March 8, 2019

Dear Parents and Guardians:

The Internet allows people an opportunity to share and receive information quickly. Although there are many Internet sites and social media platforms that are positive, unfortunately there are sites and platforms that disseminate negative information and promote dangerous trends and challenges. The purpose of this letter is to inform you about a very dangerous challenge called the “Momo Challenge”. This challenge has caused many adults and children to feel uncomfortable and or alarmed.

The “Momo Challenge” encourages children to use social media, video games, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Minecraft to commit dangerous and violent acts against themselves and others. The “Momo” avatar, which has a frightening appearance, appears in pop-up screens and intimidates viewers by threatening to send the viewer violent pictures, invade personal privacy, or death if the viewer refuses to carry out the directives given online by “Momo”.

Please be advised that we deem this type of online incivility to be very serious in nature. Our goal is to teach our children to be compassionate and respectful “digital citizens” while interacting with others in cyber communities. In our effort to keep our children safe, we encourage you to take a moment to read the attached articles which provides parents with strategies to keep children safe online.

Please feel free to contact your child’s Principal or Guidance Counselor if you have any additional questions or concerns. Thank you for partnering with us to keep the children in the Willingboro Public School District safe in online communities.

Yours in education,

Dr. Ronald G. Taylor

Willingboro Public Schools – Where Excellence Is The Expectation
Internet Safety Advice: Top Tips for Parents

The thoughts of what your child might come across online can be worrying. Check out our top internet safety advice to make sure going online is a positive experience for you and your child:

1. Discover the Internet together
Be the one to introduce your child to the internet. For both parent and child, it is an advantage to discover the internet together. Try to find websites that are exciting and fun so that together you achieve a positive attitude to Internet exploration. This could make it easier to share both positive and negative experiences in the future.

2. Agree with your child rules for Internet use in your home
Try to reach an agreement with your child on the guidelines which apply to internet use in your household. Here are some tips to get started:
- Discuss when and for how long it is acceptable for your child to use the Internet
- Agree how to treat personal information (name, address, telephone, e-mail)
- Discuss how to behave towards others when gaming, chatting, e-mailing or messaging
- Agree what type of sites and activities are OK or not OK in your family
- Follow the rules yourself! Or at least explain why the rules are different for adults.

3. Encourage your child to be careful when disclosing personal information
A simple rule for younger children should be that the child should not give out their name, phone number or photo without your approval. Older children using social networking sites like Facebook should be encouraged to be selective about what personal information and photos they post to online spaces. Regardless of privacy settings, once material is online you can no longer control who sees it or how it is used.

4. Talk about the risks associated with meeting online “friends” in person
Adults should understand that the internet can be a positive meeting place for children, where they can get to know other young people and make new friends. However, for safety and to avoid unpleasant experiences, it is important that children do not meet strangers they have met online without being
accompanied by an adult you trust. In any case, the child should always have their parents' approval first.

In addition, it is also a good idea to have a fail-safe plan in place such as calling them shortly after the meeting begins so that they can bail out if they feel uncomfortable.

5. **Teach your child about evaluating information and being critically aware of information found online.**

Most children use the Internet to improve and develop their knowledge in relation to schoolwork and personal interests. Children should be aware that not all information found online is correct, accurate or relevant. Show your child how to check information they find by comparing it to alternative sources on the same topic. Show them trusted sites they can use to compare information.

6. **Don't be too critical towards your child's exploration of the Internet**

Children may come across adult material by accident on the web. Also, a child may intentionally search for such websites; remember that it is natural for children to be curious about off-limits material. Try to use this as an opportunity to discuss the content with them, and perhaps make rules for this kind of activity. Be realistic in your assessment of how your child uses the Internet.

7. **Let your children show you what they like to do online**

To be able to guide your child with regard to Internet use, it is important to understand how children use the Internet and know what they like to do online. Let your child show you which websites they like visiting and what they do there.

8. **Remember that the positive aspects of the Internet outweigh the negatives.**

The Internet is an excellent educational and recreational resource for children. Encourage your child to make the most of it and explore the Internet to its full potential.
Online Safety Tips for Parents
By Eric Rasmussen, PhD
Media & Technology (http://www.pbs.org/parents/expert-tips-advice/category/media-technology/), Raising Kids (http://www.pbs.org/parents/expert-tips-advice/category/raising-kids/)

When I was a child, I loved riding my bike. My brother and I would pretend we were motorcycle cops as we rode all over our neighborhood. We jumped off curbs, made our own bike ramps, and rode down the hill by the park as fast as we could. We rode for hours and hours. But those were the days before bike helmets, and we suffered our fair share of bumps and bruises, including the painful day that I crashed my bike into a parked car. That one hurt.

Even though I know through painful personal experience that riding a bike can be a potentially dangerous activity, it’s such an important skill (and it’s so much fun) that we have since taught our own kids how to ride a bike. The difference today is that we require our kids to wear helmets. And based on the scratches and scrapes I see on those helmets, this safety tool has served our kids well.

Many things in life are like riding a bike: healthy ways to spend time with the proper safety equipment. We make our kids wear seat belts in the car, strap into climbing harnesses at the rock wall, and hold onto the rails on staircases. Likewise, with the proper protective measures in place, media use (including Internet use) can be another safe and healthy childhood activity.

As you know from what you’ve seen on the family of PBS websites, children’s use of the Internet can have some amazing benefits. Never before have children had access to so many educational materials. But even though many parents of young children say media has mostly a positive
influence on kids, media use is still a significant source of concern. So how do we help our young children enjoy the good and avoid the bad parts of using the Internet? As with any other potentially risky activity, parents are in the best position to help their kids learn and grow.

