

24 February 2020

Dear Parent

I have recently been informed by a parent about a child's anxieties and concerns in relation to online content (momo) being related to other pupils at the lower end of the school. Our online C2K filtering system prevents pupils accessing such inappropriate content in school.

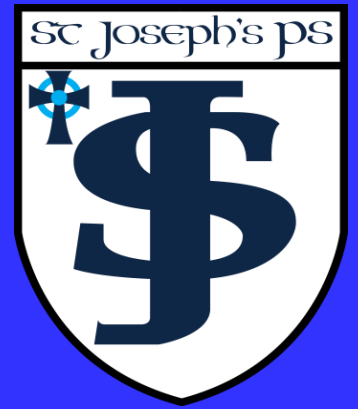
I want however to share with you an article that I read recently which is definitely worth taking a few moments to read as it raised a few issues that I was not aware of. Hopefully you will find this informative in trying to protect your child from online psychological harm which can be long lasting.

The article is by Keza MacDonald who is video games editor at the Guardian

"I first heard about Momo in my local parents' WhatsApp group. Someone had screen-shotted a Facebook post about a creepy puppet that supposedly appeared in unsuspecting children's phone messages and spliced into YouTube videos, dispensing advice on self-harm and violent acts. I reacted with suspicion: this would hardly be the first time that something on Facebook turned out not to be true, and the Momo challenge seemed a bit too on the nose – too obviously sinister – to be real. It turned out that Momo was indeed a hoax, a viral shock-story driven by a frightening image and well-intentioned worry about children's safety online. There have been videos on YouTube Kids with suicide advice spliced into otherwise innocuous cartoons as a malicious "joke" – they just don't involve Momo. Parents have spotted them before; the American paediatrician Free Hess recorded and documented one on pedimom.com. And this is, lamentably, the tip of the iceberg when it comes to inappropriate content on the video platform, even on the version that's supposedly curated for kids. YouTube has been battling disturbing videos for years, but a 2017 Medium post by the writer and artist James Bridle brought the problem to widespread attention, kicking off a slew of stories about the various horrors that could be found through the YouTube Kids app. Frightening videos of Peppa Pig at the dentist or Mickey Mouse being tortured were appearing in searches. Weirdly sexualised videos of Disney princesses were easy to find.

*YouTube has removed a lot of the worst videos that used to be rife on the platform, but they just keep coming, finding new ways to get around the algorithm. YouTube's key failing here is that it relies on a "flagging" system to find and purge inappropriate content, which means someone has to actually see the video in question and report it before anything can be done. Pre-moderation, where videos don't make it on to YouTube Kids until they've been watched in full by a human being, is realistically the only way to keep the platform safe from malicious pranksters. But YouTube has shown no appetite for this, instead emphasising its "robust" content-reporting features in its responses to these continual controversies. When you download the YouTube Kids' app, it tells you as much in the introductory screens: **"We work hard to offer a safer YouTube experience, but no automated system is perfect."***

The truth is that YouTube was never intended to be a platform for children, and I have zero faith in its ability to adapt itself to that role. Even on the less extreme end of things, YouTube can be a parenting minefield. When my teen stepson was a train-obsessed five-year-old who couldn't even read yet, we once left him watching videos of trains pulling into stations on the iPad for a few minutes and returned to find him



IN CHRIST WE LIVE,

LOVE AND LEARN

st Joseph's ps

50 FERNALOG RD.

MADDEN

BT60 3LR

Telephone:

Principal:

PAUL LOUGHAN

BEd (hons) MEd

Email:

ploughran734@c2kni.net

innocently watching a video of a train accident that had appeared in the recommendations.

*The majority of YouTube Kids content isn't distressing or disturbing – but it is mostly brain-numbingly terrible. A vast amount of the kid-friendly videos that are uploaded are straight-up garbage: cheap, algorithm-driven songs or nonsensical stories featuring 3D models or toys of popular characters such as Elsa, Spider-Man and Peppa Pig. They are designed purely to extract views and thereby money from common search terms – not to entertain or educate kids. Friends with young children regularly complain about the inane surprise-egg or toy review videos that have become household obsessions. My toddler would watch cheap, repetitive, unbearably cheery nursery rhyme videos for an hour if I let him. The easiest solution for parents of young children might be to purge YouTube from everything – phones, TVs, games consoles, iPads, the lot. This is the approach we've taken in our household, which inconveniently contains two video games journalists and, consequently, an absurd number of devices. You don't need to be a tech luddite to find YouTube Kids both irritating and vaguely worrying. **There is no shortage of good children's entertainment available on Netflix, through BBC iPlayer and catch-up TV, or through advert-free games designed for young players. And there's zero chance they'll come across any suicide tips there.***

Please note that on the 18th of March we will be hosting a Parental Talk on children's mental health. This talk is designed to Promote Positive Mental Health in our children. The workshop aims to raise awareness around resilience and to explore strategies as to how we as parents can be more aware of the risk factors and protective factors that affect resilience.

In light of the increasing issues being experienced by our pupils and young people I **would strongly urge ALL parents in our school to attend this 1 hour session.**

This session is **not** an internet safety night.

We have a dedicated E-Safety section within the Parent's Area of our school website which provides further Parental advice regarding online safety. Regular information is also available on our new school twitter account which can be reached using the twitter handle @st_madden.

Yours sincerely



Paud Loughran
Principal

Please note the following dates for your diary

Friday 6 th March	P4 Trip to a World War 2 workshop in Palace Stables. A letter with all details has been given P4 pupils.
Tuesday 10 th March	Mrs Smith P4 Class Assembly in the School Hall at 10.00 am. All P4 parents and grandparents are welcome to attend.
Monday 16 th March	St Patrick's Day assembly held jointly by P1 (Mrs Donnelly's Class) and P6/7 classes (Mr Hart) at 10.00 am in the School Hall. All parents and grandparents are welcome to this morning of traditional music and song.
Tuesday 17 th March	School Closed for St.Patrick's Day.
Wednesday 18 th March	School reopens at the normal time of 8.50 am
Wednesday 18 th March	Parental Talk on children's mental health in the School Hall at 7.00 pm. This talk is designed to promote Positive Mental Health in our children. The workshop aims to raise awareness around resilience and to explore strategies how we as parents can be more aware of the risk factors and protective factors that affect resilience. In light of the increasing issues being experienced by our pupils and young people I would strongly urge ALL parents in our school to attend this 1 hour session.
Thursday 19 th March	Ceremony of Light P7 pupils and their parents in St Patricks Church, Keady at 7.30 pm. Pupils need to be in full uniform.
Thursday 26 th March	P7 Shared Education Trip to W5 Belfast. Details to follow
Sunday 29 th March	Confirmation St Patrick's Church Keady at 3.00 pm.