



CRESTWOOD
COMMUNITY SCHOOL

TNH/JSS

28 February 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

As the safeguarding lead for Crestwood Community School, I felt it important to write and make you aware of a new internet 'suicide-influencing game' called **The MOMO Challenge**. This encourages children to harm themselves and is reported to be linked to several deaths around the world and is now appearing across the UK. At Crestwood we feel that we need to bring it to your attention, even though recent BBC broadcast believes it is a hoax, the media attention is hyped it up. Although, we believe raising awareness of this with children and young people is necessary as a means to safeguard them, we are aware that sometimes drawing attention to it may result in them gravitating towards it. However, we wish to work with parents to alleviate its impact.

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 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.

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 with 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. It referred 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' was 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 and it was believed that they 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 school mates 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 would kill him in his sleep, causing distress to the boy and his friends.

Crestwood Community School

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There is a short Youtube video which may be useful for parents which explains step-by-step how MOMO may contact and communicate with children, with examples of graphics they may receive – please note this is not intended for children to view and adult viewer discretion is advised - https://youtu.be/KX_XSDrOyzo

The Police believe the real motive behind the MOMO Challenge is for hackers to seek and harvest personal information. They go on to warn that while it is perceived as a horrendous ‘suicide game’ targeting children, likely to get thousands of hits, it ‘misses the bigger picture’. There are now numerous variations and imitators.

The advice that the NSPCC are giving parents is clear. The constantly evolving digital world means a steady influx of new apps and games and can be hard for parents to keep track of. 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 parents are concerned or have any questions on how to approach the subject with their children, please contact myself or any of the pastoral team in school. Parents can also 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.

Yours sincerely

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