



CYBERBULLYING - TROLLS AND BOTS

What is it?

Trolls and bots are **digital phenomena** that refer to the two distinct but related aspects of online harassment and misconduct in the context of cyberbullying. Trolls are individuals who deliberately provoke and upset others online, while bots are automated accounts designed to spread misinformation or cause disruption.

Trolls derive satisfaction from the chaos and distress they create, making it essential for users to recognise and address such behaviour to maintain a safe and respectful online environment. On the other hand, bots can be programmed to mimic human behaviour, generating and disseminating false information or amplifying harmful content. Bots can be used for various malicious purposes, including the spread of disinformation, manipulation of public opinion, and the harassment of targeted individuals.

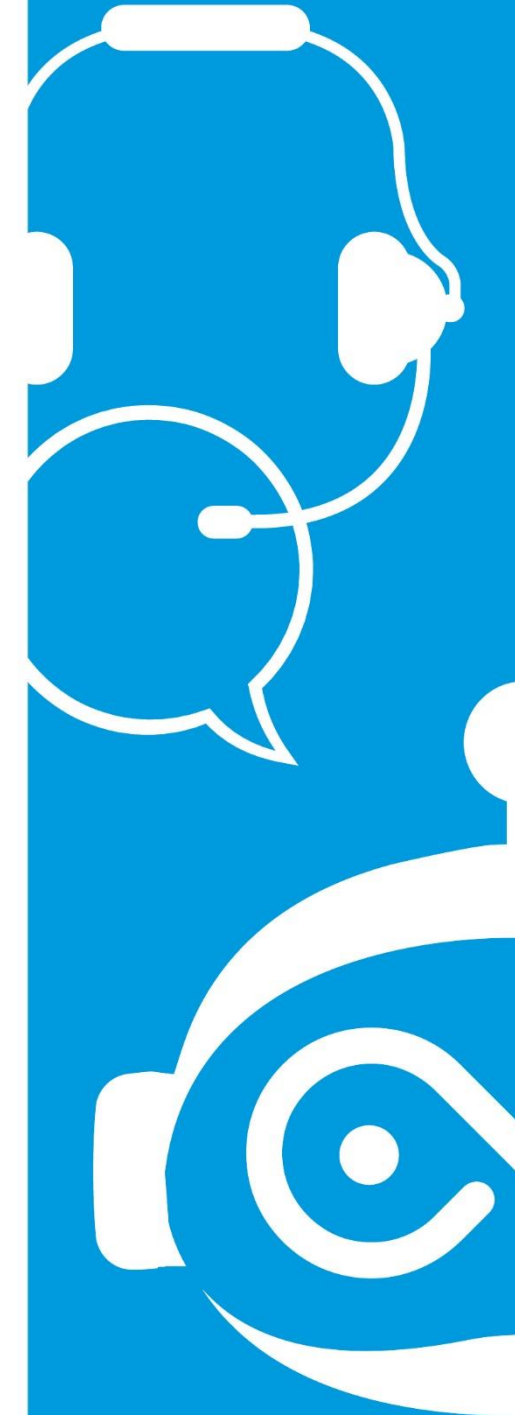


How can it impact the sexual and reproductive health of youth?

Trolls and bots can significantly impact the SRH of youth, often leading to harmful consequences with real-world implications. Youth might become targets of harassment, cyberbullying, or exposure to harmful ideologies. Trolls, for instance, frequently engage in discussions that stigmatise and shame young individuals seeking information or support for SRH concerns. For example, a young person seeking advice on contraception methods may encounter a troll who ridicules their choice, deterring them from seeking further information and potentially leading to poor contraceptive decisions.

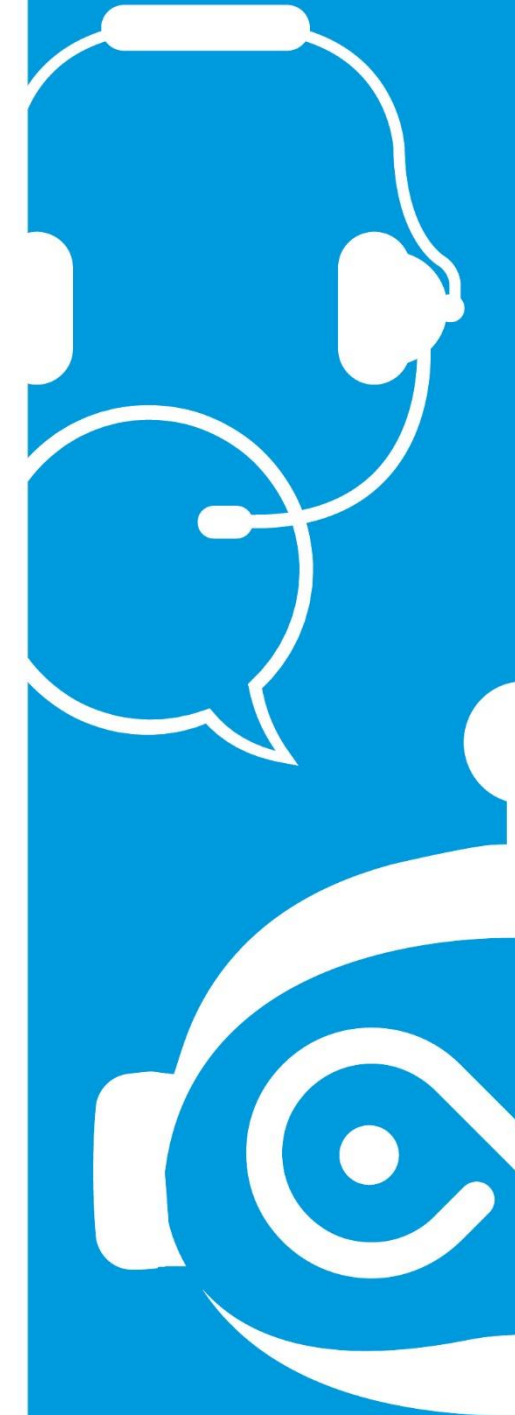
Moreover, trolls may use explicit or offensive content to harass and target young individuals online, exacerbating the emotional toll on victims. A young person who shares their experience with a sexually transmitted infection (STI) might be met with offensive comments and even threats from trolls, discouraging them from seeking medical help and emotional support.

