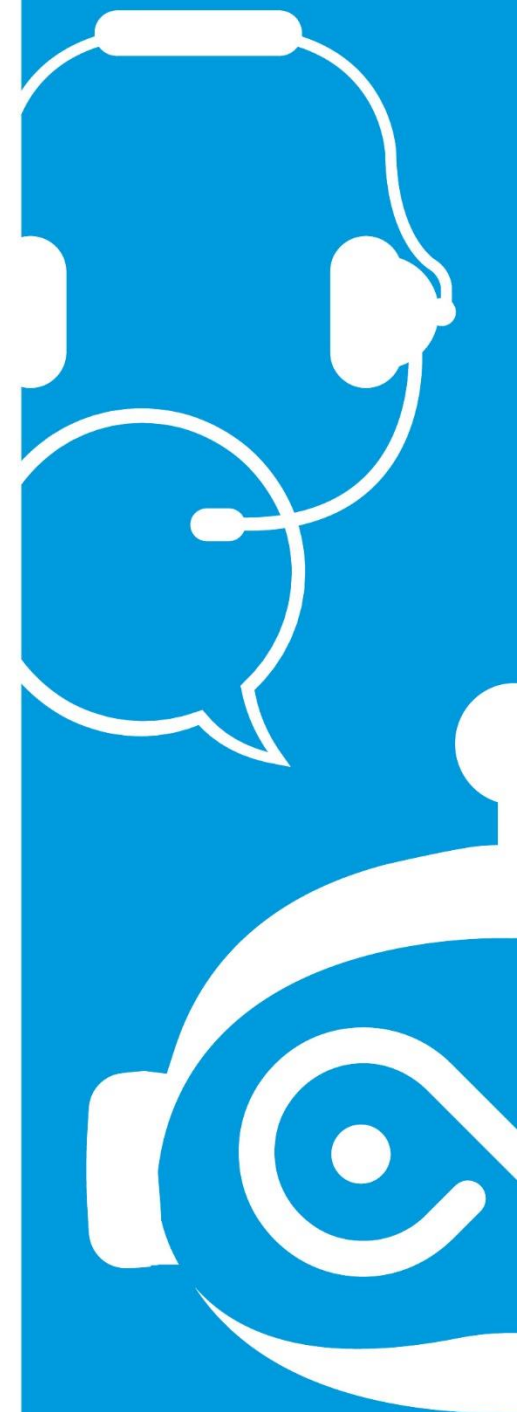




MISCONCEPTIONS AND MISINFORMATION: EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF SEX

What is it?

Despite the abundance of resources on the Internet about SRH education, young people point out that there is still a lack of information about the emotional side of sexual relations. Much of the material online covers SRH topics such as anatomy, reproductive health, pregnancy, safe sex, and STD prevention, but less often does it cover emotional topics such as sexual consent, respect, feelings, romantic relationships, and sexuality. Therefore, a **digital phenomenon** like misconception and misinformation about the emotional side of sexual relations can occur among youth.



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

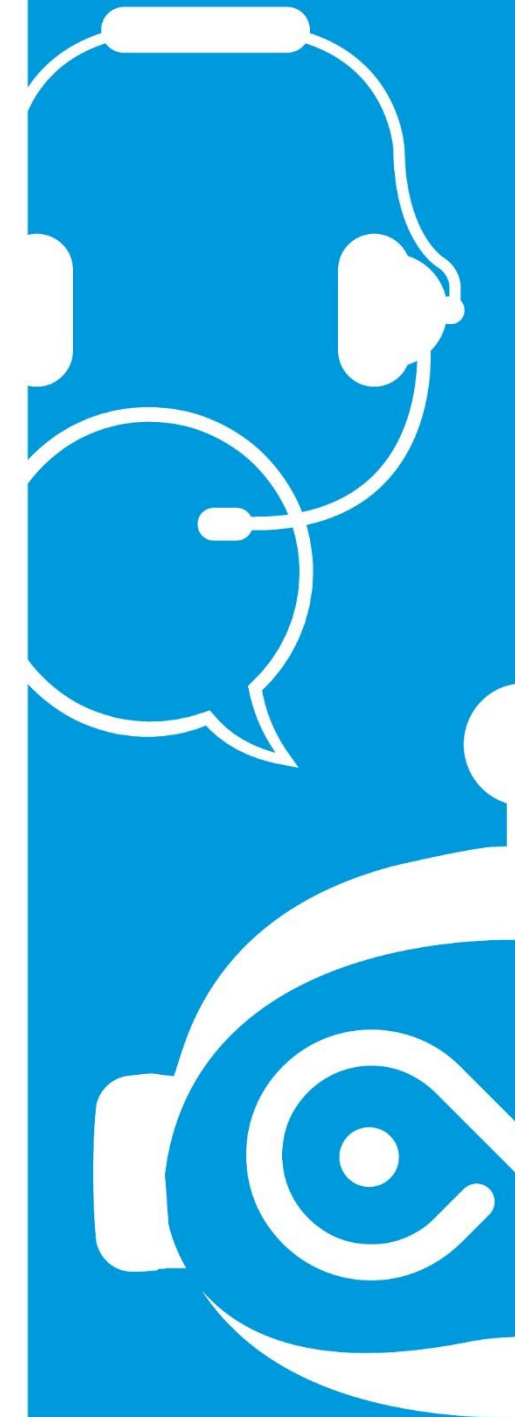
Comprehensive SRH education promotes and discusses sexual relations in a way that involves not only the biological aspects of sexuality but also its psychological and emotional aspects, allowing young people to have enjoyable and safe sexual experiences.

