

...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 hours and has even 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 innocent videos on YouTube and YouTube Kids (such as 'surprise eggs', 'Minecraft' videos and Minecraft videos) have been hijacked by unknown sources to include content that is violence provoking and/or other inappropriate content. Even though parents monitor and remove videos that are inappropriate content, clips can be accessed and viewed thousands of times before they get reported and removed. As it's difficult to spot these videos as the harmful content doesn't appear until halfway 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 the videos include a disclosure message warning that the content may be "inappropriate or offensive to some audiences" and that "viewer discretion is advised" but these videos are still easily accessed by clicking 'I understand and wish to proceed'. 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 a 'next' feature which automatically plays another video based on what you just watched. Due to YouTube's algorithm, users are shown 'suggested videos' which they may be interested in. The thumbnails 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-themed video, we were shown countless other Momo-themed videos and other content which would be age-inappropriate for children under 18.

 National Online Safety

Top Tips for Parents

TELL THEM IT'S NOT REAL

Like any urban legend or horror story, the concept of Momo is quite frightening and distressing for young children. Whilst this may seem obvious, it's important to reiterate to your child that Momo is not a real person and cannot directly harm them! Also, tell them not to go online searching for this content as it may only cause more distress.

BE PRESENT

It's important for you, as a parent or carer, to be present while your children are online. This will give you a better 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 these challenges become progressively worse it's important to recognise any changes in your child's behaviour.

TALK REGULARLY WITH YOUR CHILD

Just as monitoring your child's activity, it's important for you to discuss it with them too. Not only does this give you an understanding of their online activity, but those honest and frequent conversations

DEVICE SETTINGS & PARENTAL CONTROLS

Ensure that you set up parental controls for your devices at home. This will help to restrict the types 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 utmost 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 take part in; no matter how dangerous or scary 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.

REPORT & BLOCK

You can't always rely on parental controls to prevent distressing or harmful material. People often report around a platform's algorithm in order to remove and promote this type of material. Do advise that you flag and report any material that you deem to be inappropriate or harmful if you come across it. You should also block the account/content to prevent your child from viewing it. Also encourage your child to record/screenshot any content they feel malicious to provide evidence in order to report the issue to the appropriate channels.

FURTHER SUPPORT

Speak to the safeguarding lead within your child's school should you have any concerns about your child's online activity or malicious content that could affect them.

If your child sees something distressing online, it's important that they know where to go to and who their trusted adults are. They should contact Childline where a trained counsellor will listen to anything that's worrying them.