

MOMO WOES

Danah's mom:

Danah's mom had been reading about the latest social media scare online called the Momo Challenge. A horrifying image of a bird-girl sculpture was paired with self-harm and suicide challenges on messaging systems. This challenge threatened with bad luck if you didn't view and share the challenge with multiple people every day. As Danah's mom scrolled through the online stories and watched the news, she became increasingly nervous about her daughter. She wondered if Danah had seen the Momo Challenge, or worse, if she was participating in it. She heard the rumors about children engaging in risky behavior, illegal activity, and self-harm, and feared this trend could affect Danah and her friends.

Danah's mom went into Danah's room while she was at school and scrolled through her tablet search history. Her worst fears were realized when she saw that Danah had searched 'Momo Challenge' twice within the past week. Danah's mom freaked out and contacted the parents of Danah's friends to warn them that their children might be in danger. She couldn't believe her daughter had become a victim of the Momo Challenge. Fear and grief overwhelmed her as she waited for her daughter to come home. Danah's mom decided that Danah needed a digital detox. It was for her own good. If she took all of Danah's technology away for two weeks, Danah might be able to distance herself from the harmful material she saw.

Guiding Questions:

- Do you think Danah's mother is overreacting?
- What is Danah's mother afraid of?
- Does Danah's mother choose the appropriate action? Why or why not?

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Danah:

Danah had heard the rumors about the Momo Challenge from her friends at school. People talked about it like it was one of those fake calls from scammers you get saying that you won a free trip.

“I remember when I answered my mom’s phone once and the voice said, ‘Congratulations, you’ve won a free trip to Jamaica. Please press four and enter your credit card information to receive the money.’ I seriously thought we had won the lottery.”

Everyone laughed.

“Hoaxes are ridiculous. You have to be so gullible to believe them.”

Danah chimed in, “Yeah ... but I’m sure there are kids that think the Momo Challenge is real. All this media talk about it being a suicide challenge makes it seem like if you get it sent to you then you don’t have a choice. The media should be talking about how it’s a dumb hoax to get you to do things and not that it’s an actual challenge.”

Robert, one of Danah’s friends agreed, “Let’s spread the news ourselves. Let’s call it the Knowknow Challenge. We can give people the real information about this hoax and how it is just a viral ghost story.”

Danah’s friends spent the next two weeks researching information and putting together a flyer about the hoax. They researched quotes from internet safety experts and gave advice on getting to the source of false information.

One day, Danah came home to find her mother sitting at the kitchen counter. She asked for Danah’s cell phone and told her she needed a digital detox for the next two weeks. Danah was confused. Danah’s mother hugged her and said how sorry she was that she had been unaware. She asked if Danah had done any self-harm and which of her friends she had sent the suicide challenge to. Danah tried to explain her view on the Momo Challenge, but Danah’s mom thought that she was lying to keep up the challenge and refused to listen to her explanation.

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Guiding Questions:

- What is the disconnect between Danah and her mother?
- What is a hoax? Have you been subjected to or sent a challenge like the one in the story? What was your reaction?
- How does spreading and sharing a hoax hurt/help the situation?
- How does the news add to the problem?

Topic: Digital Literacy, Privacy and Security

Age: Middle School