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Dear Parents,

You are probably aware of the recent news about the “Momo challenge”. We have sought advice from the DCC safeguarding team and have attached some recommended information for you.

Advice for parents: Have you heard about the Momo Challenge?

The 'game', played via Whatsapp, involves contacting 'MoMo', who issues a series of challenges - the final challenge, reportedly, being suicide. It's been getting a lot of press over the last few days, and is understandably causing parents a lot of concern.

It is worth noting that a lot of the hype around 'Momo' is being generated by popular YouTubers posting videos of themselves taking part, capitalizing on the apparent popularity of the trend. Although a lot of the information about the 'Momo Challenge' is rather concerning, the number of reported cases of children harming themselves because of the game is extremely low. The challenge has alleged ties to three cases of teens killing themselves in Asia and South America, but there is nothing that proves that it was the direct cause.

This article from Parent Zone gives an overview of what it's all about. Separate fact from fiction, and learn how to help keep your kids safe here: <http://bit.ly/2GNACjz>”.

The Momo challenge is the latest in a series of online challenges that emerge and cause enormous concern. Sometimes the challenges are more myth than reality but that doesn't reduce the worry. In this article, we answer some of the questions you may have.

What is the Momo Challenge?

The Momo character — the disfigured face attached to a bird's body — was, in fact, a prop named 'Mother Bird' made in Japan three years ago for an art exhibition. Its sinister stretched features make for a disturbing image that could easily upset or worry a younger child. The Momo challenge is allegedly 'played' over WhatsApp. The Momo character asks would-be participants to contact 'her' and do a series of challenges — the final challenge being suicide. Of course, the evidence for this behaviour happening is limited — there isn't much evidence of a child actually being harmed and what seems to be happening is that the image is spreading because people are using the image in their profiles.

How do children get to know about it?

Children are hearing about the challenge through numerous sources online — the coverage that is happening in the news and on social media is also leading to old fashioned playground curiosity.

It's important to remember that the hype around these crazes often leads children to investigate for themselves even if they haven't had direct contact.

Why would children be drawn to it?

There are lots of reasons for children to be drawn towards these challenges even ones that subsequently turn out to be nothing more than urban myth. The drama can be enticing especially when a popular Influencer or gamer is talking about it online.

Is it something to worry about?

Recently, the Momo challenge has been covered extensively in the news and the disfigured avatar has been popping up all over the internet. It's important to know that there isn't much evidence of there being harm to children aside from the upset caused when a child sees a disturbing image or hears about something that sounds frightening.

However, there is no doubt that the Momo phenomenon has reached the UK, so it is something that parents need to be familiar with and ready to talk about with their child.

What should parents do?

Although the Momo challenge is now being reported as a hoax, the reports and warnings could still cause distress to children. It's important that parents talk to their children about it. The best way to start is to ask a general question about whether they have seen anything online that upset or worried them. Explain that there are often things that happen online that can be misleading or frightening and that some things are designed to get a lot of attention.

Parents need to follow their child's lead — introducing the idea of the Momo challenge to a child who isn't familiar with it might lead them to investigate. On the other hand, avoiding mentioning it won't provide a chance for a good discussion. Take your child's lead and whatever you decide about overtly talking about Momo, make sure that they know that contacting strangers and doing anything at all that they are asked to do online or off that makes them feel scared, worried or uncomfortable is not OK.

Remember that curiosity is a natural part of growing up so don't blame them for being drawn to this sort of digital drama. Try to listen, keep calm and help them to recognise that however tempting these things may be to explore, it's never sensible to be drawn in.

Parents of younger children may also want to install YouTube Kids, a more controlled version of YouTube intended for families, for better control of what young children may come across online.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate in contacting us.

Yours sincerely



Wayne Roberts
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