

# MOMO CHALLENGE & ONLINE SAFETY

## SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Dear Parents / Guardians,

You may have become aware of an online phenomenon called the Momo Challenge which has resurfaced on multiple social media platforms. While many highly regarded media outlets (The Atlantic, CNN, BBC) are reporting this to be a hoax, it can still be distressing to children and parents.

The Momo Challenge started in 2016 and has reappeared on a regular basis, most recently in the summer of 2018. The Momo challenge is said to have involved a picture of a girl with bulging eyes and a widespread mouth. This image is actually a picture of a sculpture by a Japanese artist, Keisuke Aisawa titled Mother Bird and was on display at Tokyo's Vanilla Gallery. Media has reported that this picture and accompanying 'suicide challenge' has appeared in children's YouTube videos such as Peppa the Pig, Paw Patrol and Minecraft gameplay. However, there is no evidence for these claims and such content runs contrary to YouTube's community guidelines. YouTube has recently made assurances that they will immediately delete any inappropriate content as soon as it is reported.

Although the Momo Challenge is thought to be a malicious hoax, parents should be aware that there are bad actors on-line who target children and malicious content can slip through. Some of these bad actors create YouTube videos whose thumbnails and titles look innocent and appropriate for children. However, 4 to 10 minutes into the video, inappropriate content will be inserted. This can be frightening and distressing to young children.

It is a sad reality that phenomenon such as the Momo Challenge do circulate regularly. Parents should not overreact, however, it is important to speak to your children regarding all aspects of their online activity and explain potential risk of using certain streaming platforms so that they can recognize dangerous online content and behavior.

Remember that positive, meaningful relationships with trusted adults is the most powerful protective factor for our children.

### SOME HELPFUL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT ONLINE SAFETY

Mediasmarts: Canada's Centre for Digital 7 & Media Literacy:

<http://mediasmarts.ca>

Canadian Red Cross: Kids Safety Online:

<https://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/violence-bullying-and-abuse-prevention/parents/kids-safety-online>

London Public Library Internet Safety - games to teach your child internet safety & website recommendations:

<https://www.londonpubliclibrary.ca/page/internet-safety>

RCMP Internet Safety Resources:

<http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/is-si/index-eng.htm>

**Check out these sources of information to help you support your children navigating the online world more safely.**

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILIES

1. Create an ongoing dialogue with your children about their online activity. Don't wait for a crisis. Become informed about what your child is consuming online. Create conversation about 'what happened online today' as you would 'what happened at school today'.
2. This is not the first and will not be the last social media concern that your kids will encounter online. Be fully present, as much as you possibly can be, with your children's online activities. Encourage your children to talk to you about anything they encounter online that scares or confuses them.
3. Help your children create any online accounts that they may have to ensure that their personal information is protected.
4. Their profile or cover photo should never be an actual photo of your child and should not include your child's real name or any identifying information (such as birthdate or age).
5. Create a strong password with your child so that it cannot be easily accessed – and ensure that you know their password(s).
6. Children should only communicate online with people they know in real life.
7. Block or report inappropriate videos to the app it was seen in (YouTube, Instagram etc). If you have concerns about your children accessing YouTube, be aware that you can block YouTube from your internet router: <https://www.wikihow.com/Block-Unwanted-Site-From-Your-Router>
8. There are safe YouTube Channels that are approved for children:  
Ryan Toys Review, Blippi, The Axel Show, CookieSwirlC, Toys Unlimited, Peppa Pig – Official Channel
9. It is recommended that you investigate any *new* YouTube channels that your children want to watch and scan for inappropriate content. Do not rely on the thumbnails or titles of the videos.
10. Many streaming apps (such as Netflix) have a kid-friendly function that can be turned on to allow children to browse and stream videos without being exposed to inappropriate content.
11. Many parents are worried about infringing on their children's independence and this can be especially hard with teenagers. But your child needs your help in navigating the online world. You have every right to know what they are doing. And they need you to help protect them.

Educate yourself! Check out the reliable online resources listed in the box on the front page for information and tips to help you support safe navigation of the online world with your family. Teach your children critical thinking skills with online media so that they can be active and informed digital citizens.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

### London/Middlesex Crisis Intake Team

- 24 hour support for children & youth ages 0 to 18
- 519-433-0334

### Wellkin Oxford/Elgin – Crisis Response & Urgent Care

- 24 hour support for children & youth ages 0 to 18
- 519-539-0463

### Reach Out Services: Mental Health & Addictions Crisis Services

- 24 hour support for youth and adults, 16 years and up
- 519-433-2023
- [www.reachout247.ca](http://www.reachout247.ca)

### Kid's Help Phone

- 24 hour support for children & youth age 20 and under
- 1-800-668-6868
- Text: 686868
- [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)