# The Momo Challenge: separating fact from internet myth



Between 2018 and 2019, concern swept across the globe over a purported online threat known as the "Momo Challenge," which allegedly targeted children via the WhatsApp messaging app. Parents, schools, and authorities in Britain, Latin America, and other regions reported that children were receiving messages from an account bearing the disturbing image of a half-human, half-bird figure, known as Momo. The messages reportedly included instructions for children to harm themselves or others, with some claims extending to threats involving household dangers such as turning on stoves or inserting objects into power outlets.

The figure at the centre of these reports was originally created as a sculpture by a Japanese special effects company, which was not connected to any harmful activities. However, its image was appropriated in the accounts believed to be sending out these ominous challenges. The story gained significant traction after social media users and celebrities, including Kim Kardashian, expressed concern and urged platforms like YouTube to act. According to a post shared by Kardashian, children were reportedly watching videos on platforms such as YouTube Kids where Momo was integrated, allegedly telling them to engage in dangerous acts.

Incidents connected to the Momo Challenge were reported in various countries. In Argentina, police investigated the 2018 death of a 12-year-old girl found hanged in her family garden. Authorities explored whether she had been influenced by the Momo Challenge via WhatsApp messages exchanged with an 18-year-old suspect. Similarly, Colombian investigators looked into two teenagers’ suicides possibly linked to the challenge. Mexican officials noted that the challenge appeared to have originated from a Facebook group where participants were encouraged to contact an unknown number and received threatening or violent responses.

Despite widespread alarm, many details surrounding the challenge remained unclear and contradictory. Reports about the challenge's origin, the identity behind the accounts, and the true extent of its impact varied widely. Some media outlets suggested it may have started as a prank or an interactive joke among friends in Japan, while others proposed cybercriminal motives such as extortion. Screenshots of the WhatsApp conversations circulating online often appeared doctored, and there was no concrete evidence confirming the challenge's existence as a coordinated activity.

In the UK, schools and police issued warnings to parents as stories of the challenge surfaced in playgrounds and classrooms. A school in Rossendale near Blackburn released a statement cautioning parents about inappropriate videos circulating on YouTube and social media, including altered clips of children’s shows like Peppa Pig featuring the Momo character encouraging children to undertake risky behaviours. Similar warnings were issued by institutions in Portsmouth and Bedfordshire.

However, by early 2019, the UK government and child safety charities began to dispute the authenticity of the Momo Challenge. Commons Leader Andrea Leadsom remarked on the "appalling" nature of the purported challenge but acknowledged that charities reported "no confirmed evidence" linking Momo to actual cases of self-harm in the UK. Kat Tremlett, a harmful content manager at the UK Safer Internet Centre, warned of the danger in treating the phenomenon as factual, which risked causing unnecessary distress among children.

Internationally, media outlets including The New York Times and the BBC found no credible reports that children were influenced to self-harm or commit suicide because of the challenge. YouTube denied hosting any content promoting the Momo Challenge, stating that such material would be removed for violating their policies.

Despite this, the Momo image and references to the challenge continued to appear in internet culture, particularly in horror-themed content on platforms such as YouTube. Russian content creators known as the Lyapota family feature the Momo figure in their storytelling videos, which attract viewers interested in horror narratives but do not encourage harmful behaviour.

While the initial panic surrounding the Momo Challenge has largely subsided since 2019, its legacy endures in new videos and online lore that sometimes blur the lines between urban legend and genuine concern. This ongoing presence is propelled by a cycle of fear, curiosity, and the viral nature of internet horror stories.

For those seeking confidential support related to distressing thoughts, organisations such as the Samaritans provide assistance via their helpline on 116123 or through their local branches. Further information can be found at samaritans.org.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Momo_Challenge_hoax> - Corroborates that the Momo Challenge was a hoax and internet urban legend, with no confirmed direct links to harm, but caused global panic and warnings from authorities.
* <https://www.stompoutbullying.org/blog/momo-challenge> - Supports claims about the Momo Challenge's alleged encouragement of self-harm and its spread through social media platforms.
* <https://abc7chicago.com/momo-challenge-the-what-is-stories/5163694/> - Details the hoax nature of the challenge, parental concerns, and the importance of open dialogue with children about online content.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gB1jM-8UuUE> - Provides verification attempts about the challenge's reality and expert insights into its social media impact.
* <https://pshe-association.org.uk/news/momo-challenge-hoax-potentially-distressing> - Confirms the challenge's hoax status and highlights its potential to cause distress despite lacking credible evidence.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Momo_Challenge_hoax#See_also> - Lists related internet challenges and dares (e.g., Blue Whale Challenge), contextualizing the Momo Challenge within broader online phenomena.
* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14618707/How-Momo-terrified-world-haunting-internet-Viral-suicide-challenge-horrified-parent-linked-childrens-deaths-self-harm-came-twist.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data