

01 March 2019

School Effectiveness
Education and Skills
County Hall
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 8JN

To: Headteachers of all schools in Wiltshire

Your Ref.:

Our Ref.:

NB/HD

Dear Colleague

Internet safety advice for parents

In the last few days there has been widespread media coverage of a hoax associated with the “momo challenge”. Like the “blue whale challenge” and various other false stories in the past, there is no evidence that these challenges exist or pose a risk to children.

However, anxiety can be caused by continuing to circulate and publicise these myths, which can lead to the spread and search for related material online.

From time to time false scare stories about internet challenges, dangerous apps and new drugs are deliberately spread to create panic and fear. These false stories are quickly spread by adults and even circulated by police forces and some internet safety websites, although not on reputable sites such those from the NSPCC or CEOP.

Some online videos, including unofficial videos of children’s programmes, do contain harmful content and some apps can pose risks, if normal online safety rules are not followed.

Although it can sometimes be difficult to check the truth of information received, schools and settings should not pass on anecdotes or unsubstantiated rumours about online challenges or specific apps. Where there are concerns about online safety, promoting and following the usual guidance will be more helpful.

Sites such the Safer Internet Centre have a parent’s helpline and information about internet safety as well as guides about various apps: <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/>

Mind of My Own

On a related issue, the use of the word “momo” has created confusion about Mind Of My Own, which is a digital tool for children and young people to communicate their thoughts. the following message has been prepared by Children and Families and Mind of My Own:

Dear staff

Joint message from Mind Of My Own and our service.

As you are aware the Mind Of My Own App has been linked, unfortunately, to a negative connotation of the acronym. We have issued previous updates about the alleged WhatsApp game that unfortunately goes by the name of ‘Momo’. In the interest of transparency, we wanted to give you an update on the situation from Mind Of My Owns perspective, and some advice on what you can do to help the situation. We are aware that there has been a new report in some of today’s newspapers.

For those of you who don't know ...

The alleged WhatsApp game has a bizarre avatar depicting a grotesque woman with bulging eyes. This has been taken from the work of Japanese artist Midori Hayashi for a special effects company called Link Factory, both of whom, like us, have nothing whatsoever to do with the alleged game, which purportedly targets young people.

The 'game' appears to be an exaggerated hoax which has been fuelled by poor journalism and paranoia. The news reports speculatively linked five instances of suicide over this summer to the so-called game. It has likened the so-called game to the Blue Whale Challenge, another alleged online game that mysteriously gained notoriety and disappeared just as suddenly in 2017.

Today's report is from an anonymous parent alleging that her seven-year-old child has been influenced whilst using Whatsapp.

Having taken advice, unfortunately there is nothing legally they are able to do about someone using the word MOMO, as they don't own it.

What you, as the lead in your organisation, can do to help

- Re-assure your workers

We have not had any instances reported to us where a young person has come across the WhatsApp game while looking for our app.

- Tell your workers to help young people sign up for their own Mind Of My Own account

We know that young people are far more likely to use our apps if their worker helps them sign up. So, by helping them sign up to their account the child will not only use the apps more but they'll also be protected from seeing anything negative

- Encourage young people to access their own account by searching for 'Mind Of My Own' on the App store, Google Play or through their web browser

You only see the negative 'MOMO' stories if you search 'MOMO'. So always make sure to tell workers and young people they need to search for 'Mind Of My Own'

- Keep an eye on our twitter and Instagram accounts and share our stories. The more positive vibes around 'MOMO' the better!

Googling 'MOMO'

As you know our MOMO, which stands for Mind Of My Own, is a set of digital tools used to help children and young people. We are aware, however, that if you currently google the word MOMO you will be met with the unpleasant image of Hayashi's sculpture and links to media reports about the alleged Momo 'game'. We are doing all we can to ensure that young people signing up for MOMO are not accessing these images.

From today, we will refer to our apps as, One app, Express and the service portal.

We will work quickly and start with everything children and young people come into contact with most frequently. This will include the following:

- A new logo design which is already underway and will start to appear everywhere the MOMO logo existed

If you have any questions please contact your manager or service lead.

For any queries in relation to this communication please contact either myself or Teresa McIlroy
Teresa.McIlroy@wiltshire.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

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