



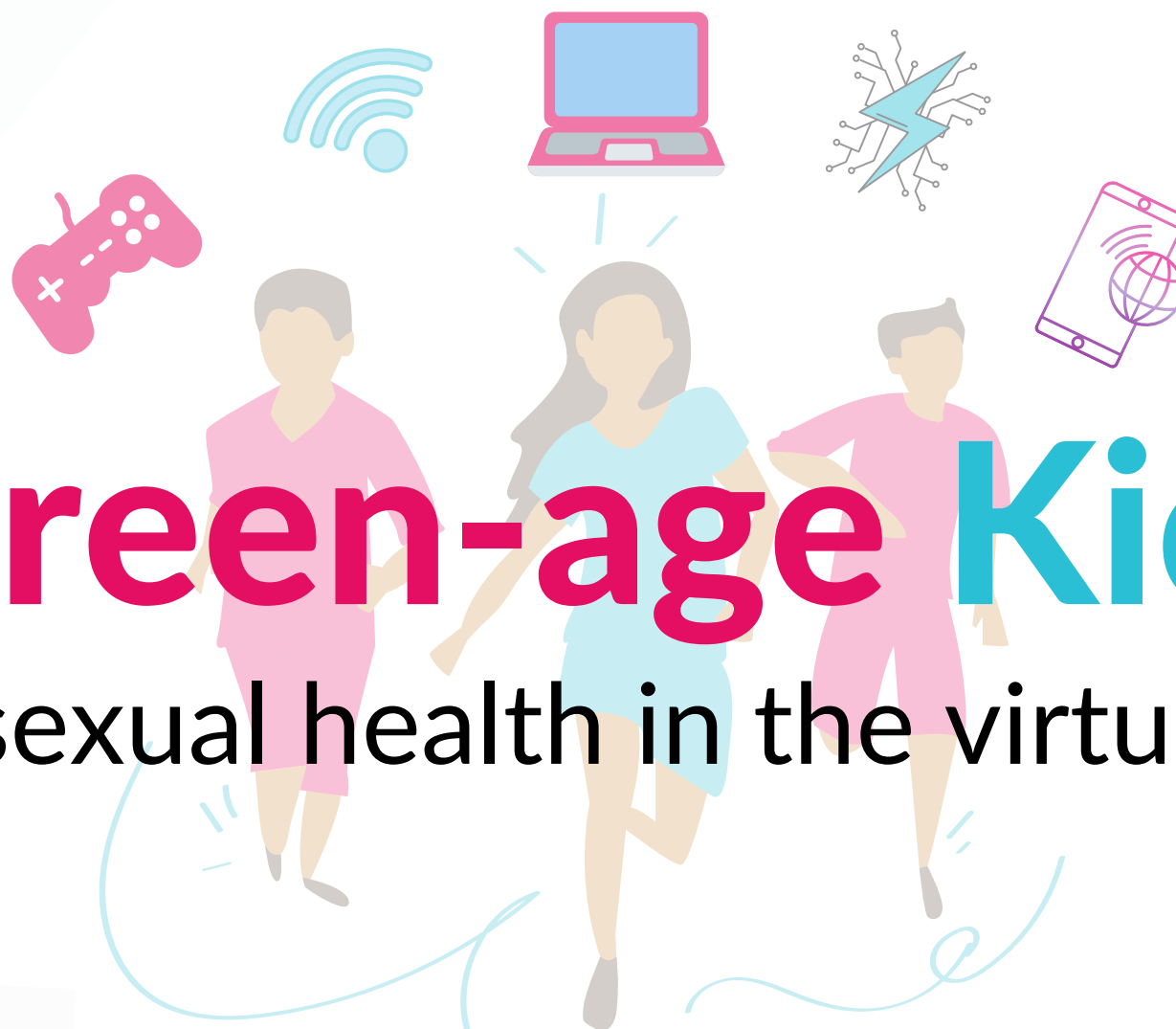
An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs



No Bias. No Judgement. No Exception.



