



February 28, 2019

Dear Madison Elementary Families,

There has recently been a buzz at Madison Elementary School about the Momo Challenge. Please take time to read this letter to better understand the challenge, how to support your child's technology use and what MES is doing to ensure their online safety during school hours.

What is the Momo Challenge?

Momo Challenge is the latest in a series of chain-letter viral stories. It's unrelenting because of the disturbing image that represents the Momo character. The image comes from Midori Hayashi, a Japanese doll artist not associated with the game. Players who want to take part search online for a number to text or Whatsapp. Once they have sent the first message they get replies including challenges to commit self-harm or suicide as well as outlandish images.

Is it a myth or a real threat to children?

The Momo Challenge sounds alarming, particularly as children are attracted to the idea, but in reality, the occurrences seem few and far between. There have been a number of reports in the press about it being linked to suicides and self-harm. Currently, these are only associations with the game and no evidence of direct harm caused by the game has been substantiated. Still, the image and the ghoulish story that accompanies it may well distress children and parents should be aware of its existence. Children will encounter YouTube videos and user-created content in video games like Minecraft and Roblox.

How to support your child?

I'd suggest that instead of warning children about Momo specifically, it's better to use this as an opportunity to teach good practices online. This should start by ensuring that kids know not to contact strangers online, regardless of the method. Setting privacy systems on devices with your child is a great way to have this conversation and agree on automatic precautions.

Parents and caregivers should ensure there's an atmosphere of openness and transparency about online activity. Keep an eye on device usage and if you notice a child switching screens on their devices when approached or new numbers or email addresses on their devices it's worth checking in with them. It's also important to have video games and screens used in shared family areas so you can see what kids are doing. This also means they can talk to you more easily about anything that upsets them.

Madison Local School District has "filters" in place to deter students from searching non-school related items. If a child is searching for topics that are not school or age appropriate an email is sent to the building administrators of the content. Building administrators will then make contact with the student about their search and notify parents of the incident.

It's important you understand what websites, apps, and social media platforms they are on to help them minimize potential risks. Have regular conversations with your children about the risks they may be exposed to and how to deal with them, such as cyber bullying, peer pressure and grooming, and ensure they feel able to come and talk to you if they see anything upsetting.

Thanks for being great parents,

Mr. Jackson, Principal