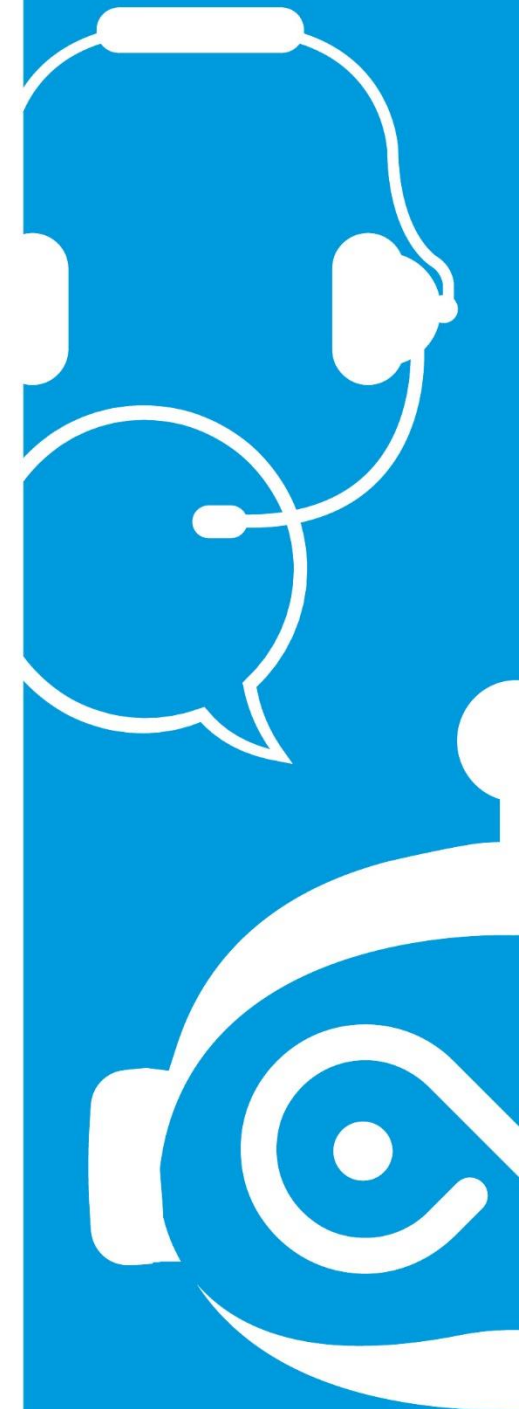




## SOCIAL MEDIA: INSTAGRAM

### What is it?

**Instagram** is a **digital tool** which serves primarily as a visual social network, where a user can post photos and short videos, apply effects to them, and also interact with other people's posts, through comments and likes. Instagram users can choose whether to have a private profile, and therefore be visible only to followers who have been accepted, or public, meaning visible to the whole world. Due to the increase of mobile phone use among young people, Instagram has overtaken Facebook as the most frequented application among youth.



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

Using Instagram as a source of information related to SRH can have advantages and disadvantages.

Here are some points to consider:

- Access to information

Instagram is an accessible platform for teenagers to get information about SRH because it is free, easy to navigate and used by their peers, who increase demand for this type of content. They can follow accounts of subject matter experts who provide educational and evidence-based content on the platform.

- Raising awareness

Through publications, stories and campaigns that are shared with just a click of a button and disseminated easily, never before has a social media platform made it simpler to call attention to the importance of SRH education in the health and well-being of adolescents.

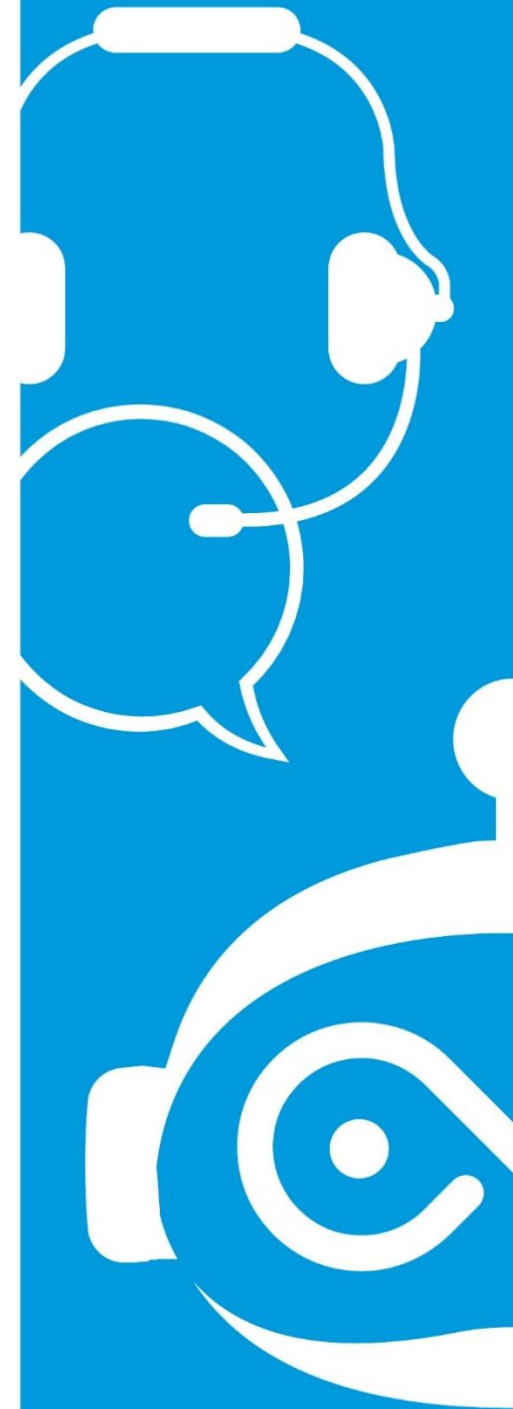
- Safe space for questions and concerns

Some accounts and organisations offer the ability to send direct messages or ask questions in comments, giving teens a safe space to voice concerns and receive personalised and real-time guidance.

