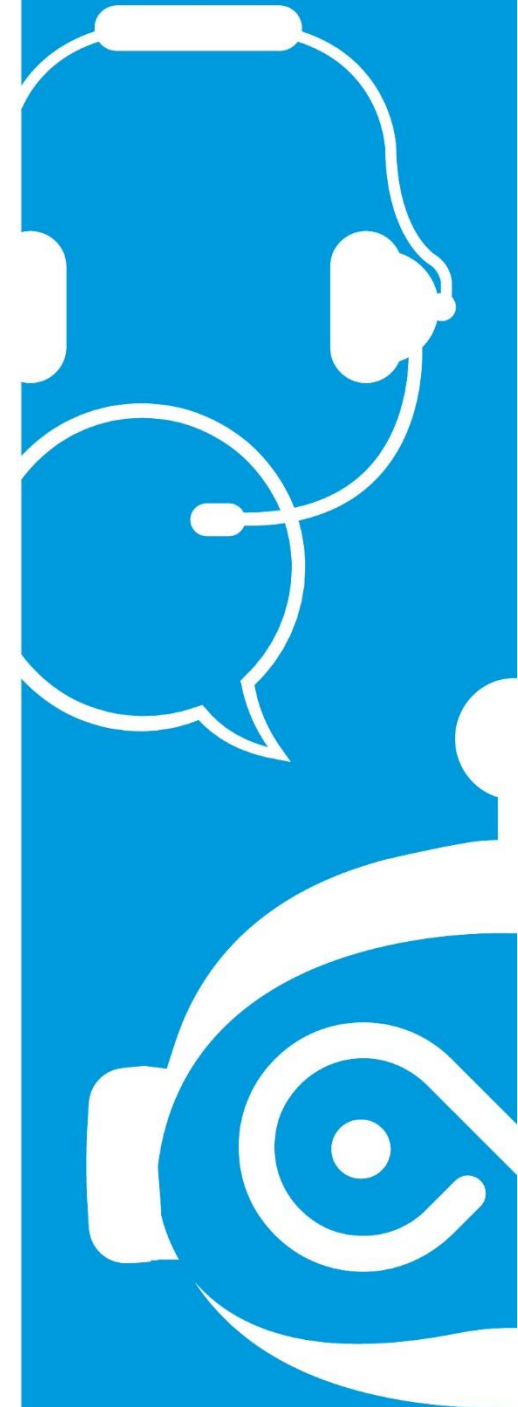




NEW TOOLS: AR & VR

What is it?

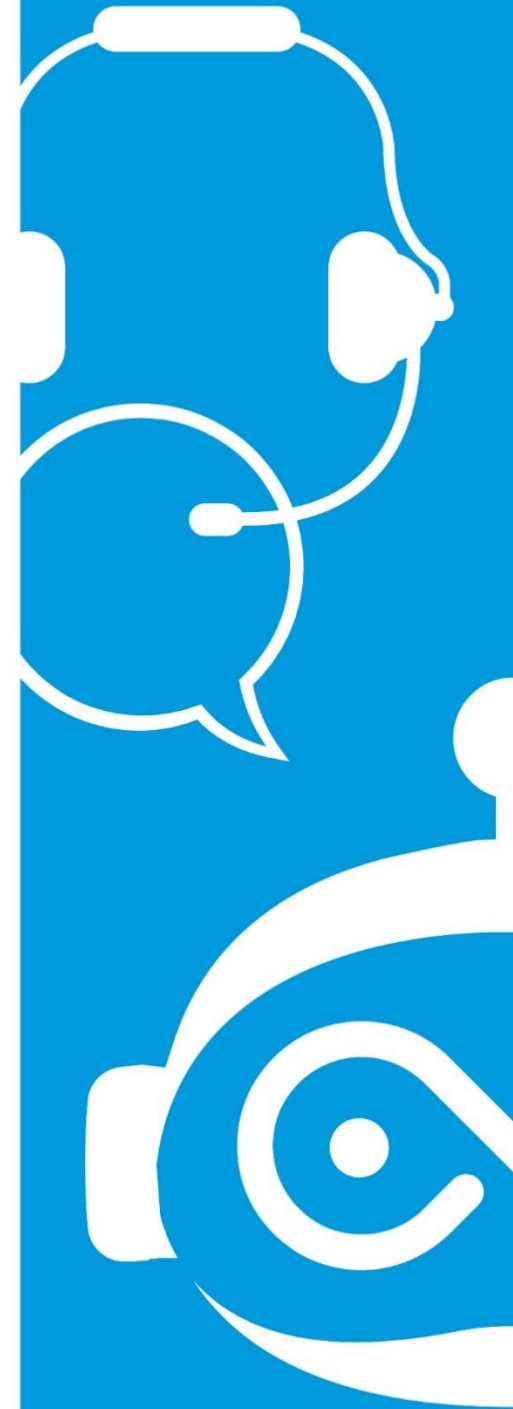
Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are **digital tools** that are being used more frequently to supplement formal education. AR projects virtual pictures and characters through a phone's camera or video viewer onto the physical world. VR takes this experience to another level by producing an entirely computer-generated simulation of an alternate world.



