

Keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility



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Beware the Momo Challenge - Information for all Parents

What is the Momo Challenge?

This is an online “game” that encourages young people to harm themselves and, in some cases, even take their own lives as recently reported in UK news. The game originally started in Mexico.

The Momo, is described as a WhatsApp “suicide challenge”, and can be found on Facebook, YouTube and Whatsapp and features an avatar of a woman with dark hair, pale skin and oversized eyes, It is understood the original artwork used by the hackers has been taken from a designer in Japan who has no connection whatsoever with the Momo challenge. This avatar sends young people images and instructions on how to self-harm themselves and others and the ultimate post tells them to take their own lives. Momo targets young children on social media.

The doll encourages them to add a contact on messaging service on WhatsApp etc. then hounds them with violent images and dares, “She” says that she knows personal things about the user and uses fear and threats to challenge the user. As the challenges intensify, the last thing Momo pressures you to do is to commit suicide. If the user fails to accept or pass any of the challenges, Momo sends even more threatening and violent images and texts until the user is coerced into doing the challenge. If none of these pressuring tactics work, Momo threatens to visit you in person, or while you’re sleeping and curse you. This can be terrifying to young children and teenagers.

The Spanish national police are among a number of forces urging gamers to avoid the new craze. Police in Spain tweeted: “Do not go into ‘Momo’! If you record the number on your calendar, you will see a strange woman’s face, it’s the latest WhatsApp viral to come in vogue among teenagers.”

Dozens of videos promoting the challenges are now on YouTube and included phone numbers for strangers.

One video seen in America, shows an ominous-sounding voice recording being sent to a child telling them to take a knife to their own throat.

Police are appealing to adults to supervise children and vulnerable people's online activity.

Experts warn that the viral nature of Momo means it can quickly spread panic online, as twisted internet users seize upon the craze to spread it further.

The game is reminiscent of the Blue Whale phenomenon, which was linked to at least 130 teenage deaths in Russia in 2017.

Guidance for Parents

"The NSPCC publishes advice and guidance for parents on discussing online safety with their children, as well as Net Aware - the UK's only parental guide to social media and gaming apps."

Among the most common signs to watch out for include children who:

- Become very secretive, especially about what they are doing online
- Are spending a lot of time on the internet and social media
- Are switching screens on their device when approached
- Are withdrawn or angry after using the internet or sending text messages
- Have lots of new phone numbers or email addresses on their devices

1. Use parental control tools

This can be used both in browsers and in antivirus software. It can be found in Version 9 of ESET Smart Security or also as a separate app ESET Parental Control for Android.

This sort of tools is also available for game consoles, such as Nintendo Wii and Xbox 360.

2. Check your child's phone/ Ipod/computer regularly. The Momo challenge is not the first challenge to encourage kids to participate in dangerous activities (the Slenderman and the Bluewhale challenge are similar challenges that were popular several years ago), and it will not be the last. If your child or teen is engaging in the Momo Challenge, or any other similar challenge, they will probably not volunteer that information to you. Remember you are your child's greatest protector and you have every right to know the apps your child is using and have every right to check their electronic devices.

- **Tell their children no-one has the right to make them do anything they do not want to do**

3. Take social media seriously, do not downplay its power in your children's lives. Social media can be a means of building friendships and connecting but it is also where most of our kids are bullied, lose confidence, feel isolated, and are exposed to porn and other unhealthy media. Even if they aren't sure what the Momo Challenge is, they may come upon this in the future, or other bizarre or dangerous

“challenges.” Educating our kids will empower them to stay away from challenges such as this, and even encourage them to help their friends.

4. Do not let your children send confidential information over the internet

Sensitive information should never be requested via e-mail or chat. Banks do not request your account data and much less your PIN in this way. It is also important not to give such valuable information to your children.

5. Do not answer nor eliminate stalking messages

If your child is a victim of cyber bullying, he or she should not retaliate. Explain that the stalker wants to provoke exactly this sort of reaction as it feeds his or her desire to harm. If you come across this sort of situations and if they happen again, notify the corresponding authorities. However, never erase any message received, as it is evidence of the act.

6. Talk to your children

The communication you have with your children plays a key role in their safety. It is much more productive to encourage them to talk about their fears and concerns than to punish them. A good environment and an open dialogue, both on the internet as well as in real life, may be the key to success when dealing with their well-being.

7. If you post something online, it stays there forever

Teach your children, that anything posted online stays there forever. What is more, they lose control over it as it can be shared by anybody, even by strangers. A good rule of thumb is not to share any photos, statuses or other content they would not want you or their grandma to see.

This applies to all forms of online presence - social networks, instant messengers, blogs or comments.

Block or delete unknown phone numbers from your child's phone.