Steps Forward to Meaningful Employment of young people with emotional well-being problems

Module 3: Tech tools and young adults with mental health or emotional issues

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Objectives

1: Identify what type of tech tools there are and how to use them for social intervention with young adults with mental health issues

2: Reflect on the uses of technological and digital tools including their positive aspects and associated risks

3: Identify issues generated by the excessive use of social media and possible countermeasures

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Chapter 1: Technology and young adults

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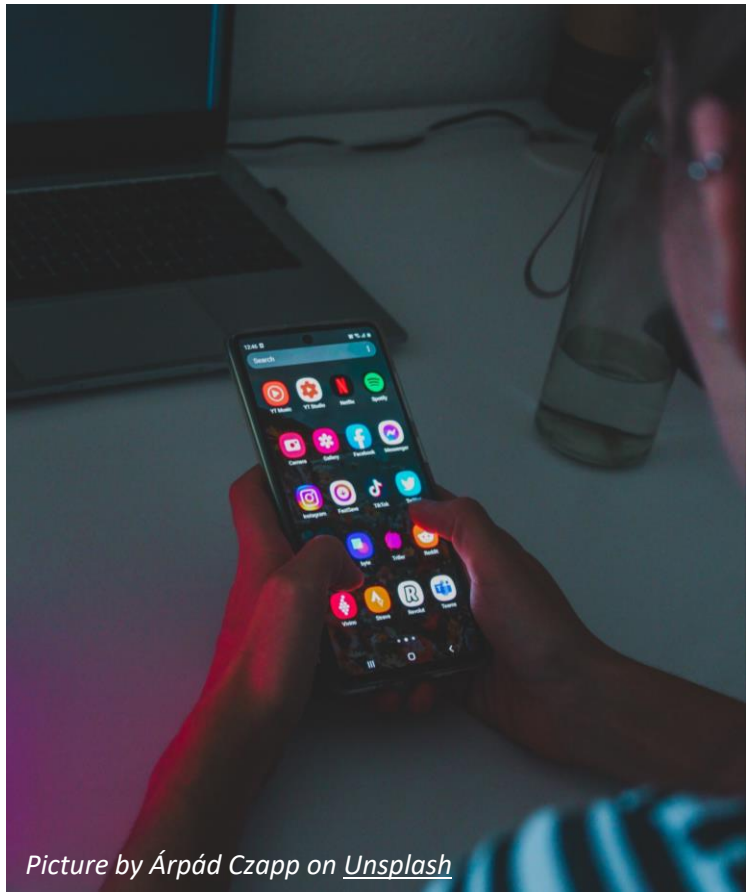
Technology and young adults

Adolescents and young adults are **digital natives**.

Smartphones and screens are **part of their daily life** which can cause wariness regarding topics such as:

- **construction of identity**
- **influences on relationships** and how these are built
- consequences and **risks of digital tools**

On the other hand, technology can be **a tool to connect** with adolescents and young adults: **stay in touch** with youth, **generate interest**, **improve efficiency in the care of young adults**, etc.



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Technology and young adults: tech tools

In their Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030, the **World Health Organization** includes **tech tools** as one of their **goals** related to the **provision of mental health and social care services in community-based** settings (WHO, 2021).

One example is the **encouragement of self-assistance** via the use of health technologies.

Tech tools as **complementary to mental health services,** not as a goal on their own.

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Introduction to tech tools and mental health

"**Digital mental health interventions** can be helpful in **reducing gaps in mental health services** and provide young adults with **more innovative and attractive techniques** for them." (Orsolini et al., 2022)

Endless options of tech tools: Virtual Reality (VR) settings, Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning, apps, online information (curated by professionals), gamification, etc.