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

Like many digital tools, the impacts of AR and VR vary according to the purpose for which they are used. New research has emerged that VR could offer an ideal and ethical medium for those experiencing sexual dysfunction (such as sexual aversion, disgust or avoidance) to work through their insecurities or traumas in a virtual space. Findings note that since these simulations can be tailored to different user needs, even for sexual contexts that would be difficult to recreate in real life or in therapy settings, individuals are more willing to face their intimacy-related fears or hang-ups using these tools than in the real world.

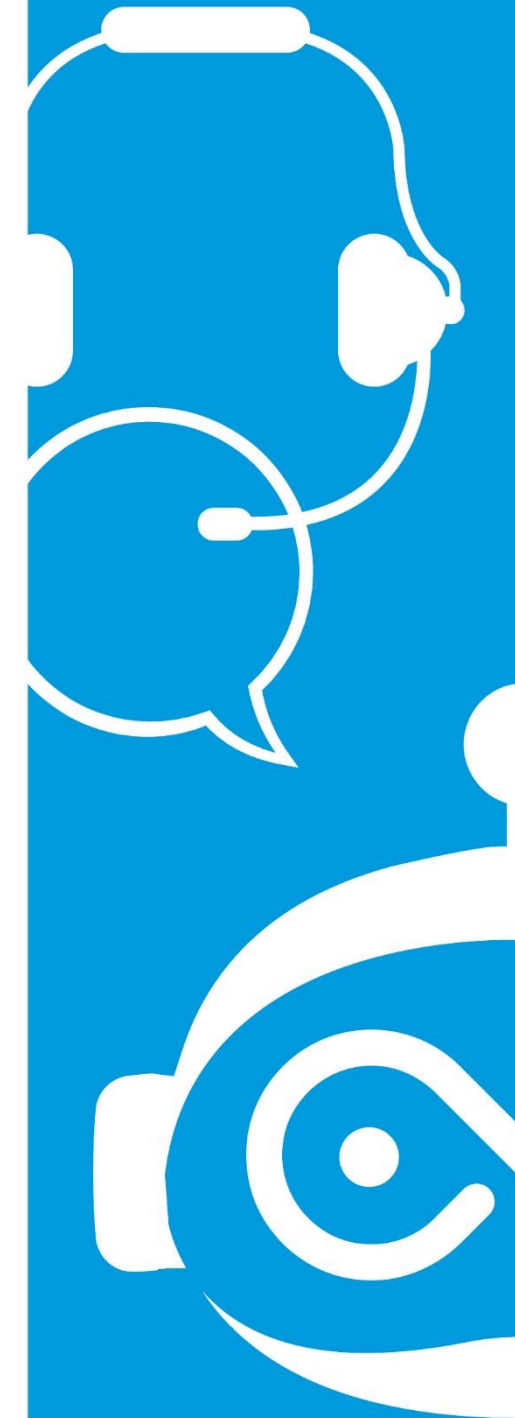
In addition, AR can be an avenue for more immersive SRH education, as seen with the project, "[The Nightstand](#)", which allows LGBTQI+ youth to experience scenes with different stories related to first sexual encounters. For youth that are navigating the proper and healthy expression of their SRH, using methods such as this could prove to be revolutionary for improved sexual expression and sexual self-image.