On the other hand, bots can be programmed to promote risky sexual behaviors or spread false information about SRH topics. For example, they might encourage young people to engage in unsafe practices, such as unprotected sex or sharing explicit content. This pressure and coercion can lead to unwanted outcomes, such as the spread of private images and potential exploitation, all of which have significant implications for the SRH and overall well-being of young individuals.



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

Furthermore, trolls and bots can perpetuate harmful stereotypes related to gender, sexual orientation, and body image, affecting the self-esteem and self-acceptance of young individuals. These stereotypes can influence young people's SRH decision-making, making them more prone to engaging in risky behaviours and reducing their confidence in making informed choices about their bodies and health.



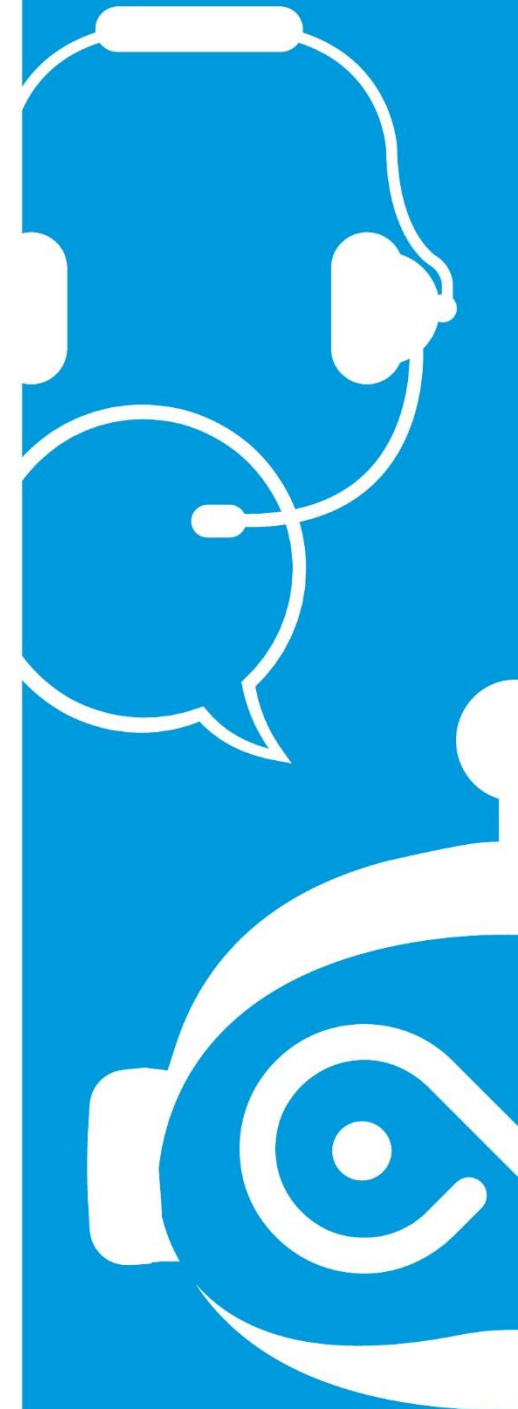
What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Teach youth about these online tactics, their motivations, and the potential consequences of engaging with them.
- Equip youth with strategies to cope with online negativity, such as avoiding engaging with trolls and utilising blocking features.
- Encourage youth to contribute to positive online discussions and report instances of trolling and harassment.
- Reinforce the importance of taking breaks from online platforms to maintain mental and emotional well-being. Engaging in physical activities, exploring creative hobbies, spending time in nature, connecting with friends and family, volunteering, learning new skills, practicing mindfulness, reading, attending workshops and classes, limiting screen time, outdoor adventures, and visiting museums and cultural events cater to various interests and provide a healthy balance between online and offline life.

Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Cyberbullying – Catfishing
- Cyberbullying: Cyber stalking
- Online abuse: Hate speech



Further reading:

- Copp, Jennifer & Mumford, Elizabeth & Taylor, Bruce. (2021). Online sexual harassment and cyberbullying in a nationally representative sample of teens: Prevalence, predictors, and consequences. *Journal of Adolescence*. 93. 202-211.
- Harris, Keith. (2023). Liars and Trolls and Bots Online: The Problem of Fake Persons. *Philosophy & Technology*. 36.
- Salazar, Marissa & Raj, Anita & Silverman, Jay & Rusch, Melanie & Reed, Elizabeth. (2023). Cyber Sexual Harassment among Adolescent Girls: A Qualitative Analysis. *Adolescents*. 3. 84-91.
- Soldatova, G.. (2022). Trolling as a Destructive Online Practice: Adolescents and Young People as Victims, Aggressors and Bystanders. *Psikhologicheskii zhurnal*. 43. 27.