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Bord Oideachais agus
Oiliúna Chorcaí
Cork Education and
Training Board



Screen-age Kicks

Your sexual health in the virtual world

This guide was inspired by the Screenagers International Research Project. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, young people have been spending more time online, and have had minimal physical contact with other people. This guide was created to empower young people of all abilities to deepen their understanding of sexual health and relationships, in the context of online activity.



Welcome to the 'Screen Age'



Technology is part of our everyday lives, and teenagers are growing up in a virtual world.



This has both positive and negative impacts on young peoples' health, including sexual health.



COVID-19 restrictions have led young people to spend more time online, on phones and other devices.



This change has made it increasingly important to think about how we use technology to learn about sexual health experiences and relationships.





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Sexual health

“Sexual health is an important part of overall health. It means the absence of disease and infections but also covers well-being, the ability to control fertility and to have children, and the ability to enjoy fulfilling relationships free from discrimination.”

- The Health Service Executive (HSE)

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, physical contact (including sex) with other people should be avoided. Some people who have COVID-19 are asymptomatic i.e. show no symptoms at all, so you could be spreading the virus by kissing, touching and having sex. It is also more important now than ever to protect yourself from Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), due to restrictions on STI screening services. More information is available in our #SafeRsex campaign.



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Core values ➔ Personal code

Your core values provide a personal 'code', which influences your behaviour and relationships with other people. Do you see some of your core values below? Can you think of other core values that you have?



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Internet 'trolling'

Trolling involves posting controversial or off-topic comments in online communities, with a view to provoking others.

Individuals who may never harrass people in real life, can be cruel on the Internet.

There is never an excuse for being disrespectful or unaccepting of other peoples' experiences.



Why do we engage in trolling?

No accountability

The anonymity of the Internet leads to a lack of accountability or consequences for bad behaviour.

Knee-jerk reactions

We know that only 7% of communication is verbal. This means that our online communication lacks the essential context that we get in real life. People sometimes respond to an online post without considering its context or true meaning.