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

However, as these tools are still in their infancy, there is increased difficulty regarding content moderation in these spaces, which has resulted in unrestricted flows of harmful content and behaviours. This has resulted in young people being exposed to sexually explicit or violent material, being inappropriately approached by adults and engaging in risk-taking behaviours such as seeking illegal content or sharing intimate personal images.

Most of this conduct has taken place on Facebook's Meta platform, which saw occurrences of predatory behaviour even during its beta testing phase when incidents of virtual groping were reported. Sexual harassment on these platforms is harder to track if users do not record all of their interactions, which decreases users' feelings of safety. These issues are further compounded with instances of stalking that can easily take place over these platforms when users' location data is compromised.



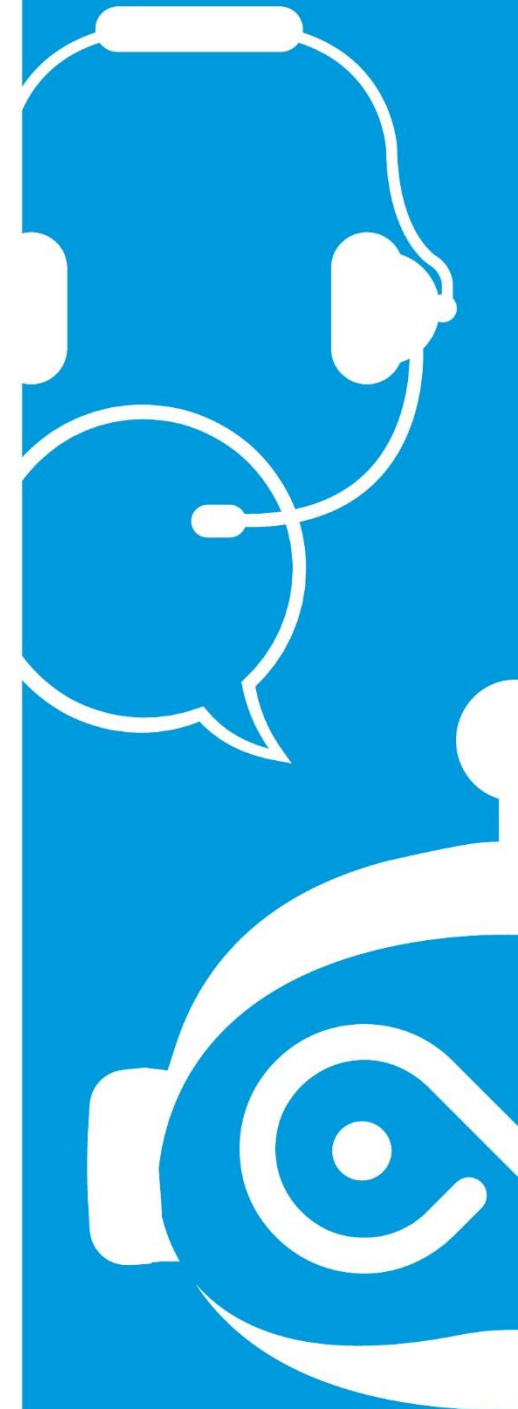
What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Empower youth to address all instances of harassment (stalking, hate speech, invasions of privacy, etc.) with the block and mute functionalities embedded in these platforms. Relatedly, some of these platforms have added 'safe zones' into which users can retreat any time that they feel uncomfortable in their interactions with others, allowing them to disengage safely.
- Discourage young people from sharing private information as they use these tools (such as turning off location services), so as not to reveal any personally identifiable information.

Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- New tools: Artificial intelligence
- SRH material online: Opening a dialogue between parents and youth
- Cyberbullying: Cyber stalking



Further reading:

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- Londoño, Juan. “User Safety in AR/VR: Protecting Adults.” Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, 2023. <https://itif.org/publications/2023/01/17/user-safety-in-ar-vr-protecting-adults/>.
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