



# WITTON MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Headteacher: Mrs Cath Crossley

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Dear Parents/Carers,

## Momo

We are writing to you to raise concerns regarding a new viral game which has been called the "suicide challenge". Momo encourages players to perform a series of challenges in order to meet 'Mother Bird' - a disfigured character (inspired by Japanese art) with bulging eyes and untidy black hair on a chicken-like body. Light-hearted and fun at the outset, this game experience quickly darkens, absorbing players who are encouraged to perform acts of violence and self-harm through a series of progressively risky challenges. Originating in Mexico, it is easily accessed through social media shares (predominantly Facebook and YouTube) and is rapidly spreading across the world.

### **Why there are concerns?**

The doll (a creepy figure with bulging eyes and a creepy grin) encourages children to add a contact on messaging service WhatsApp, then hounds them with violent images and dares. It encourages children to self-harm and the ultimate post tells them to take their own lives. Police indicate that the danger lies with children feeling pressured to either follow the orders on any app by carrying out "challenges", or because of peer pressure in chat rooms.

### **Why it's on the radar?**

The challenges issued in this game present a serious risk to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people in our schools here in the UK, as does the distressing content when a player refuses to carry on. With worrying similarities to the 'Blue Whale challenge', it has also been linked to at least five cases of childhood suicide. It targets the most vulnerable pupils and those with mental health issues as they are most likely to be drawn into the psychological nature of the challenges. Police believe that it is being used by hackers to harvest information.

### **What can you do to combat the dangers?**

A person doesn't have to be searching for Momo themselves to be exposed to it and, unlike other games that children enjoy, there is no positive side to this. We need to educate/reinforce online safety, and in this way encourage children and young people to make the right choice and avoid this game:

- \* The importance of confidently saying "no" to invitations to play games from strangers.
- \* Knowing why they should not click on unidentified links.
- \* Knowing how to 'block' unknown numbers and friend requests.

- \* Ensure you know what their children can access online.
- \* Ensure children understand the importance of not giving personal information to anyone they do not know.
- \* Tell their children no-one has the right to make them do anything they do not want to do.
- \* Use parental controls to keep children safe.
- \* Talk regularly with children about these apps and games and the potential risks they can be exposed to.

If adults are concerned or have any questions on how to approach the subject with their children, they can contact the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or **visit the NSPCC website**.

Children who are worried about their activity on apps or online games can **contact Childline 24 hours a day**, online and over the phone on 0800 1111.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "C Crossley". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Cath Crossley  
Headteacher