



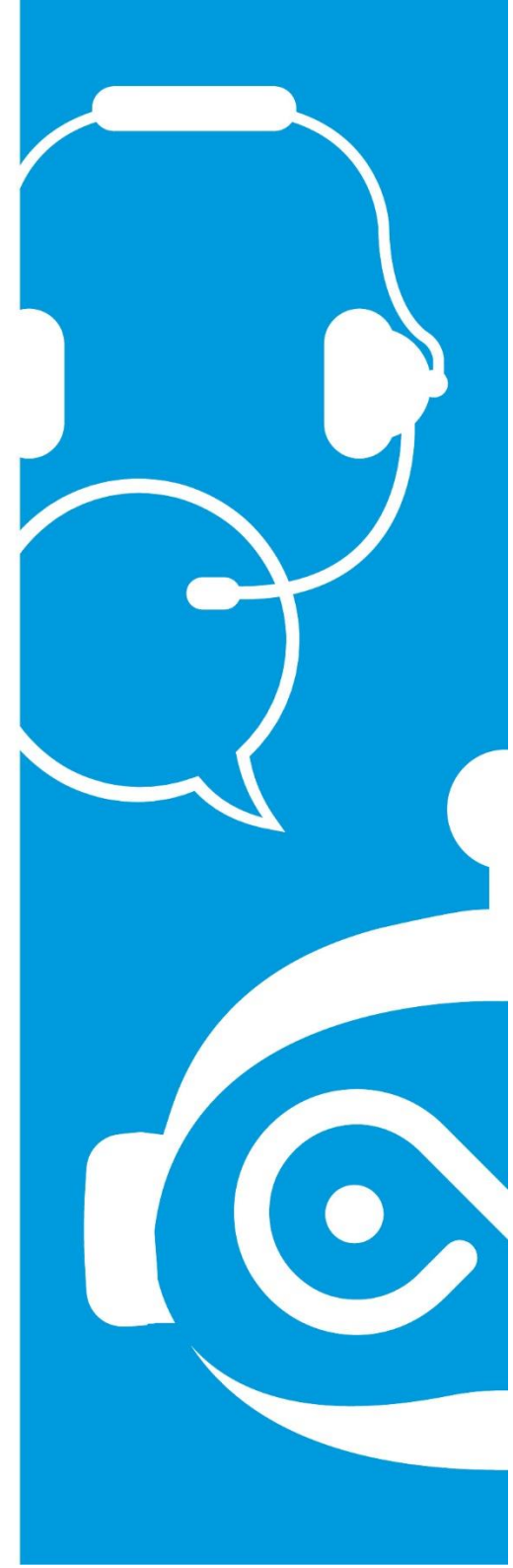
INTERNET ADDICTION

What is it?

Internet addiction is a **digital phenomenon** that manifests as:

- loss of control over temporary involvement with the internet
- neglect of social, family and professional life
- psychological preoccupation with the web

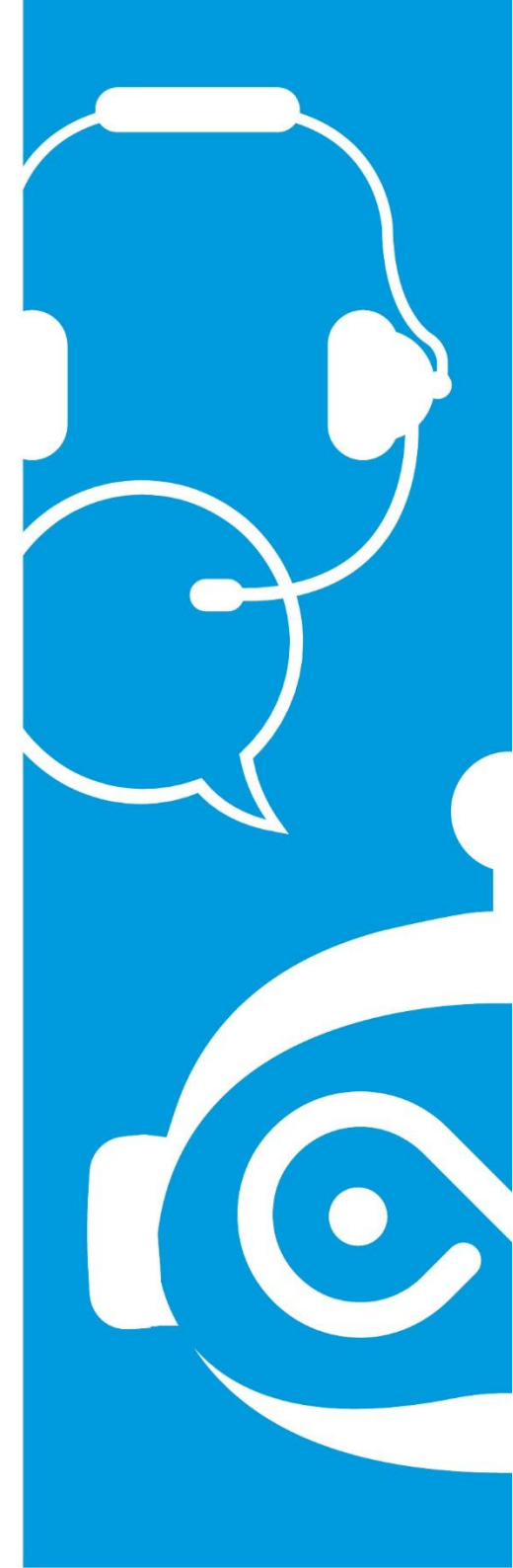
It is a compulsive behaviour, i.e., it is based on a compulsion to behave in a certain way, despite the awareness of the damage it causes. Disordered behaviour regarding cyber technology often involves not one, but several devices (e.g., computer, phone). It is becoming an epidemic of the 21st century and has a growing dynamic.



