# ONLINE ABUSE: HATE SPEECH

## What is it?

Hate speech is a **digital phenomenon** relating to a particular type of communication that uses words, expressions or non-verbal elements that have no other function than that of expressing hatred and intolerance, as well as inciting prejudice and fear towards a person or a group of people with a common ethnicity, sexual, political, religious orientation or disability.
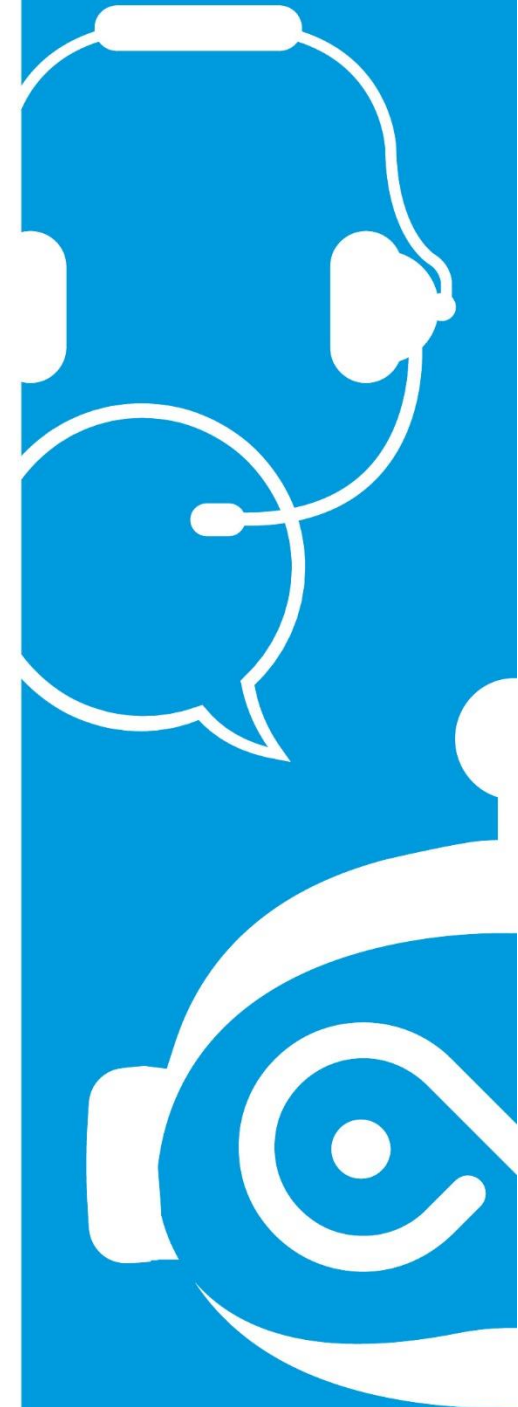
## How can it impact the sexual and reproductive health of youth?

Hate speech has an implicit and explicit dimension which can affect SRH messaging. When messages are explicit, they are outright hateful and violent, Implicit messaging, however, also exists: it does not include swear words, derogatory language and insults, but rather comments alluding to devaluing and belittling someone just based on their sexual identity or gender orientation.

The principal victims of hate speech are often teenagers who experience various forms of physical, verbal, or emotional abuse at school, online, or in their community. Marginalised groups, such as LGBTQ+ youth, people of colour, and those with disabilities, are at higher risk of being targeted by bullies inciting hate speech. Research shows that 1 in 5 15–16-year-olds have come across 'hate sites' which are dedicated to promoting or inciting hate against a particular group or groups[1].

Furthermore, the unrestricted circulation of hate speech online often escalates to the production of violent content on social media, such as gory images of people harming other people or animals, the spread of racist or discriminatory sites and discussions, and the promotion of discussions about self-harm, anorexia or bulimia, affecting the self-image and self-confidence of youth.

