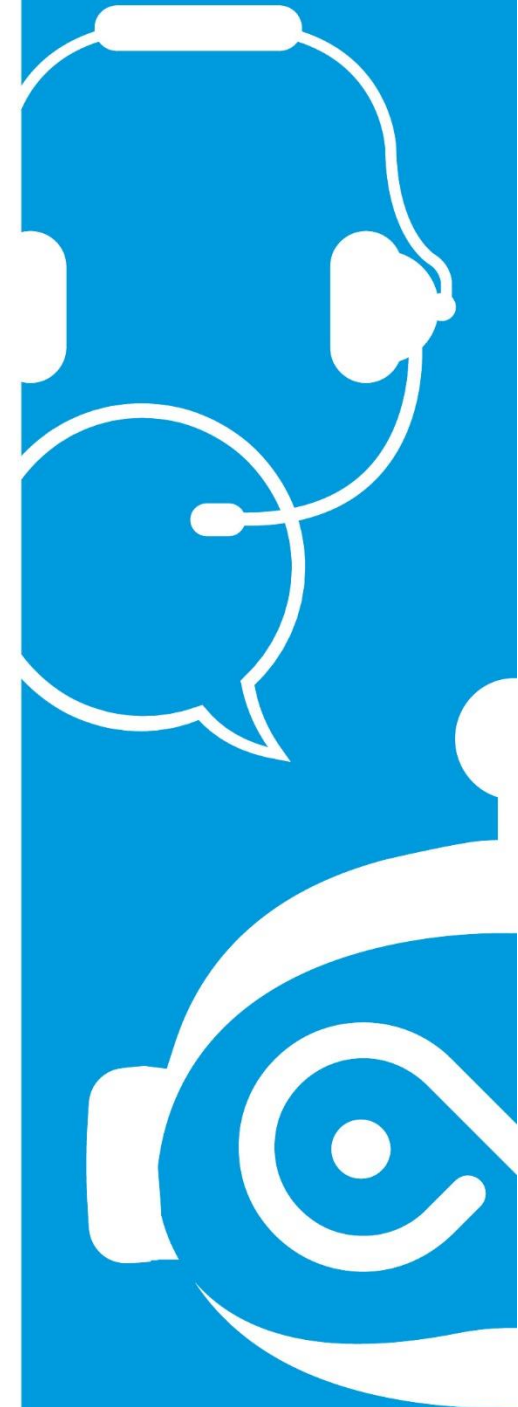




ONLINE CRISIS HOTLINES

What is it?

Online crisis hotlines are **digital tools** that provide individuals in distress with a way to seek help and support. These platforms offer a space for confidential conversations with trained professionals, allowing users to discuss their feelings, thoughts, and concerns.

