



School Safety Newsletter

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The Viral Internet Stunts Parents Should Know

CNN, May 24, 2017

http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/24/health/viral-youtube-challenges-partner/?iid=ob_homepage_deskrecommended_pool

It's a tale as old as time: We see a lot of people wearing/doing/saying something and we want to try it, too. Back in the day it was saying "Bloody Mary" into a mirror at slumber parties. Today, it means viral social media stunts. Though adults get caught up, too, kids are especially susceptible to peer pressure and FOMO (fear of missing out). To them, what was once a double-dog dare is now a popular YouTuber eating a hot pepper just to see what happens.

Called "challenges," these stunts range from harmless to horrifying: There are the silly ones (such as the Mannequin Challenge); the helpful ones (like the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge); and the slightly risky ones (such as the Make Your Own Slime Challenge). But sometimes, challenges are downright dangerous, resulting in physical injury -- and possibly even death. So what's a parent to do?

Below are some of the hottest challenges that have swept social media; some fade and then make a comeback. In most cases, kids are watching these challenges on YouTube purely for entertainment, but some challenges inspire kids to try them out themselves. (In fact, the safe ones can be fun for families to try.) Others -- like the Backpack Challenge -- are often done with the goal of filming other kids and broadcasting the results online. While there could be a new one as soon as tomorrow, they do seem to fall into certain categories, and there's some universal advice that parents can follow, no matter the challenge.

Funny

Try Not to Laugh Challenge. Popularized by YouTubers like Markiplier, this trend involves watching short, funny videos and trying not to laugh. It's simple and harmless, though there's often a lot of laughing at others' expense.

Whisper Challenge. You may have seen this one on Jimmy Fallon: One person wears headphones playing loud music. The other person says a phrase out loud, and the one listening to music tries to read their lips and repeat the phrase. Hilarity ensues.

Mannequin Challenge. A group of people gets together, poses, and freezes in place, and someone with a camera walks around recording the scene while music plays. Even celebrities have gotten in on this one, including Michelle Obama, Ellen, and Adele.

Food

Eat It or Wear It Challenge. This one takes some prep: Put some different foods in separate bags and number them. A player chooses a number, checks out the food, and decides to eat it or wear it. If they eat it, they can dump the remainder on another player's head. If they choose to wear it ... you can guess what happens. Other than a huge mess (and food allergies), this one is low-risk.

Hot-Pepper Challenge. You can probably guess: Eat a super hot pepper -- like a habanero or a ghost

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future through
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sharing*

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pepper -- while you film yourself suffering and chugging milk to try to stop the burning. Though most people get through it unscathed, there have been a few reports of people ending up at the hospital.

Cinnamon Challenge. Eat a spoonful of cinnamon, sputter and choke, and record the whole thing for others to enjoy. Again, though there may be some temporary discomfort, most kids won't get hurt -- but some have.

Physical

Bottle-Flipping Challenge. Partly fill a plastic water bottle and toss it in such a way that it lands right-side up. This one got so popular they made apps to replicate the experience!

Backpack Challenge. This one's a little like running a gauntlet. One person runs between two rows of people who try to hit you with heavy backpacks. The goal is to make it to the end without falling down ... but no one ever does. Of course, it's easy for kids to get hurt doing this.

Kylie Lip Challenge. Oh, Kylie Jenner -- and her lips. In an effort to replicate them, kids would put a shot glass over their mouths, suck in, and make their lips swell artificially. Not only can it cause damage, but it also can be an indicator of body insecurities and the emulation of impossible beauty standards.

Frightening

Choking/Fainting/Pass-Out Challenge. To get a high or faint, kids either choke other kids, press hard on their chests, or hyperventilate. Obviously, this is very risky, and it has resulted in death.

Salt and Ice Challenge. If you put salt and ice on your skin, it causes burns, so the purpose of this trend is to endure it for as long as possible.

Blue Whale Challenge. Of all these challenges, this one is the scariest and the most mysterious: Over the course of 50 days, an anonymous "administrator" assigns self-harm tasks, like cutting, until the 50th day, when the participant is supposed to commit suicide. It is rumored to have begun in Russia, and there were reports that suicides were tied to the trend, but those are unverified and likely not true. Apps related to the Blue Whale Challenge were said to appear and were then removed. The biggest concern is teens who are at risk and may be susceptible to trends and media about suicide, because even if the challenge began as an isolated incident or hoax, it could become real.

