

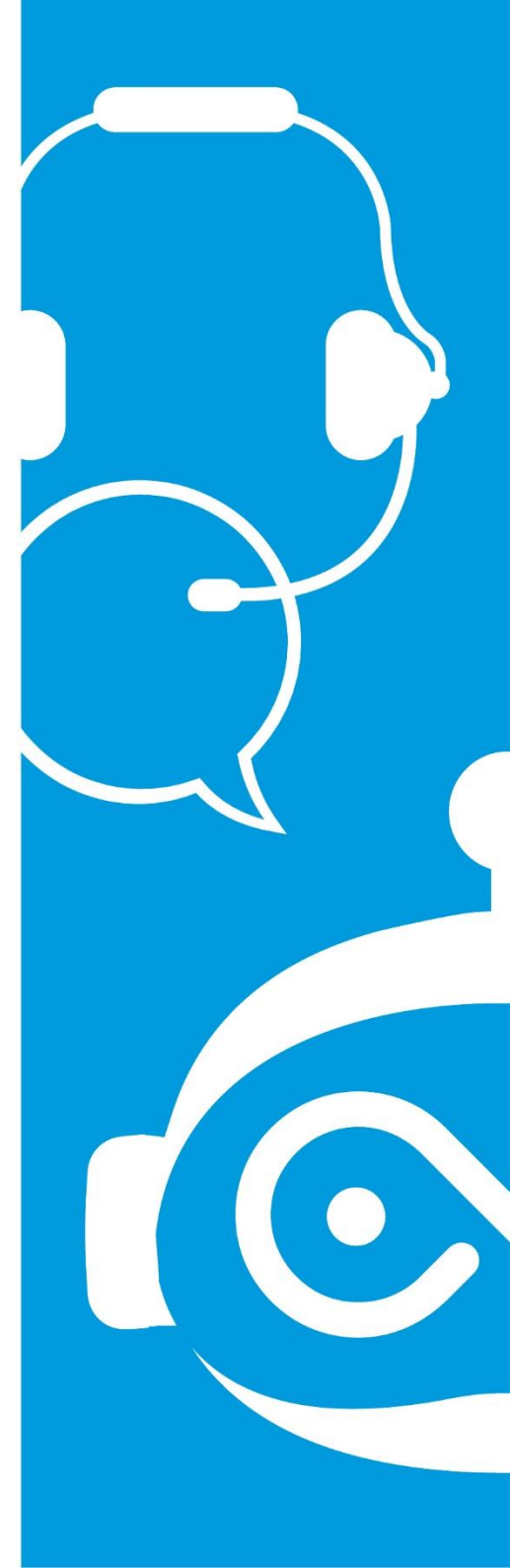


# SAFE SPACES FOR MARGINALISED GROUPS

## What is it?

Safe spaces are **digital phenomena** found on social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit, which are made up of communities of like-minded or similar people that exchange experiences and opinions and, as such, instil a sense of community and belonging in their members. The youth of today (belonging to the Gen-Z generation) are reported as being more trusting of information found in safe spaces than in traditional news sources<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Narayanan, "How Safe Are 'Safe Spaces'?"



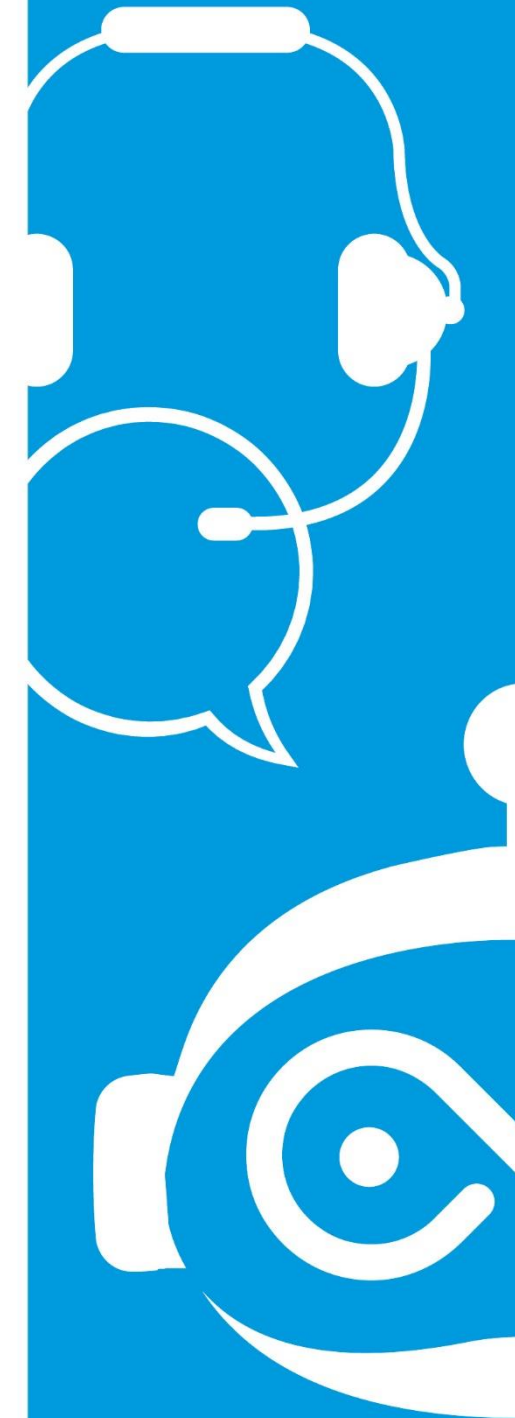
### How can it impact the sexual and reproductive health of youth?