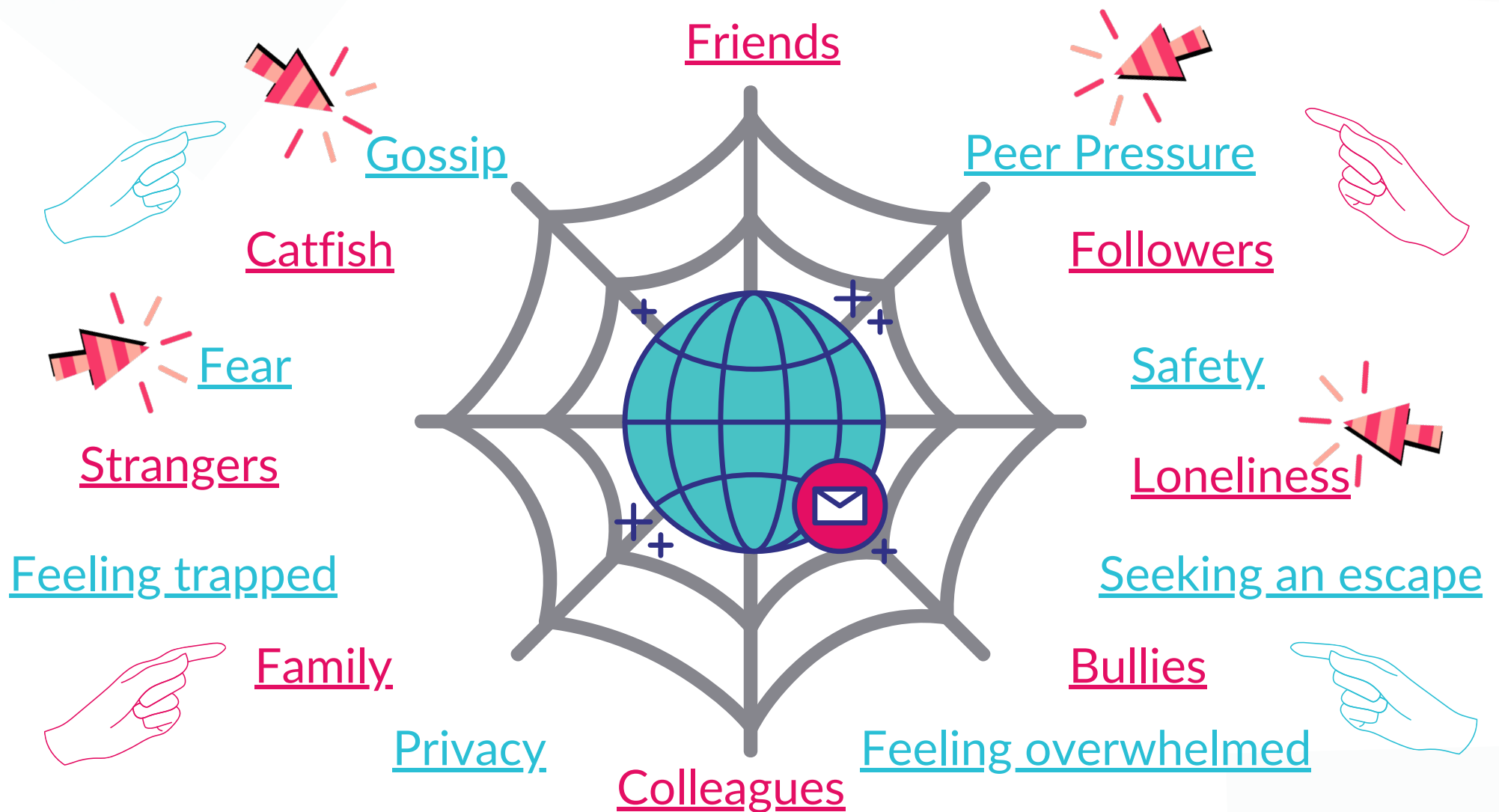
Attention

A recent U.S. study showed that online posts are more likely to be shared and seen if they include moral-emotional language. People sometimes make more inflammatory remarks to increase attention towards the post or themselves.



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Relationships in the virtual world



For advice on relationships, or to book a 'Healthy Relationships' workshop, you can contact us at 021-4276676 or info@sexualhealthcentre.com



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Sexting

Sexting involves sending and receiving sexually explicit messages or 'nudes' (naked pictures).

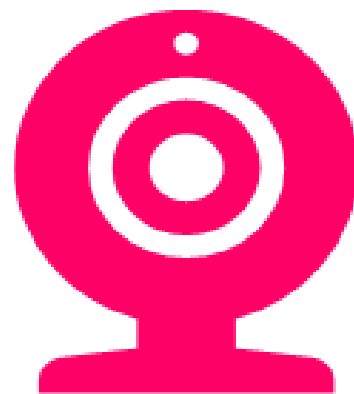
While sexting is intended to be a private form of communication between two people, sometimes private 'sexts' end up being made public, and shared with classmates and peers.





Be selfie aware: privacy issues.

- Sending sexually explicit pictures of yourself to others can be serious.
- Before you send a photo, think about how you would feel if it was shared. Once you send a picture, there may be no way of controlling where it could end up.





Be selfie aware: legal issues.

- Having sexually explicit images of someone under the age of 18 in your possession is illegal.
- If you send sexually explicit images of someone who is underage (even if it is you), you could be charged for possession and distribution of child pornography.
- In Ireland, the age of consent to engage in **any** sexual act is 17 years of age.