On the other hand, youth can come across:

- Incorrect and uncontextualised information

Some posts may spread myths or advice not supported by scientific evidence, as Instagram does not



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

have an extensive fact-checking mechanism. Space to provide information and discuss topics is limited as posts are often short and may, therefore, lack important details. This can lead to a superficial and incomplete understanding of topics. Space to provide information and discuss topics is limited as posts are often short and may, therefore, lack important details. This can lead to a superficial and incomplete understanding of topics.

- Lack of privacy and exposure to harm

By participating in public discussions on Instagram, teens may feel that their privacy is being compromised. In addition, they may receive unwanted comments or messages, which can cause discomfort or anxiety or even threats to expose their personal details.

- Distorted reality

Instagram offers the possibility to use filters on photos to alter your physical characteristics. By retouching images, you lose awareness of your body and following an unrealistic beauty standard, especially in adolescence, could trigger states of depression and anxiety. Furthermore, most of the photos published by influencers and models are retouched, promoting this distortion of reality.



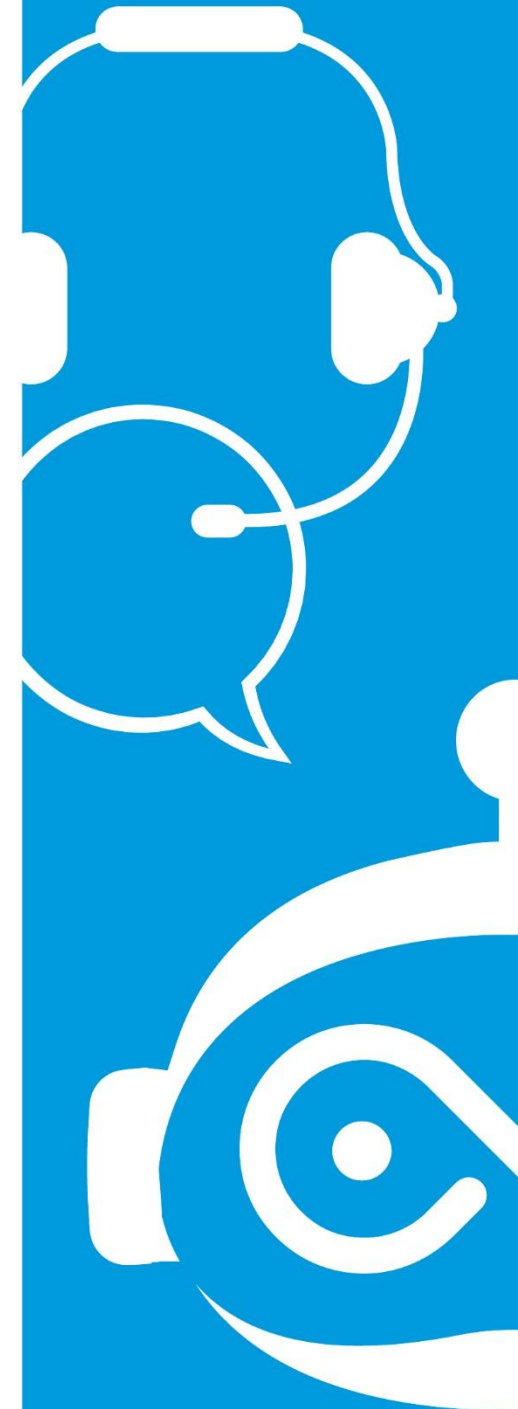
### What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Promote expert profiles for youth to follow, such as sexologist Emily L. Depasse (Instagram: Sexeducation) and Dr. Laura McGuire (Instagram: drlauramcguire), who can offer templates for having tough conversations and offer professional advice on SRH.
- Set account settings to 'private', as this can help monitor the public and limits their access. You can decide who is watching your activities. This way you can protect yourself from any theft of content and avoid the reuse of images and videos.

### Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Social media: YouTube
- Cyberbullying: Cyber stalking
- Internet addiction



### Further reading:

- Calvo González, Soraya, and Mónica Parente Fernández. “Educando en igualdad. Instagram como herramienta didáctica para formar en educación sexual a profesionales de la educación.” In *Tecnologías emergentes y estilos de aprendizaje para la enseñanza, 2020*, ISBN 978-84-09-16847-7, págs. 68-78, 68–78. Junta de Andalucía, 2020.  
<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7408970>.
- Sciberras, Ruby, and Claire Tanner. “‘Sex Is so Much More than Penis in Vagina’: Sex Education, Pleasure and Ethical Erotics on Instagram.” *Sex Education*, April 17, 2023, 1–14.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2023.2199976>.