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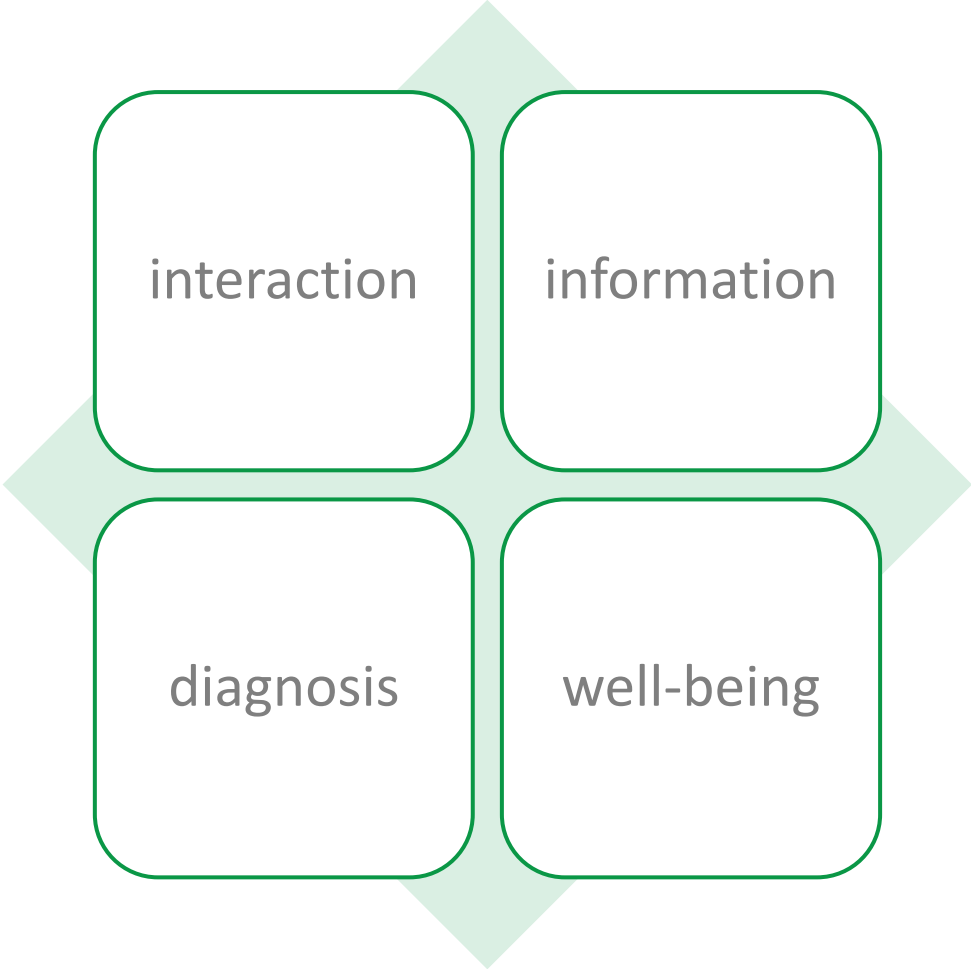
Introduction to tech tools

This module provides an **overview of common types of digital tools in the mental health field**, particularly those **related to young adults**, as researched by the StepForME project.

The tools are grouped according to their main purpose.



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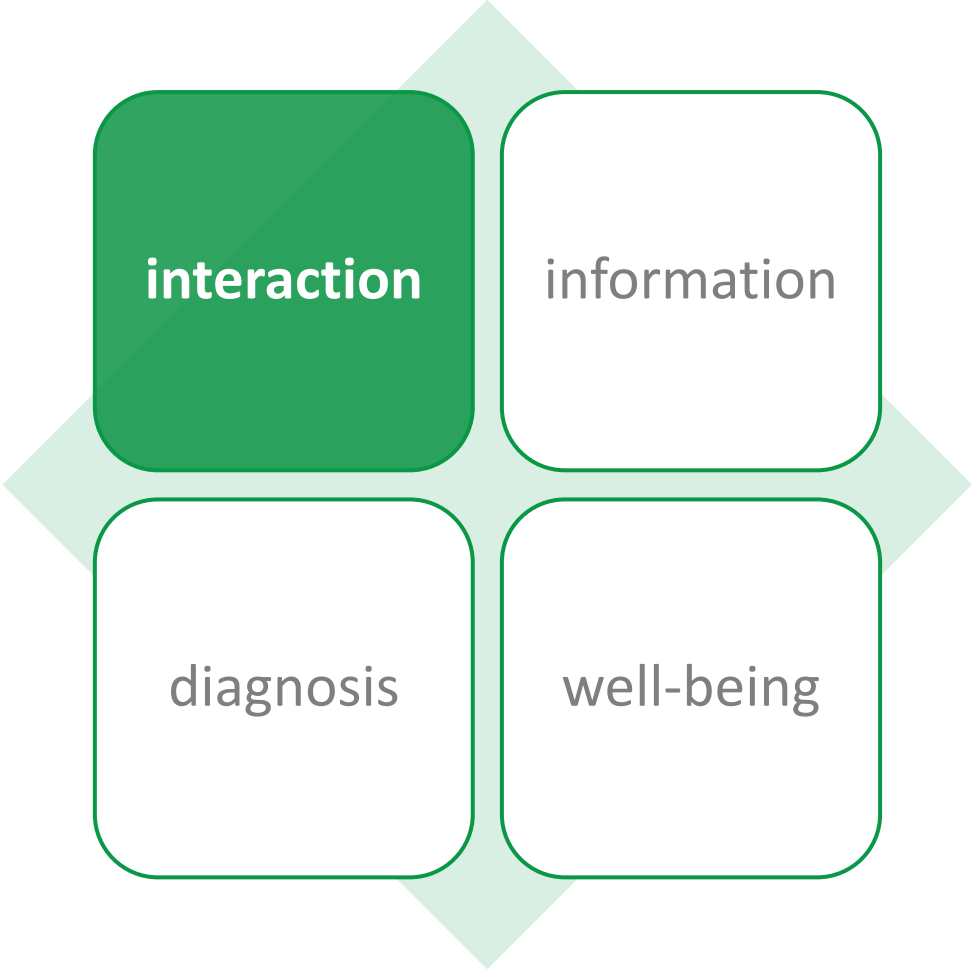
Interaction tools

Users can **interact with the app or tool and will receive answers**, not static information.