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

Adolescents and children, who are one of the largest and most active groups of users online, are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of Internet. 1 in 10 teenagers may have problems related to computer abuse. Studies also indicate that those at risk of internet addiction spend up to 40 hours a week on the internet.¹

¹ *Nadmierne Korzystanie z Komputera i Internetu Przez Dzieci i Młodzież.*

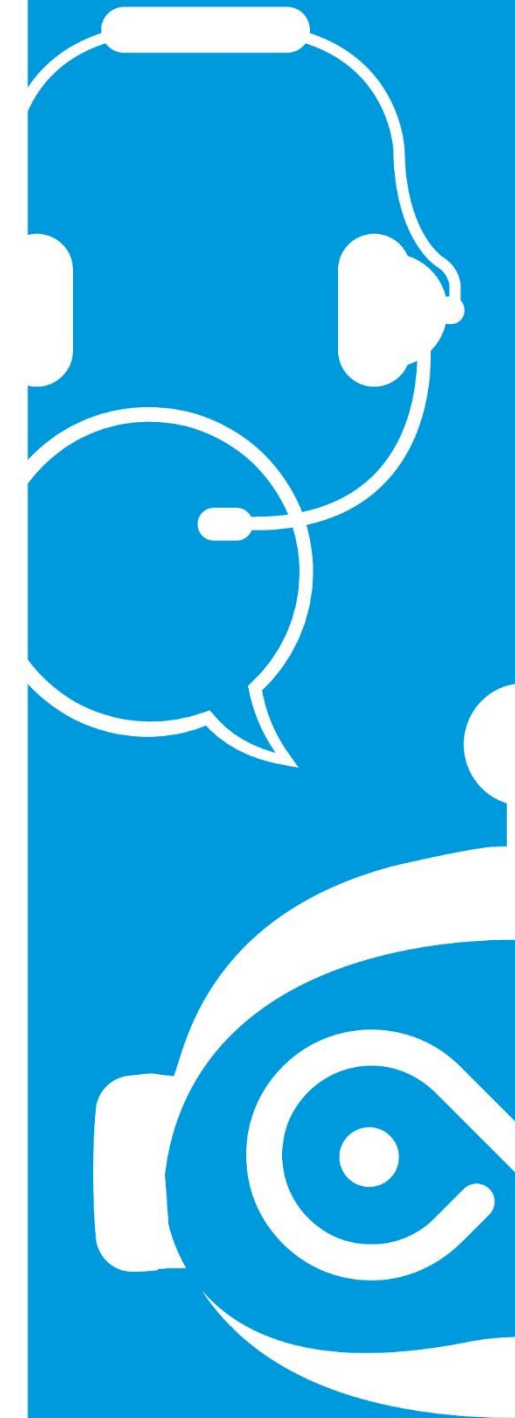


How can it impact the sexual and reproductive health of youth?

The attractiveness of the internet, driven by its widespread availability, financial accessibility, and the anonymity it provides to ensure a sense of security, can have a very detrimental impact on the SRH of young people. The internet can become their only unquestionable source of information, which they blindly trust.

Young people who possess the following personality traits are particularly vulnerable to addiction: a high level of neuroticism, introversion, hypersensitivity, a pessimistic outlook with a tendency towards isolation, lack of self-confidence, sensitivity to criticism and rejection, self-control issues, a high level of perceived anxiety, problems with open interpersonal communication, low assertiveness, low levels of social competence and emotional intelligence and difficulties in coping with stressors. These characteristics can pose risks related to the consumption of addictive and deviant sexual content, which can lead to perverse sexual interests, infidelity in romantic relationships, vulnerability to abuse and sexual exploitation and sex addiction. Addiction is often associated with both passive and active cybersex. Passive cybersex involves browsing pornographic websites, while active cybersex involves engaging in sexually explicit conversations or online sexual activities.