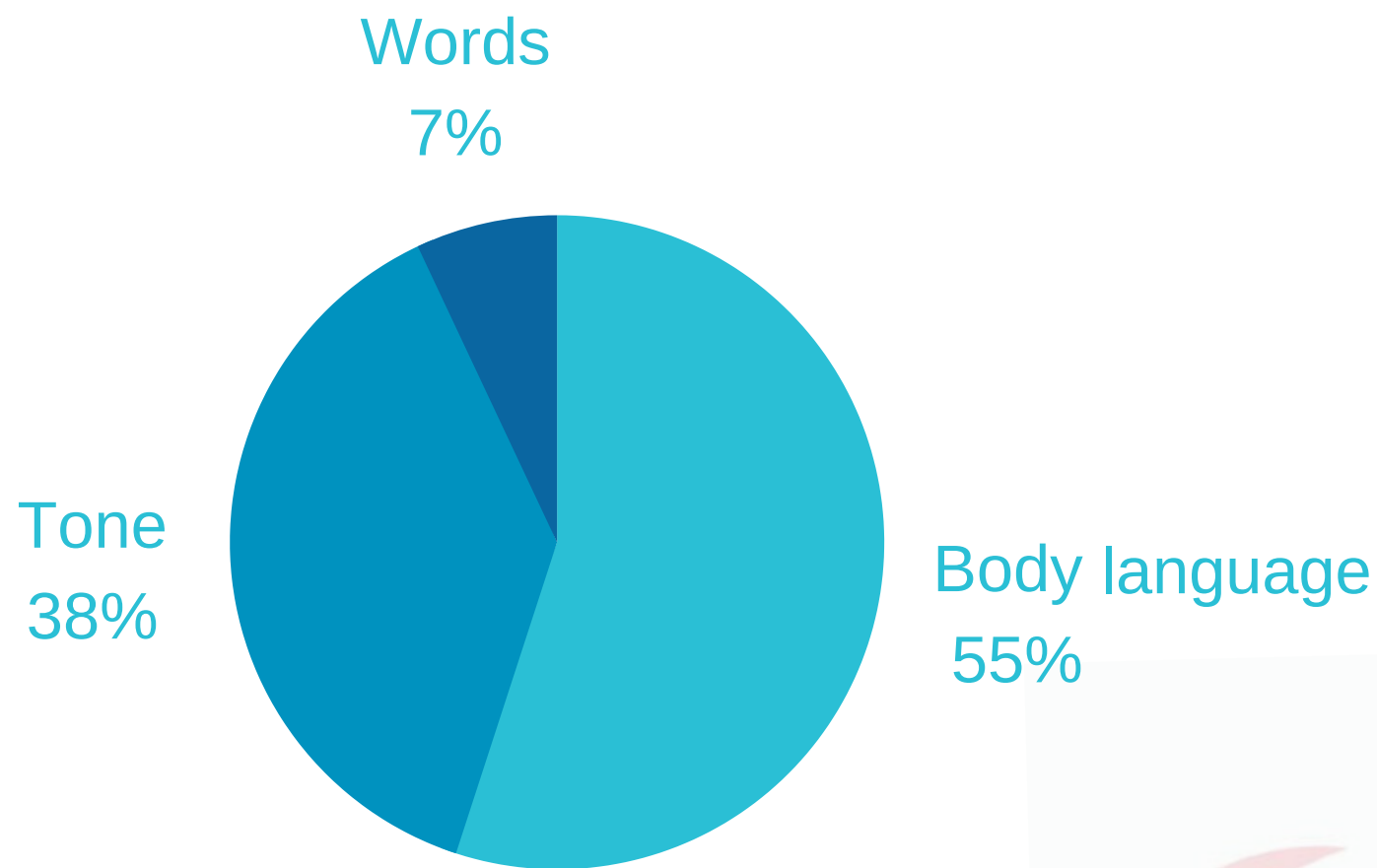
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Communication

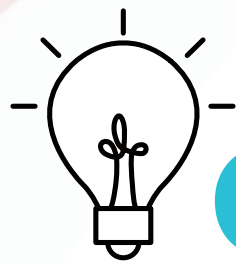
Communication is the way we connect to other people. Words only account for 7% of communication, making it difficult to show our true feelings and intentions online.



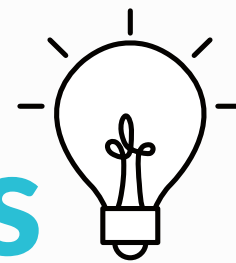
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Communication tips



The 'G.I.V.E' reminder can improve communication skills:

Gentle - Be courteous; avoid judgemental behaviour.