Failing to educate on the emotional component of sex early on can lead to sex becoming less personal, more casual and starting earlier in childhood. This means that some young people who have already experienced sexual relations do not yet have enough information to ensure safe and pleasant sex. It is important that digital sources can be used to provide more information of this type and be made available to young people before they engage in first sexual contacts.

Most of the online SRH education interventions are focused on adolescents' risk behaviour prevention instead of sexual well-being promotion. Research points out that SRH education online tends to focus on how adolescents can be victims of sexual harm and lacks positive messaging about sex, as with much school-based or other face-to-face sexuality education.¹

On the other hand, as digital natives, youth have been exposed to messaging that sex is intrinsically valuable and that we must engage in it. Such messaging should be approached critically, so that youth can investigate the narratives they receive. Instead of engaging in sex and relationships just because they believe it is expected of them, digital literacy allows youth to discover what they actually desire from these acts.

¹ Ford et al. 2019



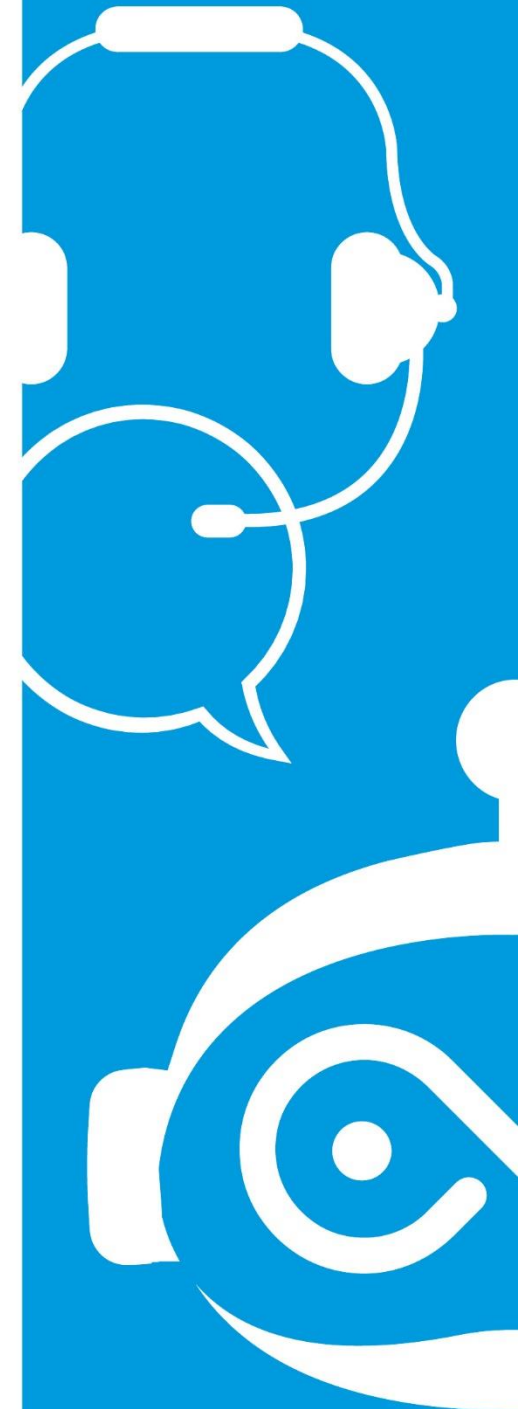
What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Develop an ethical approach to SRH education. Teach young people the importance of respect and consent, especially when it comes to relationships and sexuality. Teach them to be open to differences and to accept and care for each other.
- Respect students' intelligence and engage them in discussions about who they want to be as people. Serious dialogue about complicated topics will hone their critical-thinking skills and help them be prepared to do the right thing.
- Present the topic of sexual relations to young people in a positive way. Approach the issue of engaging in these acts in a sex-positive instead of shame-based way, helping them to understand the necessity to take care of their well-being and the well-being of their partner before, during and after sexual relations. In addition, critically examine digital phenomena which are more harmful than sex-positive, such as pornography. You can propel discussions by asking - is the well-being and safety of those involved taken into account during these displays of sexual intercourse? How do they feel watching the dynamics in pornography?

Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Sexually explicit content: Pornographic websites
- Apps: Socialising/dating apps
- Apps: Whatsapp and other IM apps



Further reading:

- Simon, L. and Daneback, K. (2013) 'Adolescents' Use of the Internet for Sex Education: A Thematic and Critical Review of the Literature', *International Journal of Sexual Health* 25.4: 305–19
- Jolly, Susie, Pauline Oosterhoff, Becky Faith, Doortje Braeken, and Kelly Shephard. "A Review of the Evidence: Sexuality Education for Young People in Digital Spaces." <https://www.ungei.org/sites/default/files/Sexuality-Education-for-Young-People-in-Digital-Spaces-eng-2020.pdf>.
- Ford, J. V. et al. (2019) 'Why Pleasure Matters: Its Global Relevance for Sexual Health, Sexual Rights and Wellbeing', *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 31:3.
- Lameiras-Fernández, María, Rosana Martínez-Román, María Victoria Carrera-Fernández, and Yolanda Rodríguez-Castro. "Sex Education in the Spotlight: What Is Working? Systematic Review." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 5 (2021): 2555. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052555>.