They address the tool with their questions, concerns, etc. and the **interaction differs** depending on the tool. It can be

- asynchronous or synchronous
- human contact or AI (artificial intelligence)

For example: e-therapy, crisis text lines, etc.



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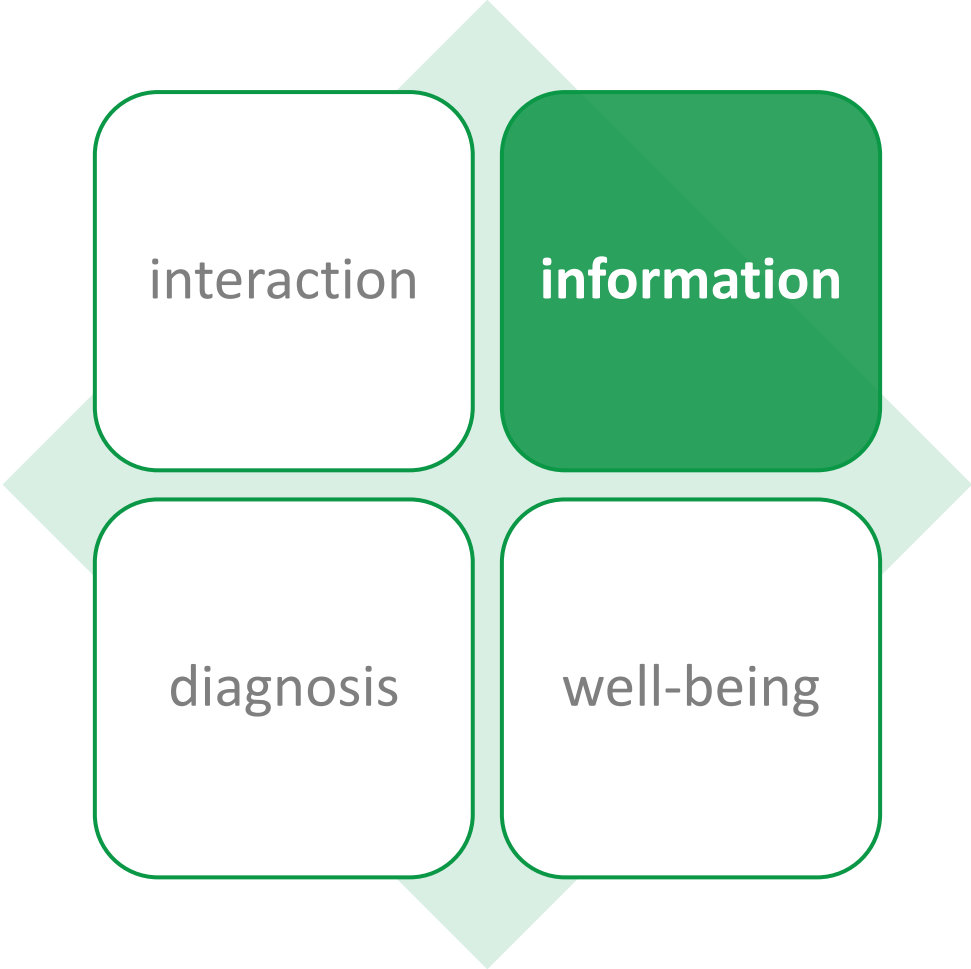
Tools that provide information

These are tools that **provide verified information** to young adults, families, and even professionals.

These are usually websites created by expert organisations, public administration, etc.

Adolescents and young adults can **consult information provided by professionals** and learn about mental health **without requiring a diagnosed issue**.