[1] British Institute of Human Rights, "Mapping Study on Projects against Hate Speech Online."
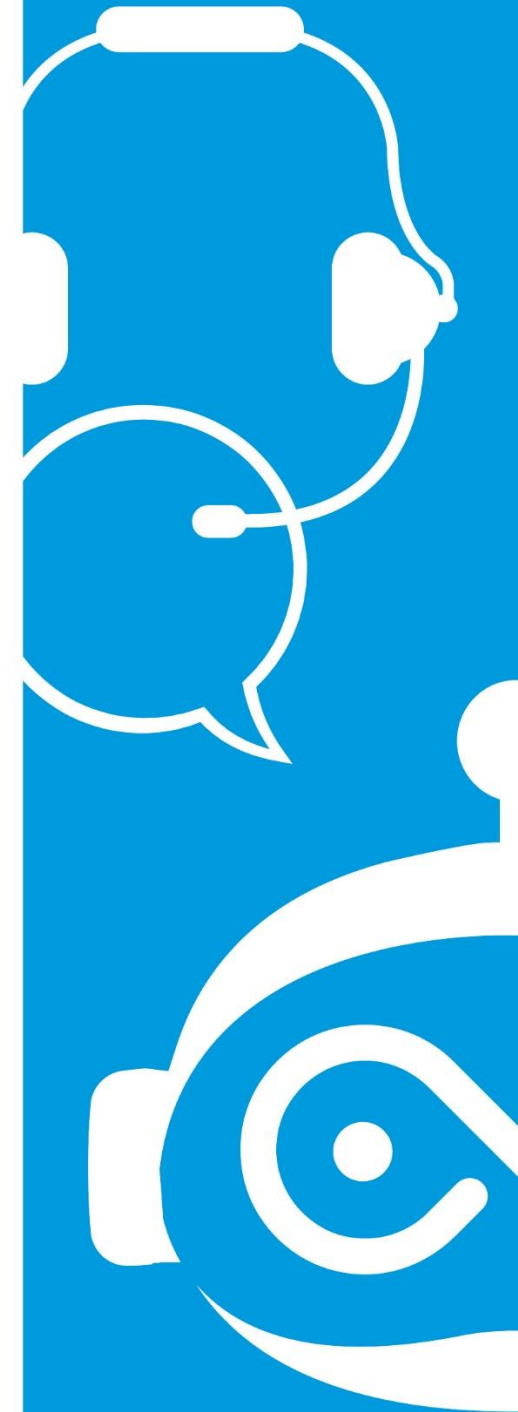
The presence of hate speech has strongly increased with the development of the Internet and social networks due to the "invulnerability effect". Writing a message or comment online does not provide the same level of exposure as communicating the same message face-to-face with a person, allowing perpetrators to spew hatred while being hidden behind a screen.
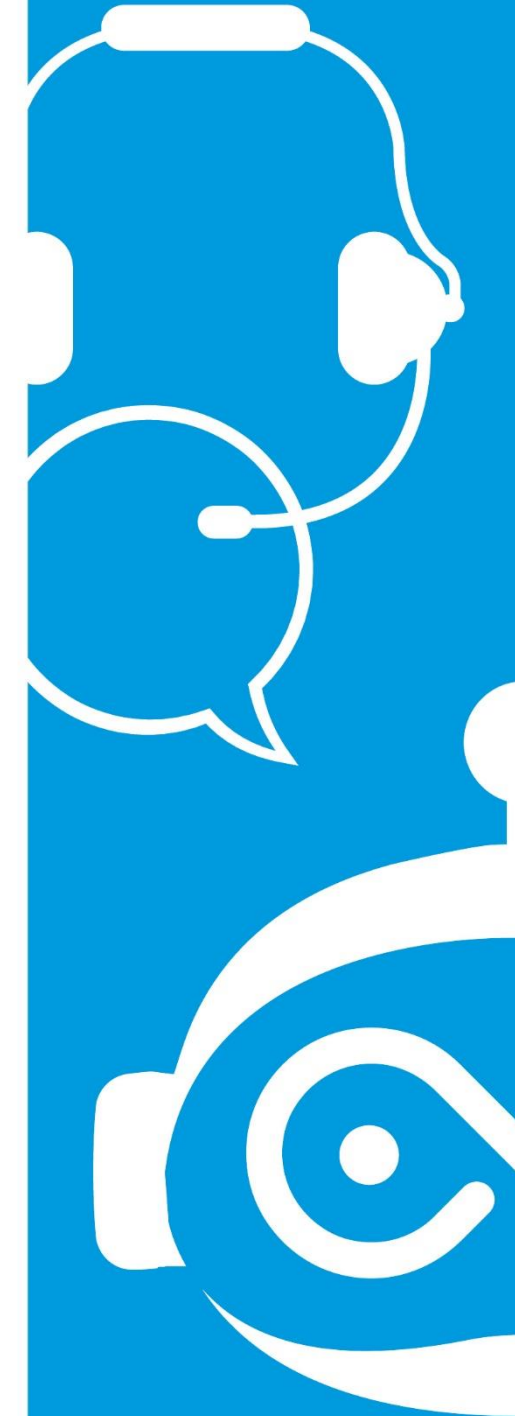
## What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Caution against messaging during anger or without calmly formulating a response.