What to Do

Talk about it. Though we can't always be with our tweens and teens to prevent dangerous behavior, our words really can stay with them. Say, "If you ever want to do an internet challenge, check with me first."

Get them to think. Help your kid think through the challenges and whether they're safe or have potential risks. Say, "Walk through each step and figure out where things could go wrong."

Acknowledge peer pressure. Today's kids think of internet personalities as their peers, so seeing kids on YouTube doing a challenge could influence your kid. Say, "Why do you want to do this? Is this a video of yourself that you really want out in the world?"

Stay (somewhat) up to date. Ask your kid about what's happening in their lives when they're not distracted -- even when it seems like they don't want you to. Sometimes kids are more willing to talk about what's going on with other kids than with themselves, so pose questions about friends, school, and trends. Once the conversation is open, you can get a sense of what your kid thinks about the latest craze -- and if they're safe. Keep an open mind and intervene if you're concerned. Say, "Would you consider doing a viral stunt if someone asked you? Which ones would you do and not do?"

Model responsible online habits. Some parents are the ones recording their kids taking these challenges, so make sure your involvement sends the message you intend. Today it might be harmless, but tomorrow it might be more dangerous. Help your kids make the distinction so they can stay safe. Say, "Let's do a funny challenge together, but we'll only film it if you want to, and we'll only share it with family."

Monthly Webinars!

First Wednesday
of Every Month

at 10 am

(Except January,
July, and August).

Next Webinars

Wednesday,
September 6,
2017

Each webinar has a
round table
discussion at the end.
Questions are always
welcome!

To participate, you must
be a vetted member. For
more information please
email [schoolsafety@isp.
state.il.us](mailto:schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us)

Online 'Sextortion' Complaints Involving Teen Boys Jump By 89% in 2 Years: Study

CBC, May 23, 2017

<http://www.cbc.ca/beta/news/canada/toronto/sextortion-children-crime-1.4127018>

Child exploitation experts say they've detected a spike in reports of online "sextortion" cases involving teen boys.

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection says 65 boys reported incidents to Cybertip.ca in 2015-16 — an 89 percent increase from the previous two-year period of 2013-2014. Reports involving girls jumped 66 per cent.

While 65 male victims may not seem like a large number, executive director Lianna McDonald says the jump clearly establishes that boys are increasingly at risk of online threats.

"We need to pay attention regardless," McDonald says from Winnipeg, where the center is based. "We know the seriousness of it. This isn't necessarily all about quantity, it's about severity."

'A growing problem?'

What's not clear is the reason for the increased reports. "Is it that they're more aware of who we are to report? Is it because it's a growing problem?" she asks. "The marker on this one is we didn't really have it before. And not only are we hearing about it but now we're hearing about it from other agencies also, which corroborates something different."

As a result, the center launched its first awareness and prevention campaign for young males on Tuesday. It uses humor to reach boys with a bizarre-looking mascot — the hairless, pink-skinned naked mole rat. The creature is meant to spark conversation and offer an alternative image boys can send when asked for nudes.

The unconventional approach is a bid to "cut through the clutter for an audience that's not paying attention," says McDonald, adding that fear-based campaigns don't seem to work with boys. The group launched a website offering confidential online help, as well as information for boys, educators and parents looking for ways to start the conversation.

Overall, reports to Cybertip involving both genders jumped 140 per cent between 2015 and 2016.

The officer in charge of the Toronto police's child exploitation section says boys are victims of sextortion "way more than people out there think." He recalled one offender who admitted to tricking more than 1,200 boys into becoming victimized.

"All of these boys thought they were sending these (images) to a girl their age," says acting Det-Sgt. Paul Krawczyk. "Imagine the ones we're not catching and then imagine the ones that we don't know about."

What parents can do

He urged parents to warn sons of the danger, and point out that girls typically don't ask to see explicit images. Girls still remain the bigger target of online predators, adds McDonald. While boys tend to be targeted by unknown adults overseas, girls are exploited in a variety of ways.