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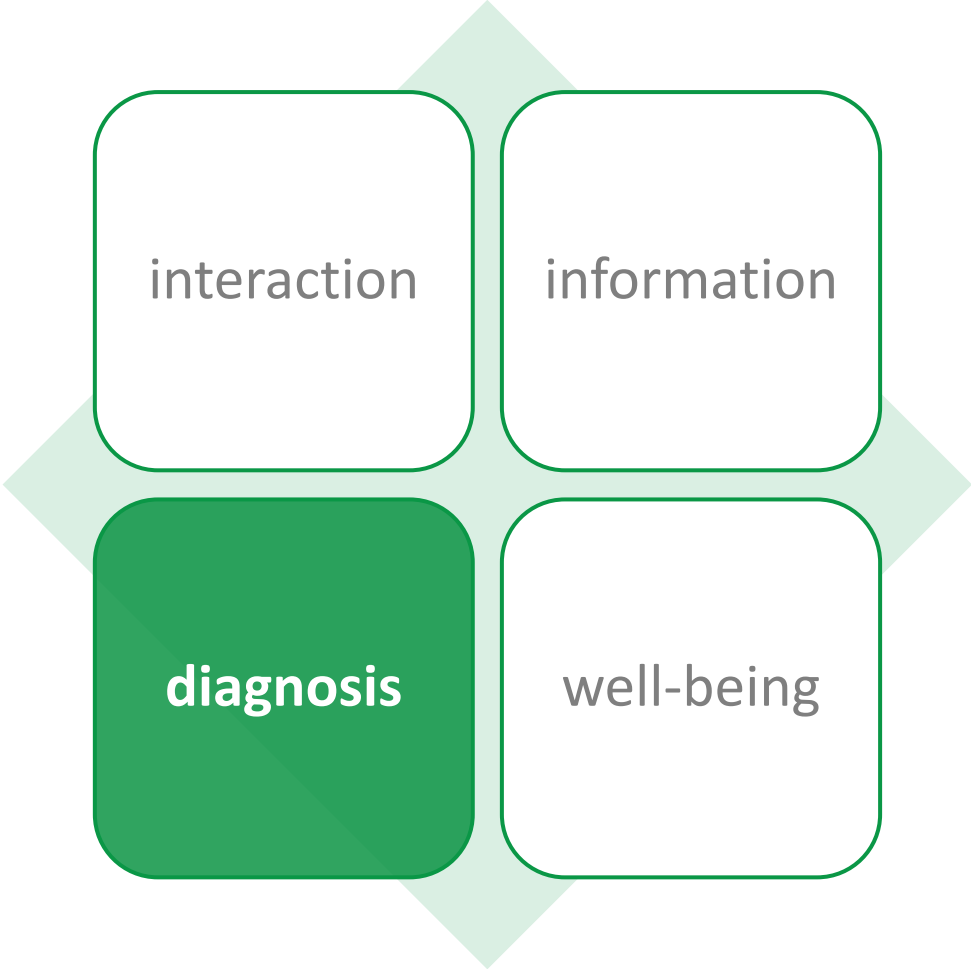
Tools to help with diagnosis

These tools **assist professionals** to analyse the behaviour of individuals or groups over a certain period of time.

They include providing **questionnaires** or **mood trackers**.

For example: mood tracking apps, habit tracking apps, meditation apps, journaling apps.



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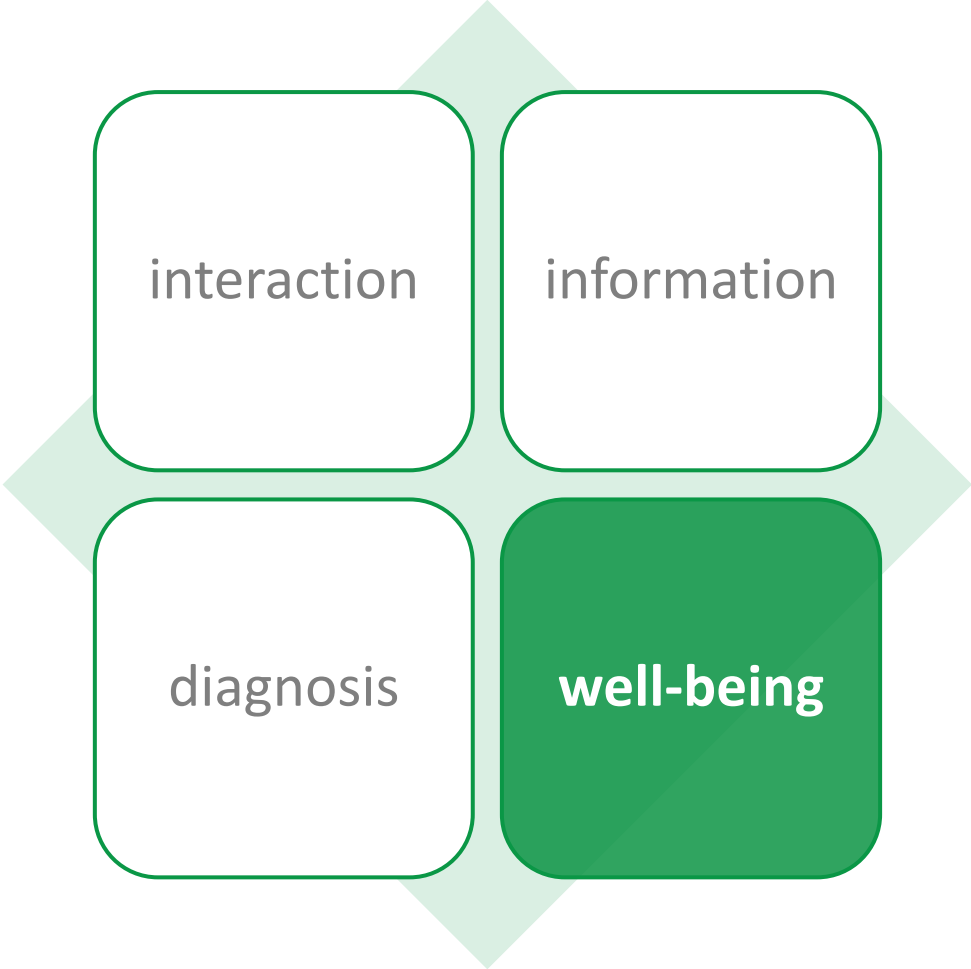
Well-being apps

Well-being apps help the **user improve their lifestyle without the direct help of professionals**.

