

Scares and panics – 10 tips

When you see media headlines about shocking online challenges causing death to hundreds of kids – take a deep breath, a pinch of salt and stay calm.

Blue Whale and Momo as it turned out, did not warrant the fear and worry caused. In fact spreading the name and the panic and even the image, is often the goal of the people who start these hoaxes. The ‘hundreds of deaths’ supposedly linked to Blue Whale could not be corroborated.

Many children were scared when warned about one of these and parents were certainly made terrified by some media headlines.

A sane and pragmatic approach is to improve media literacy for parents and give the children the basic information about scary stuff in general and what they should do if they come across it.

Parents should avoid showing their child the image or talking about specific scares, it spreads the dreaded name and their child will only go and search for it or try to find out more. Some children were deeply upset by seeing the Momo image, even when shown it by parents.

1. Encourage them not to share chain letters, dares or challenges
2. Provide a comforting emotional space when they can come to you with any worries about what they see or experience online and get help without being judged
3. Set the controls on their devices and your router
4. Teach or help them to flag, block or report nasty behaviour or images after saving evidence such as through taking a screenshot.
5. There have been stories about children’s videos being edited to include inappropriate content. YouTube monitor and remove these. However it can take time. Your child may come across something encouraging violence within familiar content that seems suitable for children. It is best to download the favourite TV content or videos for example, by going to the original source, rather than letting a child watch end to end YouTube videos
6. Talk to your child about the difference between the real world and fantasy world and try to address fear brought on by scary or sad stories in books, films, videos or even images
7. Check what young children can view, download apps and TV programmes onto a tablet and place it on aircraft mode
8. Check the PRGI rating on games to see that even if ‘everyone is playing it’ they are age appropriate
9. Popular bloggers and YouTubers that children follow may upload their reactions to scary challenges and your child might encounter this material through people they follow. This content can get through your filters.
10. Check with a source you trust about whether or not the latest scare is a hoax. Most internet safety websites will put out a statement. You can follow trusted twitter feeds by online safety educators or local police feeds. Your child’s school will have a designated safeguarding lead from whom you can get advice or to whom you can report.

Further info: [Think before they scare](#), 2019 by Rebecca Avery.

E-safety for schools

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