

## The MOMO Challenge

Dear Parents & Carers,

PLEASE READ:

We would like to draw your attention to the message below from the Hampshire Police Education Team. The information relates to the latest social media concern that is circulating. Please read the whole email below from Hampshire Police.

We must stress that we are not sending you the details to share with your children as this will draw attention to the matter and encourage children to engage (as stated below from the police too), we are sending you the details so that you are aware and so that you can monitor the online activity of your children. Please be alert to any of the indicators and to all internet and social media activity and discussions.

Please read the below from PC Maria Carrick

Dear Schools and Partners

As part of our commitment to working in partnership with schools, partners and parents, I am sending this email out expeditiously to ensure you are aware of an internet 'suicide-influencing game' which has come to my attention called The MOMO Challenge which encourages children to harm themselves and is reported to be linked to several deaths around the world and is now appearing across the UK. Below is a brief summary of what the MOMO Challenge is and we ask that you share this information among your colleague and parent networks.

With no intention to be condescending, given the horrendous nature of the MOMO challenge, I feel it necessary to advise professionals and parents to seriously consider any decision to raise awareness of it to children and young people as a means to safeguard them, unless necessary; as we know, with all good intentions, drawing attention to it may result in them gravitating towards it.

What is the MOMO Challenge?



Mirroring the 'Blue Whale' suicide-game of 2017, The MOMO Challenge is targeted at children and young people through social media by people presenting as MOMO, a terrifying looking doll.

The doll encourages them to add a contact on the messaging service WhatsApp from an unknown number, once contact is made, children are subsequently bombarded with terrifying images and

messages reportedly ranging from threats and dares which encourage them to self-harm and even commit suicide. The following video link may be useful

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zznzc3tmNw>

Although known of in other parts of the world since last year, it appears to be making its way across the UK. MOMO has been associated to multiple platforms used by children including Youtube, Kidstube, Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp.

Police in Northern Ireland have warned parents after a mother reported finding the 'creepy game' on her 7 year old daughter's iPad; they have since posted a message about the challenge on Facebook, referring to a video of a MOMO interaction in America showing an 'ominous sounding voice recording' sent to a child, telling them to use a knife on their own throat – with another making threats against a child's family if a 'challenge' is not completed, describing it as 'chilling viewing'.

So far, a 12-year-old girl and a 16-year-old boy, both from Colombia, are thought to have killed themselves after taking part in the MOMO challenge. The deaths occurred in September, just 48 hours apart; it was thought that the two knew each other. After the police seized their phones, they said they found messages that were linked to the game.

A concerned British mother spoke to the media last week to highlight that the 'sick game' had already spread to Manchester, after her 7yr old son told her that some of his schoolmates told him to look up the MOMO challenge; she went on to say that when they watched the video, the MOMO character told him to tell everyone to be in fear of MOMO or it will kill him in his sleep, causing distress to the boy and his friends.

It is understood the original artwork used by the hackers has been taken from a designer in Japan who has no connection whatsoever with the MOMO challenge.

The Real Motive? Police in Northern Ireland outlined in their statement that they believe the game is being used by hackers seeking and harvesting information, warning that while it is perceived as an horrendous 'suicide game' targeting children, likely to get thousands of hits, it 'misses the bigger picture'. There are now numerous variations and imitators.

NSPCC Response & Advice for Parents: A spokesperson for the NSPCC in Northern Ireland 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 overall online safety with their children, as well as promoting 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. Children who are worried about their activity on apps or online games can contact Childline 24 hours a day, online and over the phone on 0800 1111.