They can take many forms to adapt to the preferences of everyone.



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Other use of technology - Virtual Reality (VR)

VR has been used to **improve interpersonal conflict management between parents and young adults** and for conditioning (Cemiloglu et al., 2022). It is also used to **reduce stress levels** in kids with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and people with highly demanding jobs.

This technology can be used via **VR headsets** or with **immersive technology** that also allows group sessions. With this technology, real-life images can for example be used in therapy for exposing patients with a phobia gradually in a safe, controlled environment.

Source: Broomx

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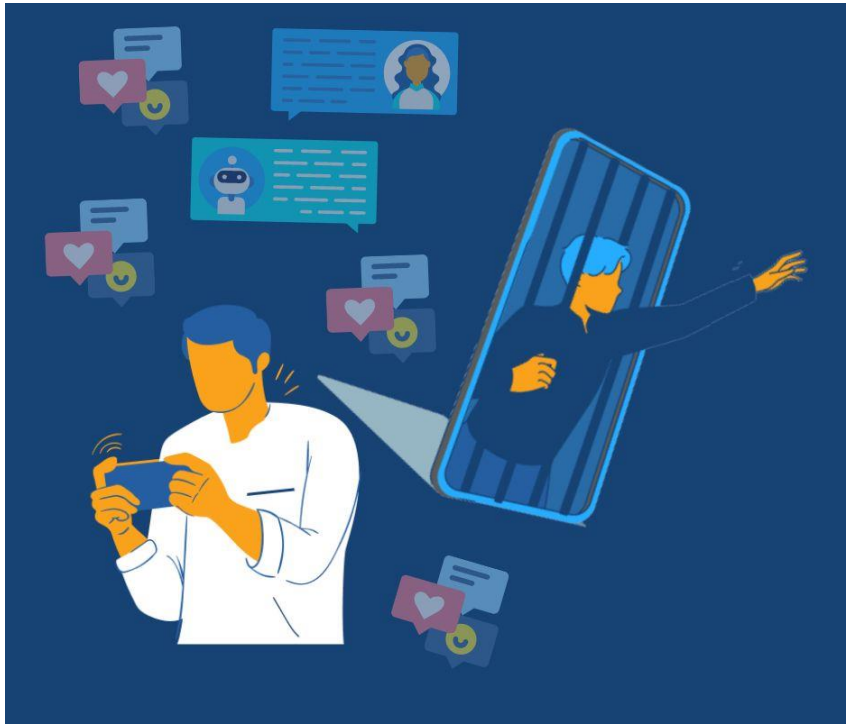
Risks of technology

Digital technology comes with its **risks**, particularly **when used by adolescents or young adults** in a stage when **their ideas of the world and themselves are still being formed**.

Excessive use of digital tools like social media and chats, video games, online bets, streaming and online shopping among others **can result in increasing mental health issues** and **addiction**.

The following chapters focus on **digital addiction** and on the **effects of social media on self-esteem**.



Source: Icons8

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Chapter 2: Digital addiction

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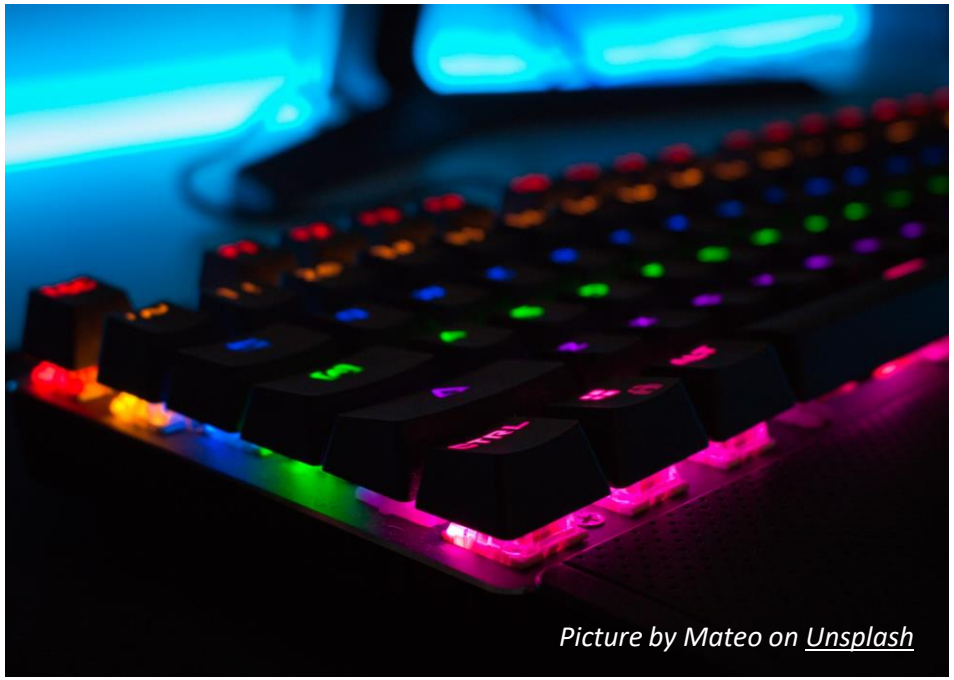
What is digital addiction?

