

Agawam Public Schools



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Dear Parents/Guardians,

Recently, we have become aware of an apparent social media phenomenon that is gaining popularity among our students. The "Momo Challenge," is being widely discussed as a game featuring an avatar who instructs viewers to perform various high-risk tasks and then provide personal information and photos as proof, sending disturbing messages with threatening consequences to those who don't comply. While there has been some question about its validity, it has nonetheless become a prevalent topic in our schools. We are concerned that as curiosity spreads, so will students' desire to "fit in" by exploring and reporting their own experiences. (There are also reports of the Momo Challenge being embedded in other popular games such as Fortnite or Minecraft, or seemingly child-friendly YouTube videos). Whether or not the Momo challenge is real, we see this an opportunity to increase our own social media awareness for faculty and staff. This includes monitoring conversations among students and encouraging reporting of any unsafe situations to adults. We know, however, that the more significant underlying issue of social media safety requires a wider call to action.

Today's youth are technologically skilled, but most do not have the maturity or life experience to assess what they send or receive within the huge online world. This makes all children vulnerable, and increases their need for adult vigilance. While it is necessary to be aware and ready to intervene on any new trends, we understand that as one trend is tackled, another will be on the horizon. The key concerns about social media, cyber-bullying and online safety can only be addressed with consistent strategies. For this reason, while we are sharing specific information about the Momo challenge that so many of our students are talking about, we think that it is even more important that you review additional resources about basic social media safety, and take this opportunity to revisit your family rules and expectations regarding online activities. Please keep in mind that there are any number of devices available to our children that create access to social media, far beyond our phones and desktop computers, and the key messages cross all formats:

- Remind your children to never comply with requests for personal information.
- Establish limits for which online sites children may visit and for how long, and remember that technology is mobile, so make sure to that rules and expectations apply to cell phones, cameras, gaming devices, tablets, etc.
- Continually dialogue with your children about online safety, with specific conversations about what they should do if they encounter anything that is questionable.

Related resources:

- The Momo Challenge: Information for Parents <https://2j39y52a62gm1afygb3g1xbu-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/MOMO-Online-Safety-Guide-for-Parents-FEB-2019.pdf>
- Online Safety: Tips for Parents: <https://www.netsmartz.org/TrendsandTopics>
<https://www.connectsafely.org/parentguides/>

If you have any questions or concerns about these issues, please call the school so that we can work together to take appropriate action. We look forward to being your partners in keeping all of our students safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

Steven P. Lemanski
Superintendent of Schools

"Put Children First"