



Online Safety Newsletter



Issue 13

Dear Parent or Carer

There have been a number of e-safety issues that have been circulating around school over the last couple of weeks that this newsletter aims to address. Our children have a natural curiosity with new opportunities provided by the wide range of digital technologies, and sometimes, we as parents feel challenged in guiding and supporting them when we are one step behind them!

E-safety is an integral part of our children's education in today's digital world and is embedded in their learning at school. We also want to help our parents and children improve their own understanding of e-safety issues so they can learn to use the internet and all digital media in a safe and secure way.

Momo

There is much debate in the news about this app and whether or not it is real or just a rumour that has gone viral. Although there is limited evidence, the children are naturally winding each other up about it. Whether real or fake, the following information from NOS provides useful information to your child understand how to keep safe.

Below are some safety tips provided by NOS:

Explain to them that it is NOT real, no matter how convincing it appears.

Be present when they are online.

Encourage your children to talk and ask questions about anything they are unsure of.

Set parental controls wherever possible, e.g on YouTube you can turn off 'suggested auto-play' on videos to stop your child from viewing content that they have not directly selected.

Fortnite

As teachers it is hard to escape the overwhelming popularity of Fortnite amongst our older children. In the UK the Video Standards council rate Fortnite as PEGI 12 for frequent scenes of mild violence.

Although it has this rating we are finding that many year 3 children and upward are playing on it daily. Our children are also moving into the online multiplayer option 'Battle Royale' where children can play with unknown players. While playing the game, players can hear profanity from others as well as exchange voice chat messages with strangers. Because Battle Royale is played by hundreds of people at once, the range of people they encounter will be wide.

A good way to mitigate these dangers is to get children to play with the sound on the TV in family rooms so parents can hear the conversation. However, many players will want to use headphones so they can hear in-game sounds more accurately and progress better.

Another way to avoid this danger is to get children to join a lobby of the friends they know online before they play. Then, in the game they can turn off the audio of other players while still communicating with their teammates.

Potential impact of Fortnite on your child

As you are probably aware, Fortnite is a highly competitive and violent game. Players use guns, swords, and grenades to fight skeleton-like monsters (husks) in ranged and melee-style combat.

Players can also defeat enemies by using various traps (e.g., electric, spikes, poisonous gas). Battles are highlighted by frequent gunfire, explosions, and cries of pain." Since the popularity of Fortnite we are seeing an increased amount of rough play in the playground which is a growing concern.

In addition children may be playing against older children and adults who may be more skilled and this may put pressures on them which they bring into school. Children can quickly be 'defeated' if distracted, which can lead to children not wanting to leave their console for hours on end.

Some children are exhausted and bad tempered at school due to hours of online playing. Putting time limits on your child's game playing could help manage these issues.

Fortnite in-app costs

Although the Battle Royale part of the Fortnite game is free to play. There are a number of potential costs associated with the game. Parents should make sure that credit cards for the console require a password to avoid unintended purchases to be made by children clicking around.

What if my child is too young for Fortnite?

The following games offer an enjoyable alternative to Fortnite until children are old enough:
Splatoon 2 (PEGI 7+) Minecraft (PEGI 7+) Roblox (PEGI 7+) Lovers In a Dangerous Space Time (PEGI 7+) Plants vs Zombies: Garden Warfare 2 (PEGI 12+)

TikTok

Many of our children are also using TikTok which used to run in the UK as musical.ly. Again, users should be 13 years old as they may be exposed to adults in this app. There have been some reports of primary age children being exposed to mean comments and encouraged to strip or self-harm.

The following poster provides lots of useful information for parents.



Andy Blakeley - Head teacher
Mrs Etheridge - Online Safety Lead

It's important to note that new challenges are arising on the internet all the time. We have created to this guide to raise awareness of the issue and offer advice on helping parents to talk to their children about making safer decisions online. See also our '7 conversation starters' guide for more tips on better communication with your child.



Momo is a sinister 'challenge' that has been around for some time. It has recently resurfaced and once again has come to the attention of schools and children across the country. Dubbed the 'suicide killer game', Momo has been heavily linked with apps such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, 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 seemingly innocent videos on YouTube and YouTube Kids (such as 'surprise eggs', unboxing videos and Minecraft videos) have been edited by unknown sources to include violence provoking and/or other inappropriate content. Even though YouTube monitor and remove videos that include inappropriate content, clips can be uploaded and viewed thousands of times before they get reported and removed. As a parent, it's difficult to spot these videos as the harmful content doesn't appear until partway 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 an 'up next' feature which automatically starts playing another video based on the video just watched. Due to YouTube's algorithm, users are shown 'suggested videos' that they may be interested in. The thumbnails used on suggested videos are purposefully created in a way to encourage viewers to click them. During our research, we found that when watching one Momo related video, we were shown countless other Momo themed videos and other scary content which would be age-inappropriate for children under 18.



**National
Online
Safety**

Top Tips for Parents

TELL THEM IT'S NOT REAL

Just like any urban legend or horror story, the concept can be quite frightening and distressing for young people. Whilst this may seem obvious, it's important for you to reiterate to your child that Momo is not a real person and cannot directly harm them! Also, tell your child to not go openly searching for this content online 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 greater 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 the nature of each task become progressively worse it's also important to recognise any changes in your child's behaviour.

TALK REGULARLY WITH YOUR CHILD

As well as monitoring your child's activity, it's important for you discuss it with them too. Not only will this give you an understanding of their online actions, but those honest and frequent conversations will encourage your child to feel confident to discuss issues and concerns they may have related to the online world.

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. Check the validity of the source and be mindful of what you share as it may only cause more worry.

REPORT & BLOCK

You can't always rely on parental controls to block distressing or harmful material. People find ways around a platform's algorithm in order to share and promote this type of material. Due to this, we advise that you flag and report any material you deem to be inappropriate or harmful as soon as 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 could be malicious to provide evidence in order to escalate the issue to the appropriate channels.

FURTHER SUPPORT

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

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

The Childline phone number is
0800 1111.



SOURCES:
<https://www.bbc.com/news/health-56102>
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