

Momo Challenge: Tips and Resources

What is the Momo Challenge and why are professionals concerned?

As different social media challenges arise, it is important to remember that they can be harmful to vulnerable youth, even when it is unclear if the challenge is real. The Momo Challenge is a form of cyberbullying that has reportedly surfaced on Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and video games such as Fortnite. Through these online websites and platforms, children receive threatening messages and visual images that encourage them to complete a series of tasks that may result in self-harm or the individual dying by suicide. These images and challenges can be distressing for children; fear is instilled in these youth, as they are told that if they share the challenge, their loved ones will be harmed. To address social media challenges and cyberbullying, parents/guardians are encouraged to have conversations with their children about potential dangers online and to monitor social media use. It is important for children to understand that their parent/guardian is available to help them if they have concerns or feel in danger.

What can parents/guardians and educators do to help address the Momo Challenge?

- **Provide information and guidance to youth about the challenge.** It is important to engage in conversations with children about potentially risky social media websites and platforms. With younger children, focus on explaining cyberbullying and ask them how much they know about social media. Older children might have more knowledge of the specific challenge, and therefore, there can be a more targeted conversation about specific social media challenges and apps. If you know that youth are engaging in the Momo Challenge, **share that Momo is not a real person and cannot directly harm them.** No matter the age of your children, an open line of communication is essential: be present and talk regularly with your children. Let them know that you are there to help and they will not get in trouble if they talk with you about negative experiences that they have had online. If youth express signs and symptoms of psychological distress, connect them to mental health professionals.
- **Monitor youth's use of electronic devices.** Discuss with youth the websites, links, and social media apps they are using. Caregivers can monitor youth's media use by looking through their browser and search history and become familiar with media platforms and websites commonly used by youth. **Also, parental controls can be set up for devices, and inappropriate or harmful content can be blocked.**
- **Talk to your children about peer pressure.** Youth should know what is meant by peer pressure and have some strategies that they can use when they are confronted with peer pressure. Parents/guardians should let their children know that they should not do anything they feel uncomfortable doing and should talk with the parent/guardian when these situations arise.

- **Know the warning signs of distress.** Observable signs of psychological distress include changes in behavior (e.g. outbursts or being withdrawn) or physical health (e.g. weight loss or gain; loss of appetite). Other warning signs of distress include hopelessness, sadness, boredom and depression as well changes in grades and school attendance. If you see signs of psychological distress, **ask youth if they are considering self-harm or suicide.** Asking about suicide **does not** increase risk of suicide.
- **Have discussions with youth about distress and strategies they can use to address it.** When having conversations with youth, listen to their thoughts, remain calm, and be nonjudgmental. Avoid statements like “you should just get over it” and blaming the youth for the problem. Talk with youth about helpful strategies that they can use to help cope with distress such as relaxation, problem-solving, deep breathing, listening to music, and taking a break from social media. Youth should be encouraged to seek support from community or school mental health professionals if their distress is interfering with their functioning and/or if they are a danger to themselves or others.
- **Call for help.** If a youth makes an immediate threat to hurt or kill themselves, call 911. If a youth shows warning signs of harm to self or others, but does not express an immediate threat, you can encourage him/her/them to: **contact Maryland’s crisis hotline: text 898-211, Call 211, press 1, or visit 211md.org. There are also several ways to anonymously report information to Safe Schools Maryland. Download the SafeSchoolsMD app via the Apple Store and Google Play, visit safeschoolsmd.org, or call 1-833-MD-B-SAFE (1-833-632-7233).**

Additional Resources:

- Guidance for the Momo Challenge: <https://tinyurl.com/y4nyqq8j>
- Guidelines for parents on cybersafety/cyberbullying: <https://www.connectsafely.org/parentguides/> and <https://www.connectsafely.org/wp-content/uploads/qg-cyberbullying.pdf>
- Prevention of cyberbullying: <https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/prevention>
- Guideline for parents on self-harm: <http://www.selfinjury.bctr.cornell.edu/perch/resources/parenting-2.pdf>