



Statement on the “Momo Challenge”

March 1st, 2019.

Over the past two days, news stories of the “Momo Challenge” have been rapidly spreading through the media. This has led to much misinformation, unclear understanding and concerned parents, professionals and teachers as well as frightened children. On Wednesday, February 27th, reports of this “challenge” were seen in many media news stories and by forwarded posts on Facebook, Instagram and other social media. By Thursday February 28th 2019, students in schools were talking about it and scared by the image attached to this story. Thursday, my own children had heard about it at school, looked it up on the school computer and were frightened. I sat down with my children and discussed what is not real about this challenge and how to talk to their friends about it not being real. For my children in 2nd and 4th grade, I explained it as someone trying to tell a scary story (like a Goosebumps book) but using the internet and a “weird picture.” This helped them understand why they were seeing this picture.

The Momo Challenge is not new and has been circulating since approximately summer of 2018. In August of 2018, reputable tech blogger, Larry Magid, wrote a [column](#) trying to explain the possible origins of how this was started and the hoax nature of this challenge. His blog has the most rational and clear description of this “new challenge” I have found. He also discusses his concerns for how misinformation can spread and leave people worried and upset about these types of “challenges.” The Momo Challenge was not the first hoax challenge and will not be the last. The [Blue Whale Challenge](#) was the predecessor to the Momo Challenge and was also a hoax.

The image that is being shared with the Momo Challenge is actually a sculpture. It appears to have been made by [Link Factory](#), which is reported to be a Japanese special effects company. The title of the sculpture is reportedly “Mother Bird.”

There is a concern that younger children may see this hoax on YouTube and make mistakes. My daughter in 4th grade reported that a friend in 4th grade saw a video of “Momo” and was “asked to send his address” to Momo. She reported that he did do this despite her recommendation that he did not. She was unable to explain where he put his address. It may have been in a comment section on a Youtube channel from her description of this event.

Parents: Here is some [information on how to talk to your children](#) about this challenge. Provide accurate information about this “challenge” and others that will arise. Explain to them “challenges” like this are not real. Be present with your children and talk with your children regularly about what they are looking at and experiencing online (at home and at school). Make sure you [set privacy settings](#) and filters for inappropriate content for younger children. Discuss how to handle peer pressure to view things on the internet that make them uncomfortable. Discuss the difference between what is real and what is a hoax. Discuss reasons why someone would want to hoax others. [Report and block inappropriate content and](#) hoaxes to the appropriate platforms via their reporting system. Discuss with children to [never give information](#) to anyone online. Look for mood and/or behavioral changes that might indicate your child has seen this, is scared and doesn’t know what to do. Talk to your kids about [fear and how to cope](#).

Educators: Please share resources with your teachers to help them have an educated discussion about the Momo “Challenge” with their students. The [Magid article](#) would be an excellent one to provide for them. “What’s real vs. what is not” should be taught to the students in their classrooms by the teacher that they trust. Students will hear about it and should be given accurate information to help alleviate fears that could develop from them researching this on their own without guidance from an adult. Students that present as experiencing elevated levels of emotional concern should be referred to the school counselor for further support/assessment. You can develop a resource guide for parents to take home or feel free to send this statement home to help parents understand how to talk to their kids about this current topic.

It should be noted that some media sites are reporting this as a “suicide challenge.” However there has been no credible data to point to this hoax as a causation for suicide. However, I do want to provide resources for suicide prevention as well.

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): 1-800-273-8255

[Prevent Suicide PA](#)

[Crisis Text Line](#): Text “Home” to 741741

Please remember that children can see and feel our fears and can take on those fears themselves. We should [role model handling these challenges](#), and the scary imagery attached, with confidence and a calm presence. This will help our children grow into strong, confident individuals as well.

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Founder of Shape The Sky: Creating Responsible Kids on Smartphones.

www.shapethesky.org <https://www.facebook.com/shapethesky/>

External Links:

Larry Magid article: https://www.connectsafely.org/dire-warnings-about-children-dying-because-of-apps-and-games-are-a-form-of-juvenoia/?fbclid=IwAR2TAh6rcafi1355O7B-mRdXQhcWBCgtCi7TXEFWR9C1HOPpc7Vyk9f_fx5

Blue Whale Challenge: <https://cyberbullying.org/blue-whale-challenge>

Momo sculpture: <https://heavy.com/news/2019/02/momo-challenge-mother-bird-midori-hayashi/>

Talking about the Momo Challenge: <https://nationalonlinesafety.com/resources/platform-guides/momo-online-safety-guide-for-parents/>

Talking about fear: <https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/comments-scared.html>

Prevent Suicide PA: <https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/comments-scared.html>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

Crisis Text Line: <https://www.crisistextline.org/>

Setting Youtube Privacy Settings: <https://www.tomsguide.com/us/set-youtube-parental-controls,review-4139.html>

Reporting on Youtube: <https://onlinesense.org/report-abuse-youtube/>

Not sharing private information online: <https://www.intego.com/mac-security-blog/8-things-to-teach-your-kids-never-to-give-out-online/>

Role modeling fears: <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/865669592/When-fear-drives-parenting-what-happens-to-the-kids.html>