There are several definitions and measurements.

WHO only defines **Internet Gaming Disorder** in its 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases:

"Pattern of gaming behaviour ('digital-gaming' or 'video-gaming') characterized by impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other activities to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities, and continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences."



Picture by Mateo on Unsplash

However, studies show that **this concern can be also applied to other uses of digital tools or screen devices** like smartphones, tablets, computers, etc.

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How can we measure Digital Addiction?

By evaluating the

time spent on devices?

content viewed?

effects on **relationships**?

"Increasing tendency towards approaching **all forms of digital addiction** as **behaviour associated with harm**, and one that **individuals may wish to change**." (Cemiloglu et al., 2022)

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Digital addiction: some signs to pay attention to

Excessive concentration on Internet activities and no response to external stimulation

Presents **a lot of excitement during the activity** with **unbreaking focus off the screen**

Inability to function in locations without a connection, smartphone or computer

Anxious, depressed or angry responses when unable to perform the activity

Fighting with family related to the use of the computer, phone, video games, etc.

Sleep deprivation because of gaming or staying connected to digital media at night

Loss of interests in other social activities outside the online ones

(Generalitat de Catalunya, 2022)

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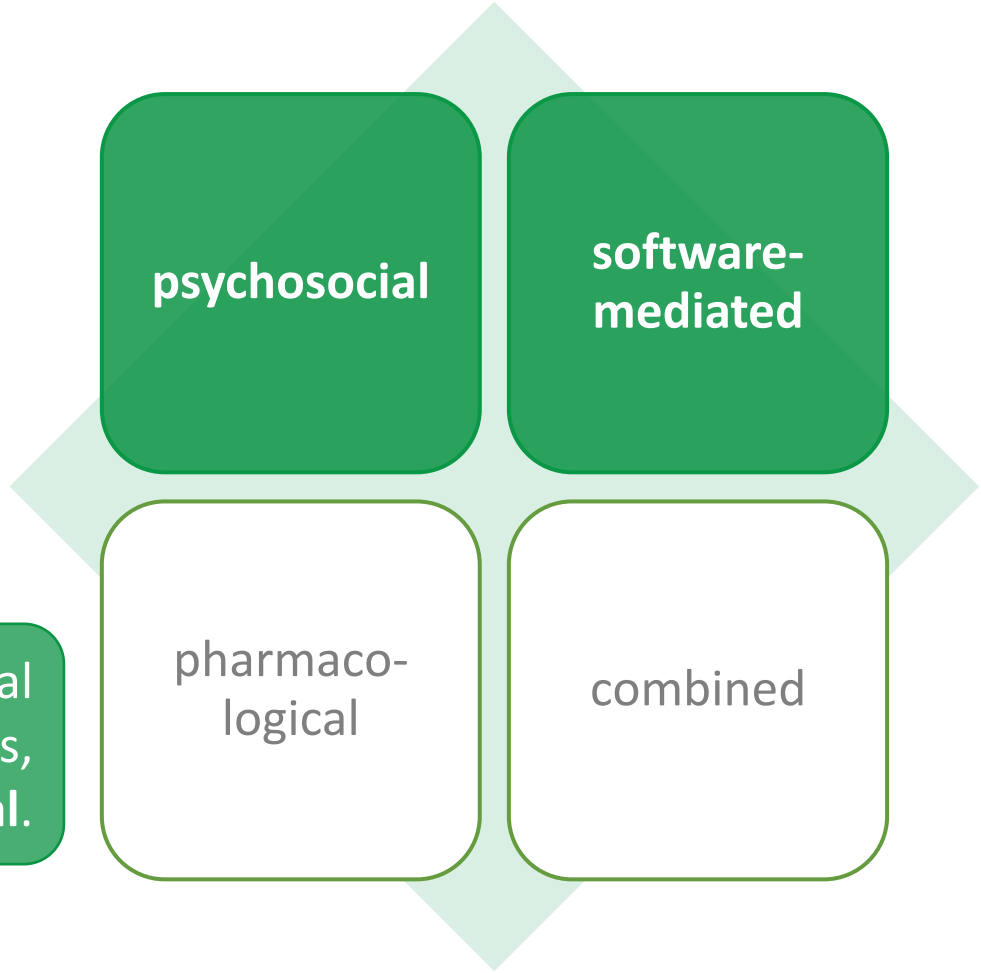
Possible countermeasures

There are **four types of countermeasures proven effective** by studies.