"There's the non-commercial side to it where you've got kids, for malicious reasons, who are blackmailing girls for more photos so they can share it," says McDonald.

"You also have things like the Amanda Todd case, very notorious scenarios where you have adult men who are again capturing them on video doing things. And they're not necessarily appreciating who they're talking to and they think they're in some sort of actual relationship. It's much more diverse for girls."

Boys are often targeted by strangers who send them pre-recorded videos of young girls and urge them to reciprocate, says McDonald. This mostly involves 13- to 15-year-olds, who can become suicidal as pressure mounts.

"We have young kids phoning us and saying: 'I'm supposed to make a payment at Western Union by 6 o'clock or they're going to send my picture or my video to all of my friends and family and I'm desperate,'" she says. "It's not difficult to appreciate that these kids are in over their heads. And because they're so deeply humiliated about what's about to happen and what they've done, they're panicked and they're not sure what to do."

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection is a national charity dedicated to the personal safety and protection of children.

Harvard Withdraws 10 Acceptances for ‘Offensive’ Memes in Private Group Chat

The Washington Post, June 5, 2017

The Facebook messaging group was at one point titled “Harvard memes for horny bourgeois teens.”

It began when about 100 members of Harvard College’s incoming freshman class contacted each other through the university’s official Class of 2021 Facebook group. They created a messaging group where students could share memes about popular culture — a growing trend on the Internet among students at elite colleges.

But then, the exchanges took a dark turn, according to an article published in the Harvard Crimson on Sunday. Some of the group’s members decided to form an offshoot group in which students could share obscene, “R-rated” memes, a student told the Crimson. The founders of the messaging group demanded that students post provocative memes in the main group chat to gain admittance to the smaller group.

The students in the spinoff group exchanged memes and images “mocking sexual assault, the Holocaust and the deaths of children,” sometimes directing jokes at specific ethnic or racial groups, the Crimson reported. One message “called the hypothetical hanging of a Mexican child ‘piñata time’” while other messages quipped that “abusing children was sexually arousing,” according to images of the chat described by the Crimson.

Then, university officials caught on. And in mid-April, after administrators discovered the offensive, racially charged meme exchanges, at least 10 incoming students who participated in the chat received letters informing them that their offers of admission had been revoked.

In an email to The Washington Post Sunday night, Rachael Dane, a Harvard spokeswoman, said “we do not comment publicly on the admissions status of individual applicants.”

But according to the Harvard Crimson article, written by Harvard student Hannah Natanson, representatives from the admissions office emailed the implicated students asking them to reveal every picture they sent in the group.

“The Admissions Committee was disappointed to learn that several students in a private group chat for the Class of 2021 were sending messages that contained offensive messages and graphics,” read a copy of the Admissions Office’s email obtained by the Crimson. “As we understand you were among the members contributing such material to this chat, we are asking that you submit a statement by tomorrow at noon to explain your contributions and actions for discussion with the Admissions Committee.”

“It is unfortunate that I have to reach out about this situation,” the email continued.

According to Harvard college admissions policies, the university reserves the right to withdraw an offer of admission if the admitted student “engages or has engaged in behavior that brings into question their honesty, maturity or moral character,” among other conditions, Dane told The Post.

The Harvard College Class of 2021 official Facebook group — like similar groups for incoming students at other universities — allows admitted students to meet classmates, ask questions and prepare for their first semester. The group is managed by the Admissions and Financial Aid Office and states in its description it is “not responsible for any unofficial groups, chats, or the content within.”

“As a reminder, Harvard College reserves the right to withdraw an offer of admission under various conditions including if an admitted student engages in behavior that brings into question his or her honesty, maturity, or moral character,” the group description states.

To read the rest of the article, please visit: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/06/05/harvard-withdraws-10-acceptances-for-offensive-memes-in-private-chat/?tid=ss_fb&utm_term=.207db13a2d0d

School Safety Newsletter

Statewide Terrorism &
Intelligence Center
2200 S. Dirksen Parkway
Springfield, IL 62703
Phone: 217-558-2661
E-Mail:
Schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us

Mia Ray Langheim
School Intelligence
Officer

