

# Chain letters and digital challenges

## Prevention advice for parents, children and young people

### Information

#### Description

Chain letters that encourage participation in certain challenges have been circulating on social networks or via messenger services.

The content is always similar. Children or adolescents are drawn into a 'game' to get them to self-harm or, worse, commit suicide.

Even challenges which do not pose such extreme dangers may be a frightening experience for children and young people.

Profiles such as 'Momo' or 'Jonathan Galindo' aka 'Cursed Goofy' are fake and not associated with real people.

Overblown and often false warnings on YouTube, TikTok etc. make chain letter challenges seem and lead recipients to believe that children have already died.

This is not real and fuels additional fears.

The growing popularity of the fake chain letter profile inspires copycats to further spread the chain letter and intimidate children and young people.

Self-harm or suicidal thoughts could potentially be reinforced by this.

#### Action recommended by police

- > Take away your child's fear
- > Do not forward messages
- > Do not respond when a strangers tries to make contact
- > If contact has been made, block the stranger's profile
- > Call the police if you suspect a crime has been committed,
- > Notify support agencies such as
  - [eco Complaints Office](#) (eco Association of the Internet Industry)
  - [FSM Complaints Office](#) (Voluntary Self-Regulation of Multimedia Service Providers)
  - [Jugendschutz.net complaints centre](#).
- > Ignore, report, delete: Do not help spread hoax alerts by re-posting or giving likes.
- > Take the fears of children and young people seriously and explain what it is about.
- > Be someone a child or young person can turn to for competent advice. Help them in their online activities in an age-appropriate manner.

## Advice for Teachers

- > Take away your pupils' fear. Explain to them what hoaxes and digital challenges are about.
- > Teach your class the safe use of digital media and smartphones.
- > Call the police if you suspect a crime has been committed.
- > Do not help spread such chain letters. Don't be paralysed with fear when demands or threats are made.
- > Ignore requests for self-harming behaviour. Talk to your parents, teachers or another person you trust.
- > Not all messengers or social networks are suitable for you. WhatsApp, for example, is only permitted from the age of 16. However, you can practise using it at an early age. Do this with your parents.

## Advice for youngsters

- > Some chain letters are intended to scare you and force you to do something. Back away.
- > It's best not to write any messages to unfamiliar profiles.

## Find out more

National crime prevention programme, (ProPK): [How to deal with digital chain letters and challenges](#); Current to: 04/10/2023

ProPK: leaflet: [Online advice for youngsters and adults](#), Current to 14/10/2024

Klicksafe: [Fake News](#), Current to 14/10/2024