Interested - Take in what the other person says; avoid interrupting.

Validate - Acknowledge the other person's feelings and opinions.

Easy manner - Aim for a light-hearted tone.

Additional information:

Due to the limitations of online communication, we do not always know the impact of what we post. Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) is a tool that can be useful for any person seeking to improve their communication skills, online or in-person. The 'G.I.V.E' reminder is one of many DBT practices.



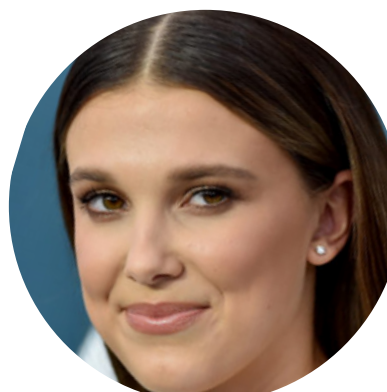
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Communication heroes

The public figures below often show examples of the 'G.I.V.E' tool in their interactions with others. Can you think of someone who has good communication skills?



Lewis Capaldi.
Pic: Elle US



Millie Bobby Brown.
Pic: Axelle/Bauer-Griffin/FilmMagic



Otis, 'Sex Education'.
Pic:Netflix



Zendaya.
Pic: PA Images



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Communication and sex

'Normal People', the screen adaptation of Sally Rooney's novel, follows the relationship of Connell and Marianne. As well as making sure to use a condom during sex, Connell and Marianne check in with each other and get consent at every step of the way, before and during sex.



"If you want to stop at anything, we can obviously stop [...] If it hurts, or, anything, we can stop, it won't be awkward. You can just say." -Connell.



What is consent?

Consent is a mutual, voluntary, informed decision between clear minded, of age participants before **any** and **every** sexual act.

The '[Tea and Consent](#)' video below explains how to recognise consent.





Consent: Know the facts.

Consent is essential for all sexual activity, including online, sexting etc.

- The **legal age of consent**: You must both be at least 17 years old to consent to any sexual act.
- Alcohol and other drugs affect decision-making abilities. A person who is highly intoxicated is not able to give consent.
- Ask the other person if they are okay before, during and after sexual activity.
- Check in with the other person each and every time a new type of sexual activity begins.

NEXT



Consent: Know the facts.

Consent is essential for all sexual activity, including online, sexting etc.

- Look at the other person's body language and facial expression to see if they are comfortable.
- Silence, or the absence of a “no” does not mean that somebody is consenting.
- Stop if the other person seems unhappy, or you are unsure whether they are consenting.
- Know that a clear, affirmative, freely-given “yes” indicates consent.
- Know that you and the other person have the right to change your mind, and withdraw consent at any time.



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#SafeRsex

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, physical contact with anyone outside of your own household should be avoided.

As most teenagers are not living with a sexual partner, it is important to avoid kissing, touching and physical sexual activity with other people during the pandemic.

If you are sexually active, it is vital to protect yourself from Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), due to restricted STI screening services. For info on the Sexual Health Centre's free condom postal service, check our [#SafeRsex campaign](#) and contact us at info@sexualhealthcentre.com / 021-4276676.

For information on how to use condoms and lubricant:
www.sexualhealthcentre.com/relationships-and-sex



Masturbation

Why is it important?

- To get to know your body, and what you like.
- To discover your sexuality and sexual identity.
- To ensure good sexual health.
- To connect with your body.
- To boost your mood.



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Porn

People watch porn for various reasons e.g. sexual arousal, to aid masturbation, curiosity or to learn about sex. While porn can be enjoyable to watch, it is not a reliable source of information regarding sexual relationships and safety. Condom use, consent and communication are often not included in porn. Photoshop and other editing tools are used in porn, creating unrealistic standards. The sex in porn is also not an accurate representation of sex in real life, as it is being performed by actors.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak and restrictions on physical contact with others, many people are spending more time masturbating and watching porn. Shared devices should not be used for watching porn, particularly when living with younger children. Shared household items such as blankets should not be used while masturbating.



