

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 partway 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

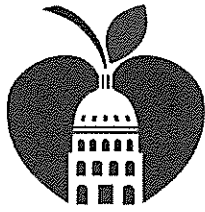
Speak to the safeguarding lead within your child's school should you have any concerns regarding your child's online activity or malicious content that could affect them.

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-14052158>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk>
<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-47359623>



AUSTIN
Independent School District

Office of
Counseling

Dear Families,

It has been reported that a recent social media challenge directed at children and teens, called the "Momo Challenge", is creating concern throughout the country. Austin ISD's Counseling office is urging parents to continue to monitor their children's use of social media and the internet. The "Momo Challenge" is an online cyberbullying game targeting young kids and teenagers through Facebook, WhatsApp, Youtube, Youtube Kids and other social media sites. It threatens children with violence if they don't commit potentially dangerous activities.

What parents can do:

- Consider age appropriateness for children's use of technology, time spent on social media and overall reminders of family expectations for making good choices.
- Ask your child if they know about the challenge and engage in conversations about safe technology use.
- Children should never respond to unidentified messages on social media and parents should advise their children to never share personal data, photographs or phone numbers on the internet.

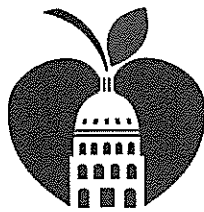
How to report a concerning behavior:

Families can call 311 non-emergency services

Your child's school counselors and administrative teams are aware of this most recent social media and internet concern and will monitor the situation in their buildings. Please contact your child's school if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Counseling Office



AUSTIN
Independent School District

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Queridas Familias:

Se ha reportado que hay un reciente reto por medio social que está dirigido hacia los niños y adolescentes, que se llama el Reto del Momo "Momo Challenge" que está creando preocupación a través del país. La oficina de Consejeros del Distrito de Austin está urgiendo a los padres que continúen monitoreando sus hijos en el uso del medio social y el internet. El Reto del Momo es un juego en el internet que se dirige a causar intimidación hacia niños pequeños y adolescentes por medio de Facebook, WhatsApp, Youtube, Youtube Kids y otros medios sociales. Amenaza a los niños con violencia si no cometen actividades que potencialmente son peligrosas.

Que es lo que pueden hacer los padres:

- Consideren el uso de tecnología apropiada de su hijo, el tiempo que usan el medio social y recordatorios de las expectativas de tomar buenas decisiones.
- Pregunte a su hijo de que es lo que saben de este reto y participé en conversaciones sobre el uso seguro de la tecnología.
- Los niños nunca deben de responder a mensajes no identificados en el medio social y padres deben aconsejar a sus hijos a nunca compartir información personal, fotografías o números de teléfono en el internet.

Como reportar comportamiento de preocupación :

Familias pueden llamar al 311 para servicios que no son emergencias

Los administradores y los consejeros de la escuela de su hijo están informados sobre la preocupación más reciente de las redes sociales y el internet y estarán monitoreando la situación en las escuelas. Favor de comunicarse con la escuela de su hijo(a) si tiene preguntas.

Sinceramente,

La Oficina de Consejeros