However, this training course will cover only the ones more relevant to the context of StepForME, i.e the **psycho-social and software-mediated measures**.



If someone you know needs pharmacological or combined countermeasures, **direct them to a professional**.

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Psycho-social countermeasures

- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**:
  CBT aims to help individuals understand the behavioural and cognitive components of their excessive actions and train them on coping responses and means to avoid relapse.
- **Educational strategies** carried out in schools
- **Craving intervention**:
  This intervention aims at recognising irrational beliefs and negative emotions regarding cravings and learning to cope with them.
- **Positive role of family dynamics**:
  This measure aims at avoiding or reducing the usage of digital devices by strengthening family relations.

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Software-mediated countermeasures

awareness raising

website as platform

gamification approach

mindfulness apps

direct intervention

self-regulation and social control

peer-to-peer support

use of apps to restrain the use of other apps

other (VR)

use of VR to improve interpersonal conflict management between parents and young adults as well as for conditioning

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Chapter 3: Effects of social media on mental health

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Use of social media among young people

- **88% – 90%** of young people **use social media**.
- They spend **9 to 12 hours daily** on social media (Nielsen, 2018).
- **Social networks** are the **most common form** of social media.

Source: own elaboration

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Social media and reliability of information

Social media can make people aware of the **mental health risks** and **solutions** to these dangers by creating effective communication.

Careful! **Receiving incorrect or even incomplete information** can pose a greater **threat to people's health**.

Accurate and reliable information should be available from **trusted ports**.

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Social media: negative effects

Studies have found that **social media use** can have the following **negative effects** (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2020).

- Loneliness
- Self-harm
- Poor sleep
- Anxiety and depression
- Decreased quality of everyday tasks / life satisfaction
- Cyberbullying
- **Dissatisfaction with body image**

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Social media: positive effects

However, the same research (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2020) found that **there's evidence of positive mental health effects** of social media:

- Getting health information
- Available mental health resources
- Tools for emotional support
- Maintaining relationships / reducing the risk of depression
- Active engagement with peers, friends and family
- Entertainment
- Self-expression
- **Increasing self-esteem and life satisfaction**

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Social media and self-esteem issues

As seen before, social media has an **important effect on self-esteem** and **the way we perceive ourselves**.

But how does this effect work?

by social comparison

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Upward and downward social comparison

upward social comparison

comparing oneself with “superior” others who have positive characteristics

inspiring vs. poorer self-evaluations

downward social comparison

comparing oneself with “inferior” others who have negative characteristics

improvements in self-evaluation vs. fear of becoming

Social media creates the **ideal climate for upward social comparison**:

“You present what you want others to see.”

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Indicators for comparison

The realistic offline selves are compared with idealised online personas of others.

The activity of one's social network is seen as an indicator of status or success.

Qualitative and quantitative data:

- **content** you post about your **quality of life**
- **number of likes** and **interactions**

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Can social media improve self-esteem?

Studies show that when **viewing one's profile or those of close** others (instead of strangers or acquaintances), **self-esteem is improved** (Wilcox & Stephen, 2013).

Because rather than being exposed to upward social comparisons, participants can **bask in their own idealised versions of themselves**, seeing their history and how far they have come.

Social media can be a place to express one's thoughts, but it can become a **vicious cycle of exposure to upward comparison** at the same time one expresses oneself in what is perceived to be a safe environment.

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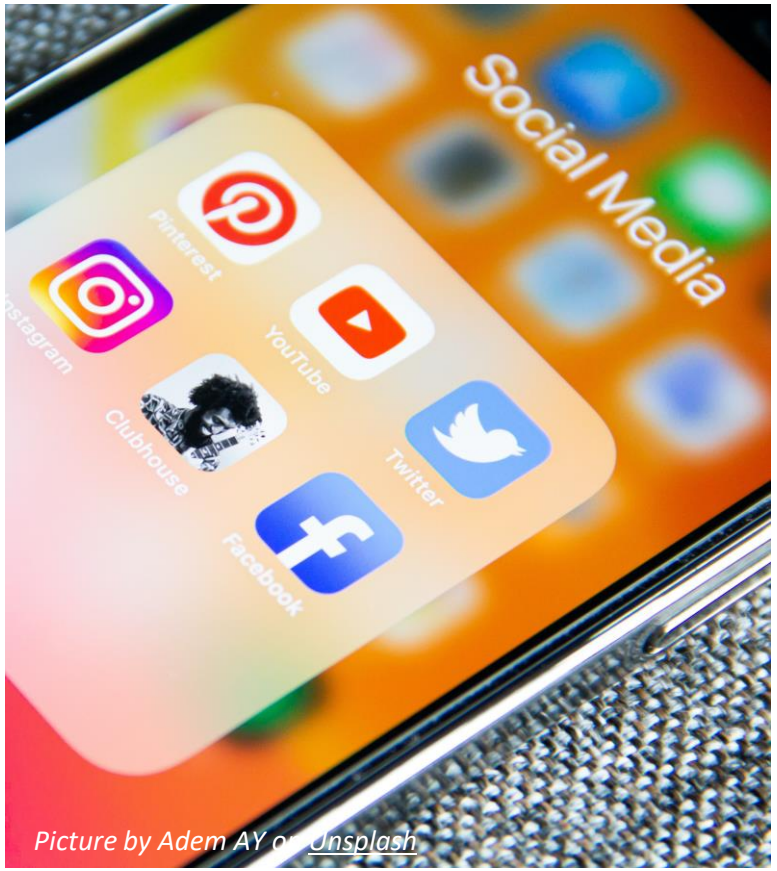
Critical use of social media

