

Miller Place Union Free School District

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Sandra A. Wojnowski

March 4, 2018

Re: Internet Safety and Cyberbullying (Momo)

Dear Parents, Guardians and Staff,

Parents, and Guardians this message is important regardless of the age of your child.

Staff, this message is important regardless of the age of the children you support within our school system.

Over the past week you may have been made aware of the media coverage regarding the latest social media trend, the Momo game. Allegedly Momo, (a global concern), which presents itself as a game, is the newest form of cyberbullying that instills terrifying fear among children and encourages risky behaviors, including self-harm. It has been reported that the international creators of the Momo challenge have invaded youth videos posted on sites considered safe for children such as You Tube Kids and WhatsApp. In addition, it has been reported that Momo is making its way to gaming videos such as Fortnite.

The initial terrifying image of Momo is of a bug eyed, toothless woman. Momo starts with simple challenges like waking up at odd hours of the night or overcoming a fear. Then the challenges take a dangerous turn, such as asking to post photos or videos of cutting your arms or legs, jumping off of a roof, or other risky behaviors. As the challenges intensify, the last thing Momo pressures you to do is to commit suicide. If the user fails to accept or pass any of the challenges, it is reported that Momo sends even more threatening and violent images and texts until the user is coerced into doing the challenge. If none of these pressuring tactics work, allegedly Momo threatens to visit you in person or while you're sleeping, curse you, or kill your family. This can be terrifying to most young children, teens and any fragile student facing personal challenges.

As educators and parents we recognize that technology is wrapped around and imbedded into our children's everyday lives. As those who are in charge of their safety and security, we need to remain vigilant in managing children's technology to safeguard and secure their digital existence. Although they are born into, and live in the world of technology, we cannot always expect them to be experts with these tools.

During this exciting time in education and technology development the District does the following to protect and/or assist your child in technology usage on the District network:

- ✓ We are attempting to block the word "Momo" within a URL address so students will not be able to access it on our computers and devices.
- ✓ Installed filtering systems to assist in the protection of only appropriate information being received through the District's technology systems.

- ✓ Maintains monitoring systems to assist in the protection of students visiting appropriate sites while in school.
- ✓ Continues to provide technology safety information to our students via classroom discussion, various curriculum, and Character Education Programs.
- ✓ Actively support and enforce the District's *Computer Network Acceptable Use and Internet Safety Policy*

You assist us in protecting your child's safety in a digital environment by:

- Continue to talk to your child regarding internet safety, going to appropriate sites and social media.
- Continue to check their phone usage and sites visited to ensure compliance with the rules and parameters you have set for them to gain access to internet sites.
- Continue to check the privacy settings on all of the digital devices they use or have access to in order to ensure the settings are appropriate.
- Remind them that they should not interact with or respond to strangers online.
- Remind them that they should not share personal information online or with anyone they do not know.
- Keeping video games and YouTube watching in shared family spaces and setting up "restricted" mode on YouTube for your child's account so inappropriate content is not available to them, or stream YouTube content through a family-friendly site such as <https://watchkin.com/>.

You may find the following internet safety resources helpful regarding your child's digital access and use:

- <https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/online-safety-guide/>
- <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/topics/protecting-kids-online>
- <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/news-features-and-safety-tips/Pages/Children-and-Media-Tips.aspx>

Our District continues to take all forms of student safety seriously and as always, should you have specific concerns regarding your child, or a child attending our schools, please feel free to contact a Building Principal and/or the Safe School Helpline at 1-800-418-6423 x 359.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marianne F. Cartisano
Superintendent of Schools