



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.



Taken from the BBC News Online 28.02.19

Following a flurry of scare stories, some schools have warned parents about the "momo challenge" - but fact-checkers say it is a hoax.

The character, shown with bulging eyes, supposedly appears on WhatsApp and sets children dangerous "challenges" such as harming themselves.

But charities say there have been no reports of anybody receiving messages or harming themselves as a result.

They warn that media coverage has amplified a false scare story.

"News coverage of the momo challenge is prompting schools or the police to warn about the supposed risks posed by the momo challenge, which has in turn produced more news stories warning about the challenge," said the **Guardian media editor Jim Waterson**.

What is 'momo'?

Earlier this week, versions of the momo story went viral on social media. They attracted hundreds of thousands of shares and resulted in newspaper articles reporting the tale.

According to the false story, children are contacted on WhatsApp by an account claiming to be momo. They are supposedly encouraged to save the character as a contact and then asked to carry out challenges as well as being told not to tell other members of their family.

The UK Safer Internet Centre told the Guardian that it was "fake news".

Several newspaper articles claim the momo challenge had been "linked" to the deaths of 130 teenagers in Russia. The reports have not been corroborated by the relevant authorities.

The image of momo is actually a photo of a sculpture by Japanese special-effects company Link Factory. According to pop-culture website **Know Your Meme**, it first gained attention in 2016.

'Urban legend'

Fact-checking website **Snopes** warned that although the momo challenge was a hoax, the reports and warnings could still cause distress to children.

"The subject has generated rumours that in themselves can be cause for concern among children," wrote David Mikkelsen on the site.

Police in the UK have not reported any instances of children harming themselves due to the momo meme.

The charity Samaritans said it was "not aware of any verified evidence in this country or beyond" linking the momo meme to self-harm.

The NSPCC told the Guardian it had received more calls from newspapers than from concerned parents.

What should parents do?

Police have suggested that rather than focusing on the specific momo meme, parents could use the opportunity to educate children about internet safety, as well as having an open conversation about what children are accessing.

"This is merely a current, attention-grabbing example of the minefield that is online communication for kids," wrote the Police Service of Northern Ireland, in a Facebook post.

Broadcaster Andy Robertson, who creates videos online as Geek Dad, said in a podcast that parents should not "share warnings that perpetuate and mythologise the story".

"A better focus is good positive advice for children, setting up technology appropriately and taking an interest in their online interactions," he said.

To avoid causing unnecessary alarm, parents should also be careful about sharing news articles with other adults that perpetuate the myth.