- **Search engines:** Search engines are amazing, but they don’t filter the way parents would. For example, coloring books for adults have been all the rage the past few years. Just the other day, my 7-year-old daughter and I searched for coloring pages for adults. As you could imagine, some “adult” coloring pages showed up. Parents should be involved any time a young child conducts a search.

- **Inappropriate content:** It’s good practice to have rules about what websites our kids are and are not allowed to visit. But despite our best efforts, it may be impossible to protect our kids from seeing some inappropriate things. In these cases, empowering them becomes the way to protect them. They need to know what to do when they stumble upon something inappropriate. In our home, we’ve had the sex talk before the Santa talk with our young kids. We’ve talked about what to do and who to tell when they accidentally come across inappropriate content. Conversations are key to empowering and, thus, protecting our kids.

- **Privacy:** Kids are trusting by nature, so it’s up to parents to teach them never to share personal information online. Not their name. Not their address, their age, or their gender. And any apps that use the device’s camera should come from a reputable, educational source.

- **Over-sharing:** We want our friends and family to be able to see pictures of our kids, but research shows (http://media.wix.com/ugd/a0f093_3ca344c37a2a4271a32a8670eeec5abf.pdf) that many kids wish parents would ask for permission before sharing about them online. Kids may not always understand the consequences of sharing things online, but asking permission first shows respect, and it might actually help to teach children to be more aware of what they share online, too.

- **In-app purchases/advertising:** Because young children cannot yet distinguish between an advertisement and other content, limit their app and website use to those without the option for child-directed in-app purchases.

Bumps and bruises, both literal and figurative, are inevitable in life. But we can protect our kids from many risks and help them enjoy the benefits of Internet use through our guiding efforts. In a way, parents become the helmet and the training wheels our kids need to help them learn to navigate the Internet safely. And through our consistent efforts, my hope is that using the Internet safely becomes a skill they’ll take with them into adolescence and beyond — a skill they’ll never forget.

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**About Eric Rasmussen, PhD**

Eric Rasmussen, PhD, is a husband, father of four, professor of communication, and children and media researcher. He is the author of ChildrenAndMediaMan.com (http://www.pbs.org/parents/expert-tips-advice/2017/12/using-coding-apps-teach-kids-think/), and his mission is to get research about children and media off the academic shelves and into the hands of those who need it most—parents.
The Internet can be wonderful for kids. They can use it to research school reports, communicate with teachers and other kids, and play interactive games.

But online access also comes with risks, like inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and online predators. Using apps and websites where kids interact, predators may pose as a child or teen looking to make a new friend. They might prod the child to exchange personal information, such as address and phone number, or encourage kids to call them, seeing their phone number via caller ID.

Parents should be aware of what their kids see and hear on the Internet, who they meet, and what they share about themselves. Talk with your kids, use tools to protect them, and keep an eye on their activities.

**Internet Safety Laws**
A federal law, the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) helps protect kids younger than 13 when they’re online. It’s designed to keep anyone from getting a child’s personal information without a parent knowing about it and agreeing to it first.

COPPA requires websites to explain their privacy policies and get parental consent before collecting or using a child’s personal information, such as a name, address, phone number, or Social Security number. The law also prohibits a site from requiring a child to provide more personal information than necessary to play a game or enter a contest.

**Online Protection Tools**
Online tools let you control your kids’ access to adult material and help protect them from Internet predators. Many Internet service providers (ISPs) provide parent-control options. You can also get software that helps block access to sites and restricts personal information from being sent online. Other programs can monitor and track online activity.

**Getting Involved in Kids’ Online Activities**
More important than blocking objectionable material is teaching your kids safe and responsible online behavior, and keeping an eye on their Internet use.

Basic guidelines to share with your kids for safe online use:

- Follow the family rules, and those set by the Internet service provider.
- Never post or trade personal pictures.
- Never reveal personal information, such as address, phone number, or school name or location.
Never respond to a threatening email, message, post, or text.

Always tell a parent or other trusted adult about any communication or interaction that is inappropriate or hurtful.

Basic guidelines for parental supervision:

- Spend time online together to teach your kids appropriate online behavior.
- Keep the computer in a common area where you can watch and monitor its use, not in individual bedrooms. Monitor any time spent on smartphones or tablets.
- Bookmark kids' favorite sites for easy access.
- Check your credit card and phone bills for unfamiliar account charges.
- Find out what, if any, online protection is offered by your child's school, after-school center, friends' homes, or any place where kids could use a computer without your supervision.
- Take your child seriously if he or she reports an uncomfortable online exchange.

Call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at (800) 843-5678 if you're aware of the sending, use, or viewing of child pornography online. Contact your local law enforcement agency or the FBI if your child has received child pornography via the Internet.

Watch for warning signs of a child being targeted by an online predator. These can include:

- spending long hours online, especially at night
- phone calls from people you don't know
- unsolicited gifts arriving in the mail
- your child suddenly turning off the computer when you walk into the room
- withdrawal from family life and reluctance to discuss online activities

Talk to your kids! Keep an open line of communication and make sure that they feel comfortable turning to you when they have problems online.

**The Internet and Teens**

As kids get older, it gets a little trickier to monitor their time spent online. They may carry a smartphone with them at all times. They probably want — and need — some privacy. This is healthy and normal, as they're becoming more independent from their parents. The Internet can provide a safe "virtual" environment for exploring some newfound freedom if precautions are taken.

Talk about the sites and apps teens use and their online experiences. Discuss the dangers of interacting with strangers online and remind them that people online don't always tell the truth. Explain that passwords are there to protect against things like identity theft. They should never share them with anyone, even a boyfriend, girlfriend, or best friend.

Taking an active role in your kids' Internet activities helps ensure that they benefit from them without being exposed to the potential dangers.