Device hygiene

Hygiene is vital to prevent community transmission of COVID-19. As well as regular handwashing, you should:

- Regularly clean your electronic devices, including phones and laptops.
- Clean your sex toys after each use with soap and warm water.
- Avoid bringing your phone to the bathroom, as germs can transfer from hands, to phone, to face.



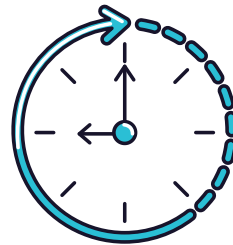


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Routines

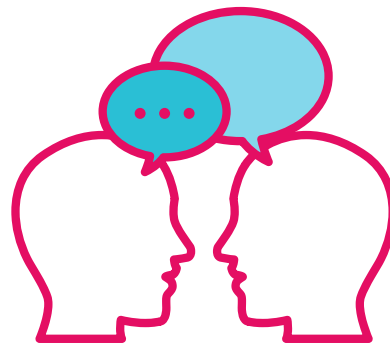
Routines lead to good time management. During the COVID-19 pandemic, following a routine is particularly helpful for reducing stress and regulating emotions. Routines can be beneficial for a number of reasons:

- Time management makes it easier to enjoy quality time with others and maintain healthy relationships.
- By reducing stress, routines can contribute to improved mental health and decision-making.
- A healthy 'screen time' routine can prevent information overload, phone dependency and sleep deprivation.





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Get in touch!

The Sexual Health Centre has adapted its services, to ensure that we continue to meet your needs during the pandemic.

Contact us at 021-4276676 or info@sexualhealthcentre.com, for advice on relationships, sexual wellbeing, LGBTQIA+ supports, crisis pregnancy counselling and more. Our services are free of charge and available via email, phone and video call.

We can also put you in contact with a range of other services that may be of use to you, including those mentioned in the 'Useful Contacts' section below.



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#HOLDFIRM

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the efforts of young people have helped to flatten the curve and protect the people of Ireland from the virus. Teenagers continue to play a crucial role in delaying the spread of COVID-19, and saving lives across the country. As the virus will remain in Ireland for the foreseeable future, it is important that we all keep up the good work, and hold firm. HSE guidelines on protecting yourself and others are available at www.hse.ie/coronavirus.



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Useful contacts



MySexualHealth.ie

Mysexualhealth.ie is an informational portal representing Cork organisations that provide a wide range of sexual health, sexuality and wellbeing services.



Jigsaw Cork

Jigsaw Cork is a free, non-judgemental and confidential mental health support service for young people aged 12 - 25 living, working or studying in Cork.

**JIGSAW
CORK**
Young people's
health in mind

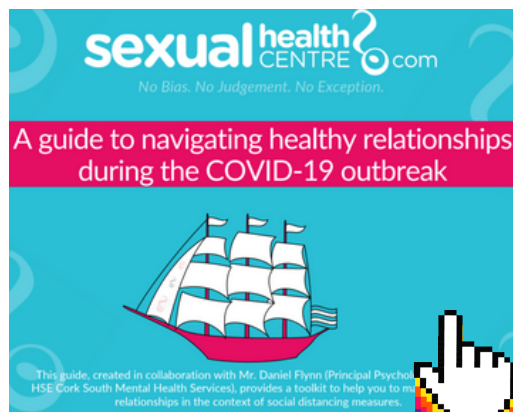


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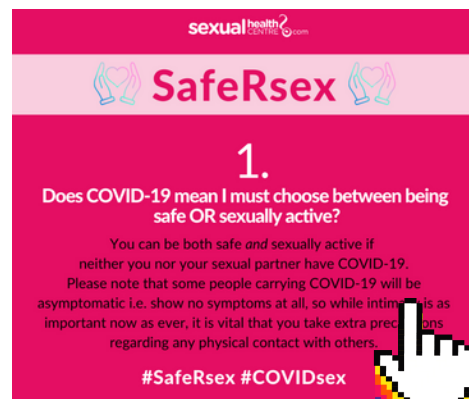
Useful resources



Healthy relationships



#SafeRsex



CSO Report: Impact of COVID-19 on youth.

