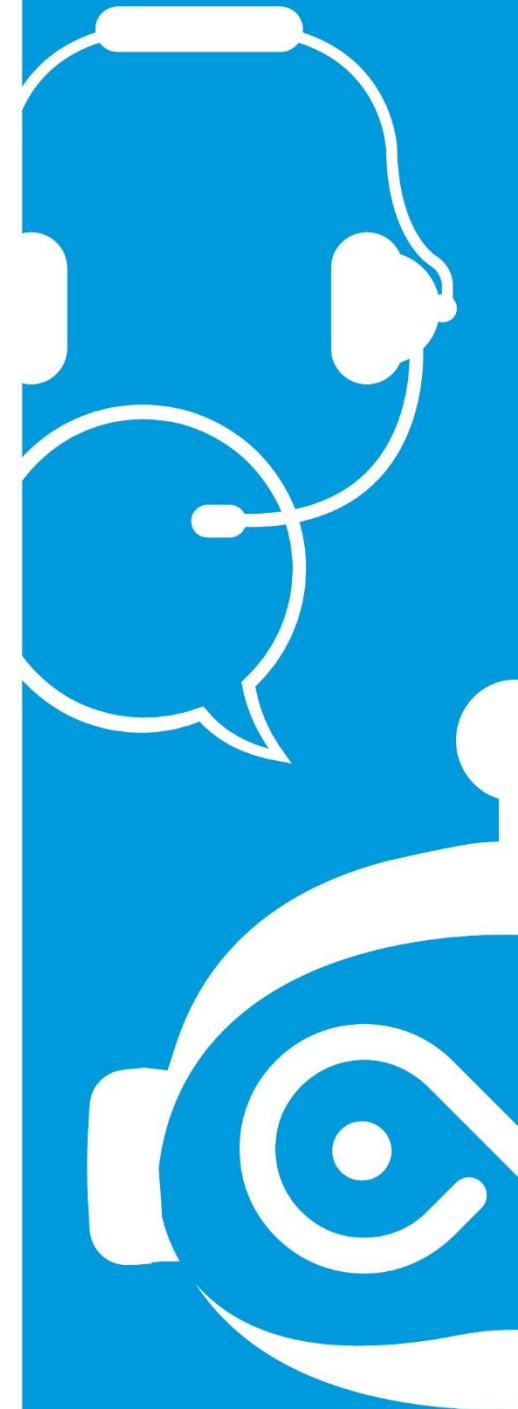
However, the anonymous nature of Omegle can also lead to potential risks. Youth might encounter explicit content, harassment, or even predatory behaviour. It exposes them to explicit content, including unsolicited and age-inappropriate material. The lack of accountability can embolden cyberbullies and harassers, causing emotional distress. Even more concerning is the potential for older individuals to mask their identities, posing as peers to engage with young users. This predatory behaviour can have dire consequences for the safety and well-being of youth. Additionally, the anonymity may lead to an invasion of privacy, with some users seeking sensitive personal information. Lastly, Omegle's openness can propagate misinformation, posing potential harm if acted upon. Additionally, the lack of accountability might foster a toxic environment that discourages respectful discussions and promotes unhealthy behaviours.



What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Encourage responsible engagement by helping youth understand the unique risks of sharing personal information on Omegle, including sensitive SRH details.
- Boost digital literacy by equipping them with critical thinking skills to evaluate the reliability of information encountered on the platform.
- Share trusted SRH websites and helplines tailored to Omegle users, ensuring access to accurate advice.
- Teach youth how to exit Omegle conversations that veer into uncomfortable or inappropriate territory.
- Create a safe environment by establishing platforms or channels for youth to openly discuss their experiences on the platform and SRH concerns.
- Highlight mental health support by informing them about available counselling services specific to Omegle-related distress.

These tailored strategies can help youth navigate Omegle safely while addressing the platform's unique dynamics and potential challenges.



Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Chatboards: Reddit
- Cyberbullying: Trolls and bots
- Cyberbullying: Doxxing

Further reading:

- Lenhart, A., Ling, R., Campbell, S., & Purcell, K. (2010). "Teens and mobile phones." Pew Research Center.
- Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2018). "Teens, social media & technology." Pew Research Center.
- Rau, A. (2019). "Staging Teen Life in the New Millennium: Canadian 'Issue Plays' for High Schools."

