



Dear parents and carers

Many children are currently worried about online content which has gone viral and is currently spreading fear amongst adults and children. E Safety advisors have declared that Momo is a hoax and not a real game. However, this does not stop the scary looking figure from appearing on the Internet and scaring children. Neither does it stop fake stories spreading across social media.

We would like to take this as an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of online safety at home.

Stories like this thrive upon fear and panic. With the knowledge that this character and game is not real we can reassure children that nothing is going to force them to do anything they do not want to do. We can also create open discussions with children about their online activity. Reminding children to speak if they see anything that makes them feel uncomfortable and not to communicate with anyone online they have not met in person are good discussions to have before going online

We are committed to keeping children safe, and our children participate in regular E-Safety sessions to ensure our children know how to keep safe online. However, we need your support to ensure every child has a safe, fun online experience at home.

The National Online Safety team have issued this extremely useful guide on how parents can help protect their children from viewing distressing content online. Please turn overleaf to view this information.

If there any issues that you would wish to discuss our learning mentor team are always available.

Yours sincerely,

Head teacher

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.



For more information access:

www.thinkuknow.co.uk – Visit the "Parent/Carer" Section and use the "Click CEOP" button to seek advice and report online abuse

www.childnet.com – Visit the "Parent and Carer" section helpful tools and advice

www.internetmatters.org – A range of advice and support on issues for parents

www.nspcc.org.uk/online-safety – NSPCC provides information for parents about popular social media sites, apps and games.

www.saferinternet.org.uk – Parents guides to safety tools on popular devices and signposts report mechanisms for some websites.

www.kent.police.uk/internetsafety - Guidance from Kent Police