



Pocono Mountain School District

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March 1, 2019

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I wanted to take a moment to ask you to please continue monitoring your child's Internet and social media use. Of specific concern for educators and parents right now is a hoax called *Momo Challenge* that allegedly compels children to engage in dangerous activities to include hurting others or committing suicide.

The *Momo Challenge* hoax is very concerning to all of us, because there are several reports that others may be using this hoax and the scary *Momo* character/graphic to try to hack phones and create frightening video challenges for children. There are reports that *Momo* is also being linked to Apps commonly used by children, such as YouTube Kids. These reports state that through Apps children may receive anonymous threatening messages that encourage children to perform acts of self-harm, including suicide.

I have also received reports from faculty and staff of some of our Pocono Mountain School District students conducting Internet searches of the term *Momo* and trying to access *Momo* videos on their smart phones or computers at school. Our Technology Department is blocking access from all District computers to any search related to the term *Momo*.

It is difficult to separate fact from fiction when it comes to such social media hoaxes and phenomena, so I encourage you to discuss with your children whether or not they have seen anything scary on their phones or computers and encourage them to talk with you or another trusted adult about what they've seen. Even those who may not have seen the challenge or *Momo* character may be impacted by conversations with peers who have.

Please ask your children to promise to talk with you about the *Momo Challenge* if they receive one. Other potentially dangerous online challenges to watch out for include:

- The Blue Whale Challenge – encourages dangerous acts and acts of self-harm,
- The Tide Pod Challenge – encourages biting into Tide Pods,
- The Choking/Fainting/Passing Out Challenge – encourages getting high from choking or hyperventilating, and
- The 48 Hour Challenge – encourages teens/individuals to go missing for 2 days.

We understand it is not realistic to take children's devices away, but please let your children know that this is cyberbullying, it is potentially dangerous, and you are trusting them to let you know what's going on. We want our young people to know that help is always available.

Please encourage your child to speak with a trusted adult at home or school if they need someone to talk to about this or know someone who does. Teachers, school counselors, social workers, psychologists and principals are here for them.

What can you do to protect your child/children from social media hoaxes like *Momo*? The Internet Matters Team offers the following tips for parents:

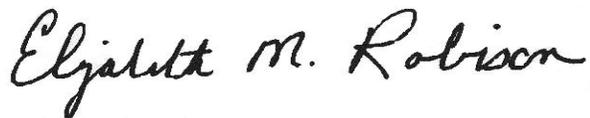
- Ask your child what they are doing online. It's important you understand what websites, apps, and social media platforms they are using.
- Check their privacy settings. Make sure they know how to make their profiles 'private' so they are not sharing personal information with strangers. For example, Facebook has a Privacy Healthcheck feature.
- Make sure they know when and how to report and block any malicious or inappropriate messages or posts.
- Be careful about over-sharing personal information such as your school, telephone number or anything that identifies where you might live. Consider not using your full name for your profile.
- Use the 't-shirt test' when it comes to sharing images online or sending pictures or videos to friends: Would you wear it on your T-shirt? If not, then don't send it.
- Have regular conversations with your children about the risks they may be exposed to and how to deal with them.

Please encourage your child to speak with our School Counselors or School Psychologists at any time during the school year or contact us directly when facing challenging times.

Resources are also readily available outside of the school setting. Individuals who are struggling with the thoughts of suicide can reach out for help by:

- Texting "START" to 741741
- Calling 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth M. Robison". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth Robison
Superintendent of Schools