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 times and has 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. Through 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 these videos include a disclosure message warning that the content may be "inappropriate or offensive to some audiences" and that "nontextual disclaimer is advised" but these videos are still easily accessed. 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 purposely 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 16.

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 reassure 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 caregiver, to be present while your child is online. This will give you 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 nature of each task occurs progressively worsen it's also important to recognize any changes in your child's behavior.

TALK REGULARLY WITH YOUR CHILD
As well as monitoring your child's activity, it's important for you to 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 comfortable discussing 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 type 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 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 try part in, no matter how dangerous or inappropriate 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/then shot 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 adult are. They could also contact Childline where a trained counsellor will listen to anything that's worrying them.

The Childline phone number is 0800 111 111.
Online safety tips for parents of pre-school children
0-5 Year Olds

Checklist
Put yourself in control
Make use of the parental controls available on your home broadband and any internet-enabled devices. You can find out how at your broadband provider’s website or by visiting internetmatters.org.

Search safely
Use safe search engines such as swiggle.org.uk or kids-search.com. Safe search settings can also be activated on Google and other search engines as well as YouTube. You can find out more at google.co.uk/safetycentre.

Set boundaries
It’s never too early to start setting rules about when and for how long your child can use devices and start to introduce the subject of internet safety at the same time. Encourage children to use devices in a communal area, keep other devices out of reach and use passwords so they can’t go online without asking you first.

Explore together
Set your homepage to a child-friendly site such as CBeebies and give them a user account which only allows access to sites and apps you’ve chosen.

Help them learn through games
Games are a great way for young children to explore the internet and learn about the world around them. You can choose safe, fun and educational games free of charge from providers such as Fisher Price or about their favourite characters like Peppa Pig.

Children can now have a digital footprint before they learn to speak and often before they’re even born.

Internet Matters is a free online resource for every parent in the UK. We’ll show you the best ways to protect your children online as they grow up – with information, advice and support on all the big e-safety issues.