Gardaí have issued a warning to parents, and are advising them to supervise their children's online activity due a cyberbullying game called the 'Momo challenge'.

It appears on social media and targets children and/or vulnerable people.

The Momo Challenge a factsheet for parents

What it is

Coined the 'suicide challenge', Momo is a new viral game that encourages players to perform a series of challenges in order to meet 'Mother Bird' – a disfigured character (inspired by Japanese art) with bulging eyes and untidy black hair on a chicken-like body.

Light-hearted and fun at the outset, this game experience quickly darkens, absorbing players who are encouraged to perform acts of violence and self-harm through a series of progressively risky challenges.

Originating in Mexico, it is easily accessed through social media shares (predominantly Facebook and YouTube) and is rapidly spreading across the world.

Why it's on our radar

The challenges issued in this game present a serious risk to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people in schools, as does the distressing content when a player refuses to carry on.

With worrying similarities to the 'Blue Whale challenge', it has also been linked to cases of childhood suicide in the UK and elsewhere.

What happens

• Players are encouraged to contact Momo and provide their mobile numbers.

• They will then receive instructions to perform a series of challenges, via SMS or Whatsapp.

• Player refusal can trigger severely abusive messaging and their mobile device being hacked.

• The final challenge is to commit suicide in order to meet 'Mother Bird'.

Why it's popular

Sharing and commentary on Social Media platforms has created a level of intrigue and curiosity about this game, which is initially lighthearted and fun.

Fundamentally, however, this is a game that targets vulnerable children and young people online, as those with mental health issues are more likely to be drawn to the psychological nature of the challenges.

What to do

A person doesn't have to be searching for Momo to be exposed to it and, unlike other games that children enjoy, there is no positive side to this.

Teachers and parents need to educate/reinforce online safety, and in this way encourage children and young people to make the right choice and avoid this game:

• The importance of confidently saying 'no' to invitations to play games from strangers

• Knowing why they should not click on unidentified links.

• Knowing how to 'block' unknown numbers and friend requests.