Social media is a double-edged sword:

The important thing is **to be able to reduce the negative effects of social media on mental health** and turn it into a **positive opportunity** by implementing appropriate strategies and actions that increase and strengthen the positive effects.



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Chapter 4: Activities

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Activity 1

The goal of these simple exercises is to **reflect on the content provided** so far and explore how it can be incorporated (if not already) into your organisation's professional practice:

Propose two strategies to enhance the positive effects of social media and tech tools **and to reduce the risks**.

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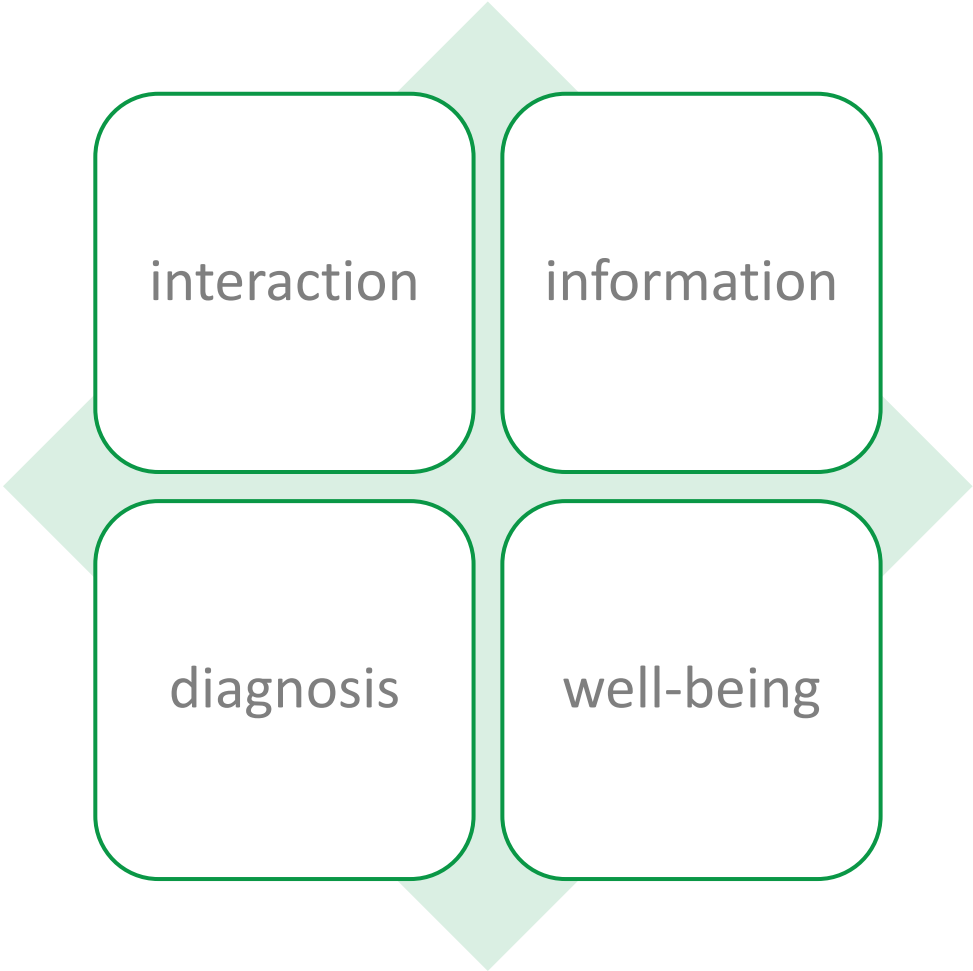
Activity 2

Make a **list of tech tools you use in your work** and then answer the following questions:

- Are you making the most out of them?
- Which categories explained in this module do they fit in?
- Is there a tool you don't use but think would be helpful? If so, from which category?

Now you can have a look in the handbook of technology-based practices for the intervention with young people with emotional welfare issues and see what you can find.

[Technology-based practices for the intervention with young people with emotional welfare issues (isocial.cat)]



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