The digital safe space model facilitates access to information and services in a way that is safe and inclusive to groups that are marginalised or underrepresented in information relating to SRH, including women (especially those belonging to ethnic minority groups and organised religions), and LGBT+ youth. For many of these young adults, curious about their bodily changes and sexual desires, safe spaces provide them with a judgement-free and often anonymous zone that they can rely on to seek answers and question oppressive discourses instead of questioning their peers or older siblings.

For young women, these safe spaces have been avenues of support when dealing with intimate partner abuse or sexual health issues (such as STDs or fertility difficulties). This support has been especially precious during the past health crisis, when many vulnerable groups felt isolated and helpless in their own homes.

Similarly, safe spaces have provided sanctuaries for LGBT+ youth, with survey findings reporting that forums online lower the rates of attempted suicide among these groups<sup>1</sup>. Besides being an integral part of the wellbeing of LGBT+ youth, safe spaces also present useful avenues for these members to turn to for finding those that identify the same as them, strengthening a sense of understanding and unity.

Despite their potential to curate free exploration and opinion exchange, safe spaces differ in the usefulness of the information they contain and may be home to SRH-related misinformation and perpetuate certain biases.



### What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

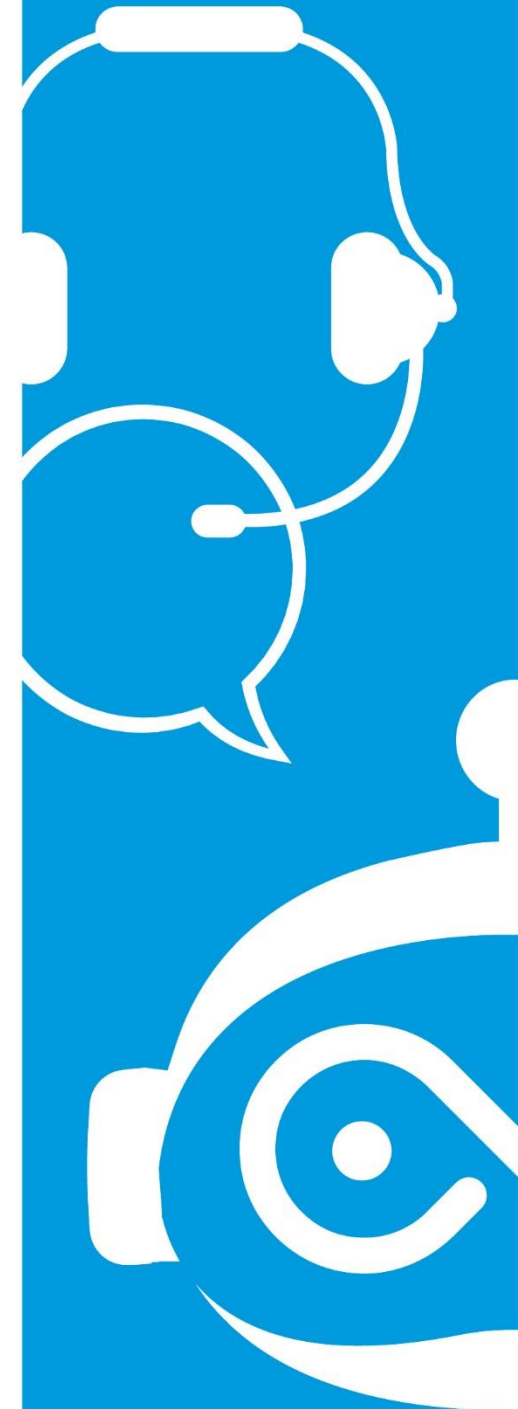
Regardless of whether you would like to organise your own safe space for youth or educate them on the purposeful and informed use of existing safe spaces, here are some tips to follow:

- Youth should never share personally identifiable information with other (such as their full legal name and location), regardless of how much they trust the members of their shared safe space.
- When choosing a safe space, prioritise websites that:
  - closely monitor and regulate user activity to ensure the validity of the information shared.
  - facilitate confidentiality of information and/or anonymity
- Even if safe spaces foster community, avoid referring to them in 'us vs them' terms. Youth shouldn't use these spaces to 'prohibit' those that are different from joining and instead should be inclusive towards users who may not share their predicament, but are willing to educate themselves.

### Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Online abuse: Grooming of youngsters
- Chatboards: Reddit
- Privacy: Setting privacy settings



### Further reading:

- D'souza, Sharin. "What Access To Safe Spaces Meant To Marginalised Young People In The Lockdown." *Feminism in India*, November 15, 2020.  
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- Narayanan, Kavya. "How Safe Are 'Safe Spaces'?" *The Listeners Collective* (blog), November 6, 2020. <https://thelistenerscollective.org/how-safe-are-safe-spaces/>.
- Unia. "Why Safe Spaces Are Essential for Marginalised Groups," 2021.  
<https://www.unia.be/en/articles/why-safe-spaces-are-essential-for-marginalised-groups>.