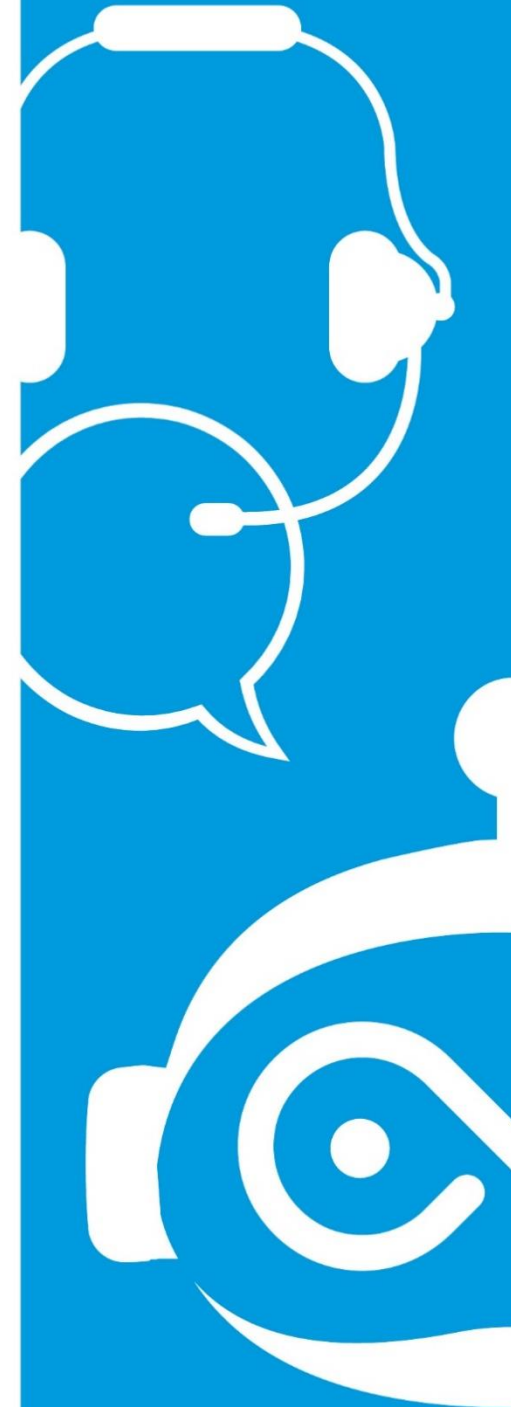


How can it impact the sexual and reproductive health of youth?

The use of online crisis hotlines as a confidential and judgment-free platform for youth to address their SRH concerns is undeniably valuable. These digital resources empower young individuals to seek guidance and information on topics like reproductive health, relationships, and sexual and gender identity without the fear of stigma, making them a vital component of modern SRH education.

Online crisis hotlines extend their benefits even further when it comes to supporting vulnerable SRH-minorities, such as LGBT+ youth. These platforms create a safe and anonymous haven where LGBT+ individuals can openly explore their SRH concerns without the fear of discrimination or bias. They offer a judgment-free space for discussing issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and unique challenges faced by this community. Online crisis hotlines, through their non-discriminatory and inclusive approach, empower LGBT+ youth to seek guidance and resources that are specifically tailored to their needs, fostering a sense of acceptance and understanding that might be lacking in their offline environments.

However, the effectiveness of these hotlines depends on the quality of the services provided. Misinformation or unqualified advice might be given if the hotline is not properly regulated and staffed with trained professionals.



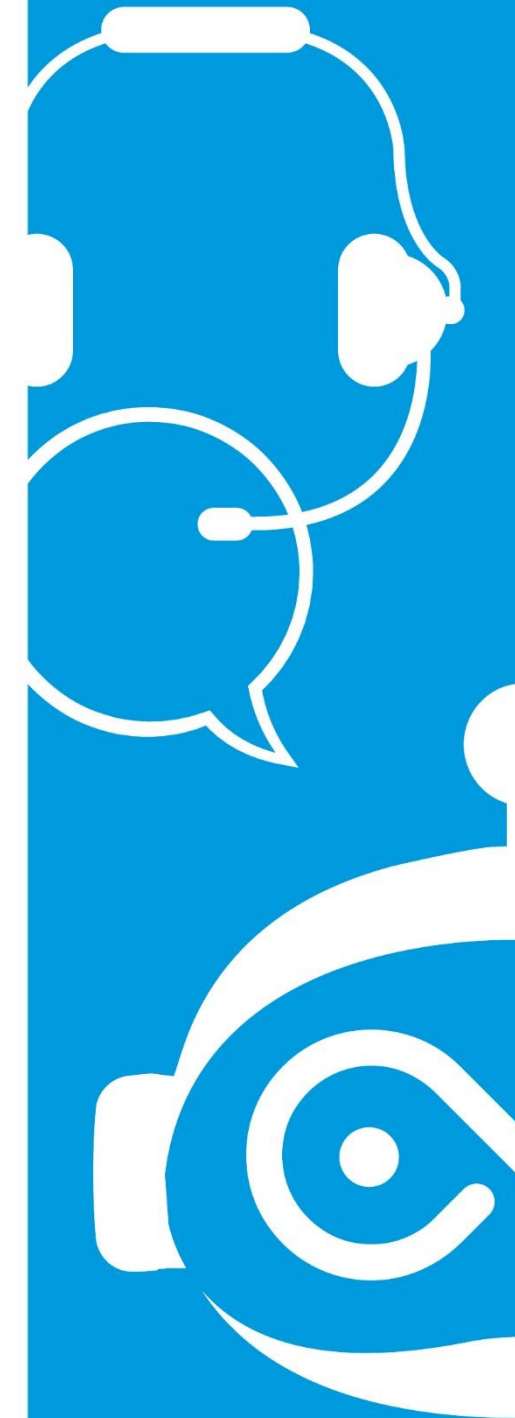
Supporting youth's sexual & reproductive health in the digital age: BEST PRACTICES

These hotlines can be in the form of:

Text-Based Services: Many online crisis hotlines provide text-based services, enabling youth to communicate via text messages with trained counselors or volunteers. Youth can reach out at their convenience, making this method particularly accessible to those who may be uncomfortable with traditional phone conversations or face-to-face interactions.

