

## Safety Net's Online Safety advice to parents

### The MOMO Challenge

The MOMO challenge has been making the headlines in the media recently and the disfigured avatar has been popping up all over the internet. Warnings about the 'MOMO challenge' suggest that children are being encouraged to kill themselves or commit violent acts after receiving messages from users with a profile picture of a distorted image of a woman with bulging eyes.

However it's important to know that despite the scare stories there isn't much evidence of children actually being harmed; the NSPCC have stated that there is no confirmed evidence that the phenomenon is actually posing a threat to British children; they go on to say that the ensuing media hysteria could now be putting children at risk by encouraging them to think of self-harm. Sharing the MOMO avatar with children is also not helpful because it makes it more likely that they will be upset by seeing disturbing images. <https://bit.ly/2UdExEC>

The Safer Internet Centre say that the publicity around the issue of MOMO is actually increasing the risks to children and young people as "Even though it's done with the best intentions, publicising this issue has only piqued curiosity among young people."

However, there is no doubt that the MOMO phenomenon has reached the UK, so it is something that parents need to be familiar with and ready to talk about with their child. Parent zone have produced a really useful 3 Minute Briefing for parents on the MOMO Challenge which gives a balanced view.

<https://parentzone.org.uk/article/three-minute-briefing-momo-challenge>

#### **Advice from Parent Zone: What should parents do?**

Although the MOMO challenge appears to be more fear than fact, it's important that parents talk to their children about it. The best way to start is to ask a general question about whether they have seen anything online that has upset or worried them. Explain that there are often things that happen online that can be misleading or frightening and that some things are designed to get a lot of attention.

Parents need to follow their child's lead - introducing the idea of the MOMO challenge to a child who isn't familiar with it might lead them to investigate further. On the other hand, avoiding mentioning it won't provide a chance for a good discussion. Take your child's lead and whatever you decide about overtly talking about MOMO, make sure that they know that contacting strangers and doing anything at all that they are asked to do online or off that makes them feel scared, worried or uncomfortable is not OK.

Remember that curiosity is a natural part of children growing up so don't blame them for being drawn to this sort of digital drama. Try to listen, keep calm and help them to recognise that however tempting these things may be to explore, it's never sensible to be drawn in.

The NSPCC has launched a campaign to make social media sites have a legal responsibility for protecting children online, find out more here <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-we-do/campaigns/wild-west-web/>

## Chainmail

In Safety Net's online safety sessions we discuss chainmail and most of the children say that they have received it. Chainmail has been around since we were children and is either the threat of something bad or the promise of something good happening.

### **Promise of something good**

If you forward this bag of gold onto 10 people a million pounds will arrive.

If you forward this pink rose to 10 people, your true crush will arrive

**Threat of something bad** In MOMO these may be linked to historical events on Wikipedia.

Unless you forward this image to 10 people you will be haunted

Unless you forward this message to 10 people your parent will be harmed.

We have met year 10 pupils who are still scared by chainmail they sent in year 5. We need to make sure children know these **are not true**.

### **Regularly ask children:**

Will something good/bad happen as a result of forwarded on (chainmail) messages?

No

## Online Safety

The online world is forever changing and it can feel difficult to know how to start conversations with children and young people, especially in the midst of media frenzy.

To help this process, we believe that online safety fits into 5 themes:

<b>Content</b>	<b>What you view, share (upload) and download</b>
<b>Contact</b>	<b>Who you interact with</b>
<b>Conduct</b>	<b>How you behave online (including cyberbullying).</b>
<b>Overuse</b>	<b>Are we using technology too much?</b>
<b>Commercial</b>	<b>POP UPS, advertising and more</b>

MOMO fits into three of the themes: Content, Contact and Conduct. Many of the MOMO risks are not just online issues so to keep children safer online and generally, we need to be involved in a child's online life and regularly having conversations.

**We recommend asking children about their online lives when things are going well, so that we are not responding in panic when confronted with a news story. Useful conversation starters...**

Are you OK online?

Do you know where to get help if not?

What do you like about being online?

What do you do if you are contacted by someone you don't know.

What do you do if you get a strange message?

Who do you talk to if they need help?

The Safer Internet Centre has lots of information, resources and an advice line for parents

**<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre>**