There is also a significant likelihood that young people will be apprehensive about forming emotional and sexual relationships in the real world, relying solely on addictive forms of virtual interaction that may seem safer to them because they do not require face-to-face involvement and engagement.



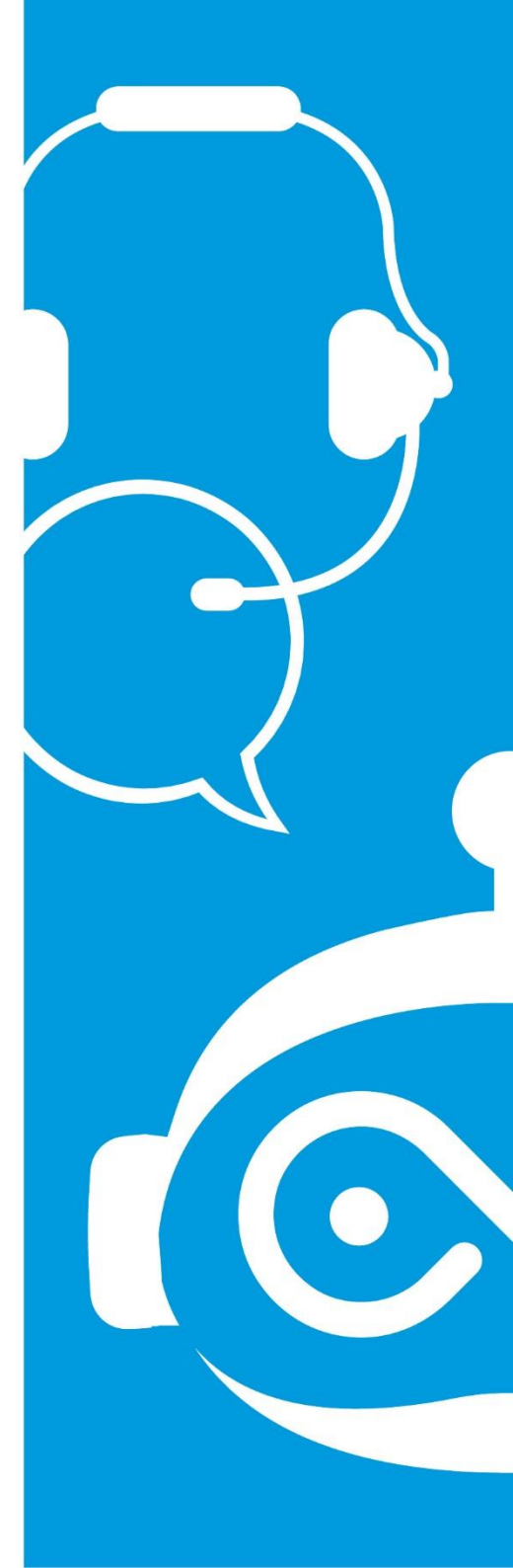
What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Teach young people how to use the internet in a healthy manner by fact-checking information, and responsibly managing their time spent in the virtual world. This can be done with the help of apps or their own phone settings which can measure the time they spend online and recommend forms of 'detoxing' daily (limiting the use of the internet to just a few hours per day, for example).
- Demonstrate the importance of engaging in alternative activities to spending time on the computer, either by partaking in individual activities (solitary hobbies such as photography or running) or group activities with others (board games, group sports, etc.)
- Conduct a workshop on media education for children and parents, focusing on the psychological mechanisms of media influence and responsible media consumption.
- Educate young individuals that there are other sources of information they can turn to besides the internet, such as books, workshops, training, therapy, and discussions with others.

Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Parasocial relationships
- Safe spaces online for underrepresented groups
- Misconceptions & misinformation: About digital literacy



Further reading:

- Jarczyńska, Jolanta. "Problematiczne używanie Internetu przez młodzież i młodych dorosłych – przegląd narzędzi do przesiewowej oceny tego zjawiska." *Przegląd Pedagogiczny*, no. 1 (2015): 119–36.
- *Nadmierne Korzystanie z Komputera i Internetu Przez Dzieci i Młodzież: Problem, Zapobieganie, Terapia*. Warszawa: Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje, 2012.
- Salus Pro Domo. "Uzależnienie Od Internetu - Jakie Ma Objawy, Przyczyny i Skutki?," 2018. <https://salusprodomo.pl/blog/uzaleznienie-od-internetu-jego-przyczyny-objawy-skutki>.