Chat-Based Platforms: These platforms offer real-time chat sessions, allowing youth to engage in immediate conversations with qualified professionals. This is especially useful for addressing urgent SRH concerns, where immediate responses are essential.

Video Conferencing Services: For youth who prefer a more personal touch, certain crisis hotlines offer video conferencing options where they can engage in face-to-face conversations with professionals. This provides a human connection while maintaining the comfort of a digital platform.



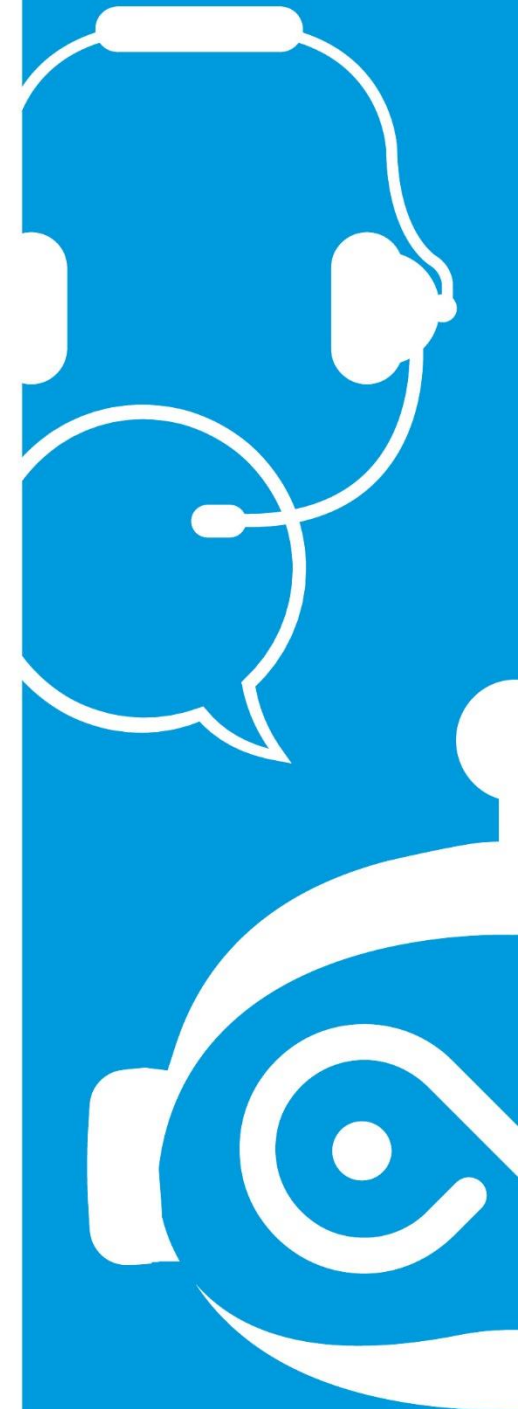
What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Educate youth about the availability of credible online crisis hotlines for SRH and mental health issues. For an overview of organisations operating in Europe, you can refer to this link: <https://www.mhe-sme.org/library/youth-helplines/>
- Emphasise the importance of seeking advice from qualified mental health professionals and SRH experts, instead of relying solely on advice from hotlines if they are not staffed with qualified employees.
- Teach youth how to express their concerns clearly when interacting with professionals through text-based platforms.
- Equip youth with techniques to manage emotions and stress while seeking support online.
- Emphasise follow-up by encouraging youth to connect with local resources or professionals for continued assistance if needed.

Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- The presence of 'safe spaces' online for underrepresented groups
- Know your rights: Accessibility of platforms/media
- Internet addiction



Further reading:

- Halford, Emily, Lake, Alison, and Gould, Madelyn. "Crisis Hotlines." (2021). [10.1093/med/9780198834441.003.0053](https://doi.org/10.1093/med/9780198834441.003.0053).
- Brody, Carinne & Star, Alaina & Britton, Jasmine. (2020). Chat-based hotlines for health promotion: a systematic review. *mHealth*. 6. 36. [10.21037/mhealth-2019-di-13](https://doi.org/10.21037/mhealth-2019-di-13).

