

Parents are never 'too old' to learn to monitor kids' internet use

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Nothing scares parents more than losing a child. We do everything in our power to keep our children safe.



In the past, teaching the kids the “Stranger Danger” rhyme seemed enough, along with a few common reminders to stay off the streets and avoid dark corners.

But times have changed and today, the “stranger” is no longer an unknown person, but the familiar and constant companion of our children, the internet. The internet is a complex and complicated creature that can't be classified simply. It can be a parent's savior with its numerous resources and opportunities to bring loved ones closer. However, it can also be a parent's worst nightmare with lurking pedophiles, psychopaths and bullies.

Add to this a growing number of harmful videos, applications, trending suicide games and challenges, with the infamous Momo Challenge currently trending. The Momo Challenge is basically a suicide challenge, not unlike its predecessor, the Blue Whale Challenge. While the administrators of the Blue Whale Challenge supposedly got in touch with their victims through Facebook, videos of Momo are supposedly found on YouTube.

Momo is actually nothing more than a photo of a Japanese sculpture created by Keisuke Aisawa for a special effects company. The complete image actually looks quite humorous, but only the face is shown in order to provoke young children. It started as a message from people on WhatsApp assuming a “Momo” character, sending teenagers messages with lighthearted and fun tasks. Once they draw the kids' attention the tasks become darker, with instructions such as watching hor-

ror films, staying up late, re- fraining from speaking to anyone, hurting themselves and, finally, committing suicide.

There is a threat of harm to the child or his family should “Momo” be disobeyed.

Classic moral panic

Fortunately, it has recently been proven to be a hoax. Consider it like a chain letter, which warns that failure to send it to 10 friends within three days or so would lead to a death or some other unfortunate event.

American writer Benjamin Radford has compared the reaction to “classic moral panic,” with parents seeing their lack of knowledge as a danger to youth and society.

But the damage has been done. The hoax has given rise to a number of copycat groups. There will never actually be a “Momo” or Blue Whale administrator who will contact children at random, but there will always be members of society who are vulnerable to narratives such as these.

Such things will also attract people who get a thrill from causing trouble, or, in some cases, are simply reckless in spreading it, not realizing the dangerous consequence of their actions.

This could be the explanation for a recent case involving the death of an 11-year-old boy in the Philippines. According to his parents, the child never showed signs of depression and had no reason to end his life. And yet, less than a month ago, he intentionally overdosed on gout medicine and died.

Just because our children are home does not mean they are safe, if they don't know what they are doing online