- Advise leaving or ignoring a conversation if it is not productive.

- Encourage critical thinking and open-mindedness with comments. Think about, for example, a contemptuous judgment such as "I don't like this video at all". Replying with "You're wrong" or "If you don't like it, then leave" would only raise tensions. Instead, ask the user, "Why don't you like it?", as a way to invite the other person to share their point of view. If, however, their response is still contemptuous and a personal attack, close the discussion.

- Suggest applications like [B-reso](l) (available in Spanish) and [ReThink](), which use mobile technology to alert others about hate speech incidents and give users the chance to pause, review and reconsider their responses.

## Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Cyberbulling: Cyber stalking
- Social media: Instagram
- Cyberbulling: Trolls and bots
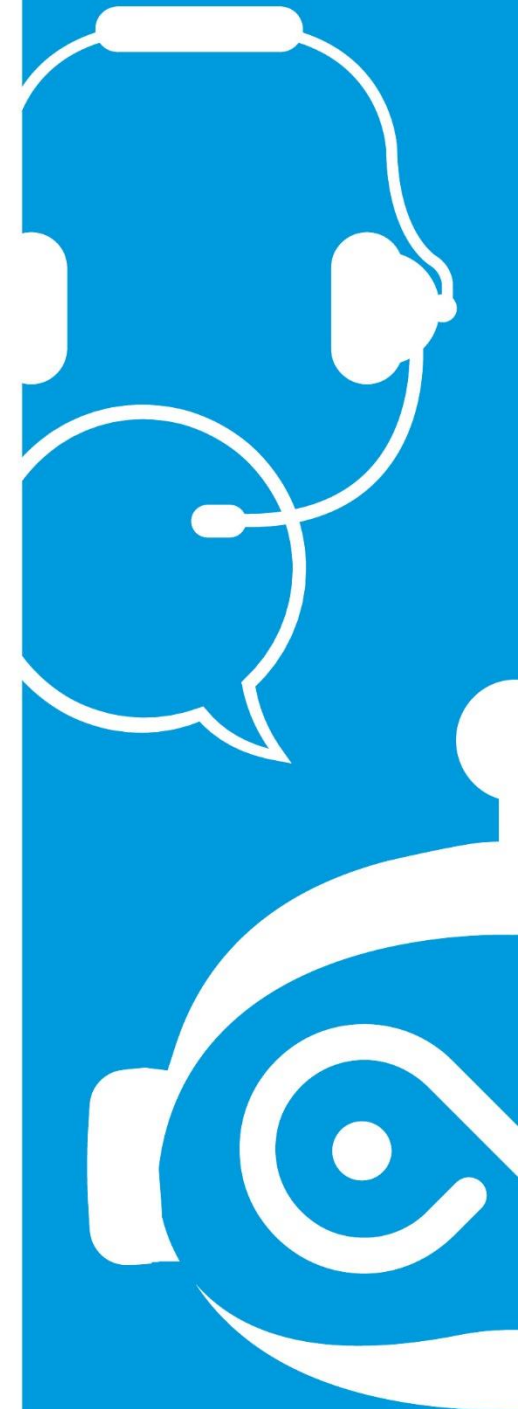
**Further reading:**

- Bianchi, Claudia. *Hate Speech: Il Lato Oscuro Del Linguaggio*. Prima edizione. Robinson. Letture. Bari: GLF editori Laterza, 2021.

- British Institute of Human Rights. "Mapping Study on Projects against Hate Speech Online." Council of Europe, 2012. https://rm.coe.int/report-fug-2-sept-2012/16808ecc97.

- Gould, Jon B. *Speak No Evil: The Triumph of Hate Speech Regulation*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005. https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/S/bo3534442.html.

- Padoan, Stefano. "Come Rispondere Ai Commenti Su Internet." Nostrofiglio.it, 2022. https://www.nostrofiglio.it/adolescenza/come-rispondere-ai-commenti-su-internet.