



Wednesday, 27 February 2019

Online Safety Alert – MoMo

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to you regarding a significant concern that we have regarding some of our children's awareness of "MoMo" – a sinister craze that is becoming widely talked about online and amongst children in all year groups both inside and outside of school.

"Momo" seems to target young children on social media. A very sinister-looking doll encourages them to add a contact on messaging service WhatsApp, then hounds them with violent images and dares – some of which seem to encourage children to self-harm, sometimes stating that if they do not carry out a particular act, then they, or one of their loved ones will be killed. This is obviously causing some of our children a considerable amount of distress and worry. Please [click here](#) for further details.

This week, we have noticed that some of our children have been talking about "MoMo" in school and some have even chosen to role-play this during play times. As a school, we have ask all teachers to talk to their children about the inappropriateness of this and to ensure that any playtime games based around this are stopped straight away.

Organisations such as the Police and NSPCC have also released statements saying that the danger lays with children feeling pressured to either follow the orders on any app by carrying out "challenges", or because of peer pressure in chat rooms. The game 'MoMo' and can be accessed via websites or apps such as Whatsapp, Youtube and Facebook. Whatsapp is currently only allowed for those over the age of 16 years old; Facebook and YouTube are for those over 13 years old.

As you know – we actively teach online safety here at Warden House, however we strongly recommend that you speak to your children about keeping themselves safe online and you may also want to check your parental controls and search histories. Many excellent tips and guidance can be found on the NSPCC's website on how to do this. These can be accessed at www.nspcc.org.uk. On Facebook, there is also a resource '[EST E-Safety](#)' which can give you, as parents, excellent tips to keep your child safe online. Finally, CEOP has many superb resources to help your child understand online-safety in a fun, interactive way and there is a section with advice for parents: <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>.

Should you have any further concerns or questions, please contact your child's class teacher in the first instance and they will be happy to help. Thank you for your vigilance and support.

Yours faithfully

Rob Hackett
Headteacher

It's important to note that new challenges are arising on the internet all the time. We have created to this guide to raise awareness of the issue and offer advice on helping parents to talk to their children about making safer decisions online. See also our '7 conversation starters' guide for more tips on better communication with your child.



Momo is a sinister 'challenge' that has been around for some time. It has recently resurfaced and once again has come to the attention of schools and children across the country. Dubbed the 'suicide killer game', Momo has been heavily linked with apps such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and most recently (and most worryingly)... YouTube Kids. The scary doll-like figure reportedly sends graphic violent images, and asks users to partake in dangerous challenges like waking up at random hours and has even been associated with self-harm. It has been reported that the 'Momo' figure was originally created as a sculpture and featured in an art gallery in Tokyo and unrelated to the 'Momo' challenge we are hearing about in the media.

What parents need to know about

MOMO

CHILDREN'S VIDEOS BEING 'HIJACKED'

There have been recent reports that some seemingly innocent videos on YouTube and YouTube Kids (such as 'surprise eggs', unboxing videos and Minecraft videos) have been edited by unknown sources to include violence provoking and/or other inappropriate content. Even though YouTube monitor and remove videos that include inappropriate content, clips can be uploaded and viewed thousands of times before they get reported and removed. As a parent, it's difficult to spot these videos as the harmful content doesn't appear until halfway through the video.

DISTRESSING FOR CHILDREN

Popular YouTubers and other accounts have been uploading reaction videos, showing their experience of the MOMO challenge. Some of the videos include a disclosure message warning that the content may be "inappropriate or offensive to some audiences" and that "viewer discretion is advised" but these videos are still easily accessed by clicking 'I understand and wish to proceed'. The image of the 'Momo' character can be deeply distressing to children and young people and it's important to note that it may slip through parental settings and filters.

SUGGESTED VIDEOS ON YOUTUBE

Video apps such as YouTube include an 'up next' feature which automatically starts playing another video based on the video just watched. Due to YouTube's algorithm, users are shown 'suggested videos' that they may be interested in. The thumbnails used on suggested videos are purposefully created in a way to encourage viewers to click them. During our research, we found that when watching one Momo related video, we were shown countless other Momo themed videos and other scary content which would be age-inappropriate for children under 18.



National Online Safety

Top Tips for Parents

TELL THEM IT'S NOT REAL

Just like any urban legend or horror story, the concept can be quite frightening and distressing for young people. Whilst this may seem obvious, it's important for you to reiterate to your child that Momo is not a real person and cannot directly harm them! Also, tell your child to not go openly searching for this content online as it may only cause more distress.

BE PRESENT

It's important for you, as a parent or carer, to be present while your children are online. This will give you a greater understanding of what they are doing on their devices, as well as providing you with the opportunity to discuss, support and stop certain activities that your child may be involved in. As the nature of each task become progressively worse it's also important to recognise any changes in your child's behaviour.

TALK REGULARLY WITH YOUR CHILD

As well as monitoring your child's activity, it's important for you discuss it with them too. Not only will this give you an understanding of their online actions, but those honest and frequent conversations will encourage your child to feel confident to discuss issues and concerns they may have related to the online world.

DEVICE SETTINGS & PARENTAL CONTROLS

Ensure that you set up parental controls for your devices at home. This will help to restrict the types of content that your child can view, as well as help you to monitor their activity. In addition to this, it's vital that you are aware of your device and account settings to ensure your child's utmost safety. For example, on YouTube you can turn off 'suggested auto-play' on videos to stop your child from viewing content that they have not directly selected.

PEER PRESSURE

Trends and viral challenges can be tempting for children to take part in; no matter how dangerous or scary they seem. Make sure you talk to your child about how they shouldn't succumb to peer pressure and do anything they are not comfortable with, online or offline. If they are unsure, encourage them to talk to you or another trusted adult.

REAL OR HOAX?

As a parent it is natural to feel worried about certain things you see online that may be harmful to your child. However, not everything you see online is true. Check the validity of the source and be mindful of what you share as it may only cause more worry.

REPORT & BLOCK

You can't always rely on parental controls to block distressing or harmful material. People find ways around a platform's algorithm in order to share and promote this type of material. Due to this, we advise that you flag and report any material you deem to be inappropriate or harmful as soon as you come across it. You should also block the account/content to prevent your child from viewing it. Also encourage your child to record/screenshot any content they feel could be malicious to provide evidence in order to escalate the issue to the appropriate channels.

FURTHER SUPPORT

Speak to the safeguarding lead within your child's school should you have any concerns regarding your child's online activity or malicious content that could affect them.

If your child sees something distressing, it is important that they know where to go to seek help and who their trusted adults are. They could also contact Childline where a trained counsellor will listen to anything that's worrying them.

The Childline phone number is 0800 1111.

SOURCES:
<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/sick-videos-youtube-youtube-kids-14052196>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk>
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-47359623>

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