



International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP)

BRIEFING STATEMENT IN CONNECTION WITH THE “MOMO CHALLENGE”

In response to the global media coverage surrounding the “Momo Challenge”, Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) and the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) have prepared the following statement in which we express our concern about the likely negative impact on young people, in particular those who are vulnerable, and suggest that the media should be highly cautious if reporting on this story.

SAVE and IASP express their concern about the ongoing social media activity called the "Momo Challenge" which has been linked to suicidal behavior in several countries. Primarily targeted at children and adolescents, the Challenge involves users receiving instructions to chat with a stranger via an unknown number on WhatsApp. Once the interaction commences they are challenged to complete a series of extreme tasks in the hope of meeting “Momo”, a fictional character with bulging eyes and a wide mouth. The artwork, called Mother Bird by Link Factory, was thought to be inspired by the work of a Japanese artist Midori Hayashi, however according to officials neither the Link Factory nor Midori Hayashi are affiliated with the challenge. If the player refuses to follow orders, “Momo” replies with a series of violent images and threats. Some have claimed their interactions with “Momo” included being sent violent images during the night, threatening to appear while they are sleeping and curse them.

In several countries Computer Crime Investigation Units and the police have put out a warning about the Momo Challenge, advising people to avoid talking to strangers on the app and recommending that parents have conversations with their children about online safety. In light of recent global discussion about certain negative impacts of social media on youth suicide and in order to become more proactive and help reduce the risk of the Momo Challenge gaining additional attention and participation, as well as minimizing the risk of suicide, SAVE and IASP urge all representatives and youth serving organizations to monitor cases and individuals carefully.

Parents, teachers, mental health professionals and others should be aware of the need to talk with adolescents and children who have heard about, joined or are engaged in any aspects of the challenge and to encourage them to express their feelings in response to the game. For young people who have engaged in self-harming behaviors or who have plans to hurt themselves, immediate intervention is suggested. In these situations, we recommend that parents contact their local Medical Doctor or Youth Mental Health Service.

In addition, we recommend that:

- Parents take this opportunity to talk with their children about how to be critical thinkers of what they hear and see through the media and on social media. Talk with them about checking with their peers and adults to see if these are real or false.
- Young people check in with their friends and help dispel the myth that everyone is playing this challenge. If you know of someone who is doing it, make sure you talk to an adult you trust to keep your friend safe.

- Teachers and other adult caregivers be aware of what they hear from young people and use this as a chance to discuss with them online safety.

SAVE/IASP are conscious of the potential negative impact of increasing media coverage of Momo Challenge, and therefore recommend that the **media should not reinforce the dissemination of this phenomenon**. When reporting on suicide, the media should adhere to international guidelines and recommendations:

<http://www.reportingonsuicide.org>;

<http://www.samaritans.org/media-centre/media-guidelines-reporting-suicide> ;

https://www.who.int/mental_health/suicide-prevention/resource_booklet_2017/en/

In any stories that are written, media should include factual information on suicide and rates, the research based warning signs for youth suicide (www.youthsuicidewarningsigns.org), and details of helplines and support services for adolescents and concerned parents.

An overview of relevant helplines and support services for people in distress in different countries can be accessed via: https://www.iasp.info/resources/Crisis_Centres.

Guidelines for young people on communicating about suicide safely online are available here:

[https://www.orygen.org.au/Education-Training/Resources-Training/Resources/Free/Guidelines/chatsafe-A-young-person-s-guideforcommunicatin/Guidelines_Orygen_Final_WebLG.aspx?ext=.](https://www.orygen.org.au/Education-Training/Resources-Training/Resources/Free/Guidelines/chatsafe-A-young-person-s-guideforcommunicatin/Guidelines_Orygen_Final_WebLG.aspx?ext=)

Additional information regarding online safety can be found at: <https://cyberbullying.org>
<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/social-media-smarts.html>

For further information, please contact:

Dr. Dan Reidenberg, Psy.D.

Executive Director

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

+1-952-946-7998

dreidenberg@save.org

Professor Ella Arensman

School of Public Health, College of Medicine and Health & National Suicide Research Foundation

WHO Collaborating Centre for Surveillance and Research in Suicide Prevention

Representative IASP College of Presidents

Visiting Professor, Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention, Griffith University

4.28 Western Gateway Building

University College Cork

Cork, Ireland

T: + 353 (0) 21 420 5541; E: ella.arensman@ucc.ie

February 2019