Social Impact of COVID-19 by Age Group April 2020

Social Impact of COVID-19 by Age Group

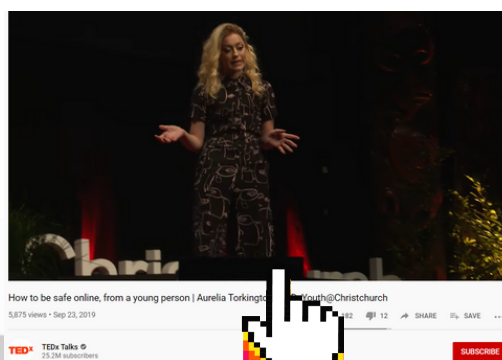
April 2020

CSO statistical release, 1

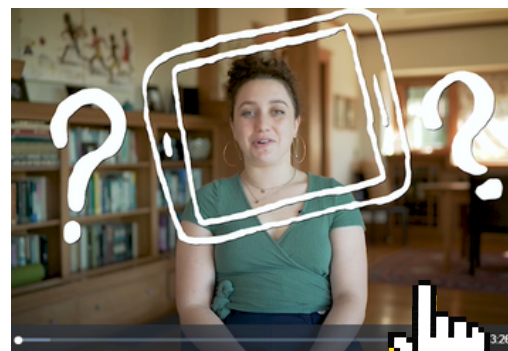
Younger adults report greatest decline in well-being in April 2020



TEDx talk: Safety online

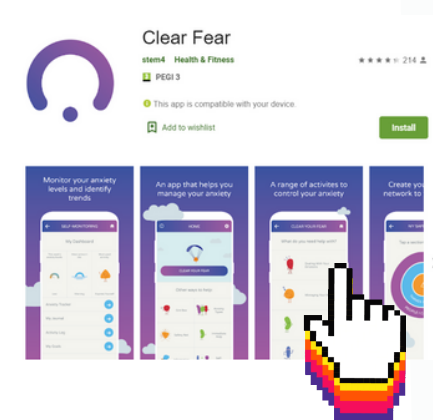


Teen Voices: Strangers online



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'Clear Fear' mental health app





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Useful resources

Contraception Choices



STIs



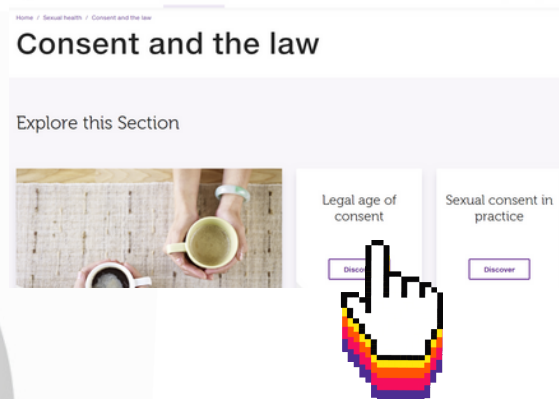
'Porn literacy' for Irish teens.

The importance of porn literacy for young Irish people

Updated / Tuesday, 30 Jul 2019 16:48



Consent and the law



Consent in practice





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Useful resources for parents & youth workers

Sexting



Online predators



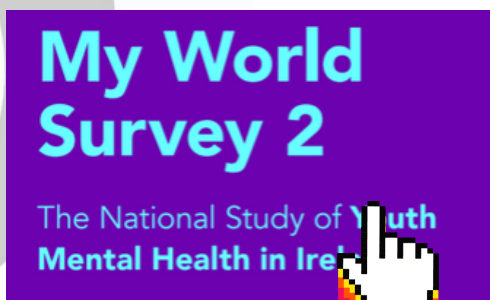
Excessive social media



Online safety



My World Survey 2



Masturbation during lockdown



Nude photos



'Planet porn'

