

The Momo Challenge - a factsheet for parents

What it is

Coined the “suicide challenge”, Momo is a new viral game that encourages players to perform a series of challenges in order to meet ‘Mother Bird’ - a disfigured character (inspired by Japanese art) with bulging eyes and untidy black hair on a chicken-like body. Light-hearted and fun at the outset, this game experience quickly darkens, absorbing players who are encouraged to perform acts of violence and self-harm through a series of progressively risky challenges.

Originating in Mexico, it is easily accessed through social media shares (predominantly Facebook and YouTube) and is rapidly spreading across the world.

Why it's on our radar

The challenges issued in this game present a serious risk to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people in our schools here in the UK, as does the distressing content when a player refuses to carry on. With worrying similarities to the ‘Blue Whale challenge’, it has also been linked to at least one case of childhood suicide.

The low down

- Players are encouraged to contact Momo and provide their mobile number.
- They will then receive instructions to perform a series of challenges, via SMS or Whatsapp.
- Player refusal can trigger severely abusive messaging and their mobile device being hacked.
- The final challenge is to commit suicide in order to meet ‘Mother Bird’.

Why children like it

Sharing and commentary on Social Media platforms has created a level of intrigue and curiosity about this game, which is initially light hearted and fun. Fundamentally, however, this is a game that targets vulnerable children and young people online, as those with mental health issues are more likely to be drawn to the psychological nature of the challenges.

What to do

Please do not share the image, name of the challenge or information about the challenge with your child/children unless they specifically talk to you about it, as it is quite frightening. Once they have seen it, they cannot unsee it; it has caused nightmares and a lot of worry for some pupils. Natural curiosity might lead your child to search for it online if you talk about it specifically – lots of children like the idea of something scary or that is ‘banned’, but the reality can be quite different.

Police have appealed to parents to not simply focus on Momo, urging them to:

- Ensure they know what their children can access online
- Ensure children understand the importance of not giving personal information to anyone they do not know
- Tell their children no-one has the right to make them do anything they do not want to do
- Use parental controls to keep children safe

A spokesperson for the NSPCC said: "The constantly evolving digital world means a steady influx of new apps and games and can be hard for parents to keep track of. That's why it's important for parents to talk regularly with children about these apps and games and the potential risks they can be exposed to. The NSPCC publishes advice and guidance for parents on discussing online safety with their children, as well as Net Aware - the UK's only parental guide to social media and gaming apps."

Among the most common signs to watch out for include children who:

- Become very secretive, especially about what they are doing online
- Are spending a lot of time on the internet and social media
- Are switching screens on their device when approached
- Are withdrawn or angry after using the internet or sending text messages
- Have lots of new phone numbers or email addresses on their devices

If adults are concerned or have any questions on how to approach the subject with their children, they can contact the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or visit the NSPCC website.