February 28, 2019

Mooresville Families -

Online safety is a very important factor for our students and families. Recently, families across the U.S. and in our area have experienced issues with disturbing and violent messages being seen by and sent to children despite many online parental controls being in place.

A very concerning issue being reported by a few local parents is the "Momo Challenge." This involves a photo of a disturbing doll-like character that pops up and challenges children to commit dangerous and even violent acts, including self-harm, using detailed and graphic information. These messages can come through a variety of social media channels and have even been reported as hidden within videos using popular cartoon characters on "child-friendly" applications such as on YouTube Kids. The image of Momo and the disturbing messages can cause children to have extreme anxiety and the messages sometimes warn that telling an adult will result in kidnapping or other scary consequences.

We are not sharing this information directly with students but ask that families discuss online behavior with their children. Please consider how your children may have access to social media at home, away from home, or through friends and siblings. We've included several resources in this message to help parents have conversations about internet safety and be informed about internet and social media best practices. Additional resources are available at www.MooresvilleSchools.org/Parents

If your child needs supports, please contact your school office to learn about resources available through our Family Services, Adult and Child, and Youth First counseling services. Thank you for your support of our schools and our students.

Mooresville Schools Administration

Family Cyber Safety Links

Momo Challenge

[Momo Challenge – What Parents Need to Know](#)
[Momo Online Safety Guide](#) (see graphic next page)

Internet & Cell Phone Safety

[Parent Guide to Internet Safety](#)   [Creating a Family Media Plan](#) (American Academy of Pediatrics)
[Internet Safety 101](#)   [Teaching Kids About Internet Safety](#)
[SafeKids.com](#)   [Talking with Kids About Being Online](#) (Federal Trade Commission)
[Family Online Safety Institute](#)   [NetSmartz.org](#) (National Center of Missing & Exploited Children)
[Common Sense Media](#)   [IDOE Bullying & Cyberbullying Prevention Resources](#)

Commonly Used Apps Among Children and Teens

Please note that phone and tablet apps can be hidden in folders or use different names or images. It's best to open each app to see exactly where the link leads.

ASK.FM is an app notorious for cyber bullying which encourages to anonymously message others to ask questions.

BUMBLE is a dating app, similar to Tinder, that requires women to make first contact, though kids are known to create fake accounts and falsify their age.

BURNBOOK lets users to post anonymous rumors through text, audio and pictures.

CALCULATOR% is a secret app that allows users to hide photos, videos, files and browser history.

HOLLA is a video chat app that allows users to meet through their phones across the world in seconds.

HOT OR NOT allows users to rate profiles and find people in their area and chat.

INSTAGRAM is one of the most popular apps among children, who are known to use this app for fake accounts and to text since the conversation is deleted when someone leaves the chat.

KIK allows anyone to direct message instead of text messaging and gives unlimited access to anyone, anytime.

LIVE.ME is a Live streaming app that uses geolocation to share videos so users can see the broadcaster's location.

OMEGLE allows users to chat for free and encourages anonymous chatting with strangers.

SNAPCHAT allows users to take pictures and videos that disappear with new features like 'stories' that allow users to view content for 24 hours and see your location.

WHISPER is an anonymous social media app that allows users to share secrets with others and can share users' locations so they can meet.

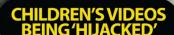**WISHBONE** allows users to compare photos to each other and rate one another on a scale.

YELLOW allows teens to flirt with one other similar to Tinder.

Source: Bulloch County Sheriff's Office

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
NOS

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 everthing 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.bbfc.co.uk
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-47359623