

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (PARENTS AND TEACHERS): Momo Challenge

What is the Momo challenge?

'Momo' is a scary and distorted looking 'woman' who suddenly appears in online content, and communicates disturbing information or demands to its audiences. Momo can appear in platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Whatsapp and will provide threatening messages, violent images, or instructions to the viewer.

The nature of the threats and comments may escalate over time as 'she' claims to know personal information about the user, threatens that she will visit them, or their family, and creates a sense of fear in order to manipulate those exposed to her messaging into performing acts of self-harm, danger, or even suicide.

Messages from 'Momo' can appear in the midst of otherwise appropriate content and can be unpredictable and aggressive. This type of intimidation can be traumatic and upsetting for young people. Anyone who is exposed to this content, should remove themselves from being exposed to it, understand that it is not real, and contact a trusted adult immediately.

Has the 'Momo Challenge' appeared in Waterloo Region?

We are not aware of any local incidents related to the Momo Challenge in our community or schools. Recent media attention has brought this trend to the forefront and created some anxiety for students. We remind our students that 'Momo' is not real, that the threats are a form of online bullying, and that anyone who experiences this type of content, should immediately bring it forward to a trusted adult.

Can 'Momo' be accessed through WRDSB computers or internet?

Although our existing firewall/filter protection denies access to millions of undesirable sites, we know that the protection is imperfect. Adult supervision of student access and use of technology continues to play an important role in ensuring online safety and in cultivating digital citizenship.

Why would someone choose to participate in the Momo Challenge?

The Momo Challenge targets the vulnerability of children and appears unexpectedly in otherwise normal online content. 'She' attempts to manipulate her audience into complying with her demands. Children with depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, as well as children who are susceptible to peer pressure, are especially at risk. Early intervention is integral to the prevention of children experiencing the negative impact of this content. Parents are encouraged to speak with their children around online safety, avoiding inappropriate content, safe behaviours, and their overall wellbeing.

How will I know if my child/student has been exposed to this?

Talk to your child/student about the Momo Challenge and ask them if they know what it is. Have they heard of it? Have they tried it? Are they showing any signs of self-harm? If they don't know about it, share the dangers associated with the challenge. Discuss a plan that includes what they can do if they receive a message with the Momo Challenge. Remind them **never** to harm themselves or others, **never** to perform a dangerous or risky task, and to **always** bring this to the attention of an adult.

What can parents do?

Parents are encouraged to speak with their children about online safety and wellbeing and what their experiences have been. The Waterloo Region District School Board offers a [Digital Citizenship - Guide For Parents](https://www.wrdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/digital-citizenship-guide.pdf) which can be used to support conversations around online safety. If a child or teen is engaging in the Momo Challenge, or any other similar challenge, they may not provide that information to you. Parents are a child's greatest protector and have every right to know the apps their child is using and have every right to check their electronic devices.

How can we prevent this from happening?

Keep your relationship with your children/students strong and spend time with them in a format that allows for open dialogue. Keep the flow of communication open and consistent and remind them that they are safe, and can talk to you about anything that is causing them fear. Remember to take social media seriously and remember that it has powerful impact on a young person's life. Empower them to use it safely and wisely in the future.