



School Safety Newsletter

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What is The Blue Whale Challenge? The “Game” Possibly Encourages Teen Suicide

Bustle, May 11, 2017

<https://www.bustle.com/p/what-is-the-blue-whale-challenge-the-game-possibly-encourages-teen-suicide-57229>

We’ve seen a lot of viral challenges in the last few years; some are harmless fun, some are ridiculous, some are sketchy, but none have been quite as disturbing as the “Blue Whale Challenge,” a dangerous “game” that encourages self-harm and, eventually, suicide. In the last few months, reports have emerged of dozens of deaths motivated by the game, though much of this information is unsubstantiated and its validity is unclear. Nevertheless, concerns about the Blue Whale Challenge, which appears to have originated in Russia, have spread across the globe, with warnings cropping up in the UK, Brazil, Central Asia, and the United States.

The Blue Whale Challenge (also sometimes called the “Blue Whale suicide game”) purportedly involves a “master” or “curator” on social media giving a set of 50 daily tasks to a player, who is usually between the ages of 10 and 14. These tasks range from activities like watching a horror movie to committing self-harm. The final task required to “win” the game is suicide. Radio Free Europe reported that in one encounter it recorded, a curator told a player, “The last day is the end of the game. If you die, you win. If you don’t, we will help you. Are you ready?” Some players also told Radio Free Europe that they had been threatened by curators when they attempted to stop playing.

Some outlets have reported that the name “Blue Whale Challenge” is a reference to beached whales that, some believe, purposefully cast themselves on land to die. Bloomberg suggested that the name is an allusion to song lyrics by a Russian rock band.

Reports of the Blue Whale Challenge first came out of Russia, with dozens of teen suicides blamed on the game. In May 2016, the Russian website Novaya Gazeta alleged that, of 130 recent child and teen suicides in Russia, most had been motivated by Blue Whale Challenges. (Russia has the second highest teen suicide rate in the world, according to Bloomberg.) However, Radio Free Europe subsequently reported that none of these deaths have “been found to have a conclusive tie” to the Blue Whale game.

Though information about the challenge’s alleged victims is tenuous, authorities in a number of countries are nevertheless concerned, and there does seem to be some reality to the game and the so-called “death groups” that lead them. In St. Petersburg on Wednesday, 21-year-old Philipp Budeikin pleaded guilty to inciting the suicides of at least 16 teen girls via the Blue Whale Challenge. BBC Newsbeat reported that Budeikin, an organizer of the game, at one point referred to the girls as “biological waste” to the Russian press.

Schools, authorities, and media outlets in the UK, Europe, Russia, the United States, and Central Asia have warned parents about the Blue Whale Challenge; on Tuesday, a school district in Alabama posted a warning about the game on Facebook. Instagram has started directing users who search “#bluewhalechallenge” to a message offering mental health support.

The Irish internet safety website Webwise points out that, even if the Blue Whale Challenge was initially a hoax, it may still pose a danger for vulnerable adolescents and teens, especially as reports of the challenge go viral and its presence on the internet expands.

*Protecting our
future through
information
sharing*

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What is The Blue Whale Challenge? The “Game” Possibly Encourages Teen Suicide (Continued)

If you or someone you know is taking the Blue Whale Challenge, or experiencing thoughts of suicide, call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

Terrifying Report Reveals That Sexual Violence at School Begins Long Before College

Huffington Post, May 11, 2017

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/terrifying-report-reveals-that-sexual-violence-at-school-begins-long-before-college_us_59135384e4b050bdca61c720

A recent report from the Associated Press found some truly horrifying statistics about sexual violence in grades K-12. The investigation explored state education records using federal crime data between 2011 and 2015. The AP uncovered a total of 17,000 official reports of student-on-student sexual violence in grades K-12 in those four years.

According to the research, among children in the K-12 age range, those between the ages of 10 and 14 (namely those in their middle school years) were the most likely to experience sexual violence. Only 5 percent of the sexual assaults detailed by the AP involved 5 and 6-year-olds. The percentage of sexual violence decreased as students hit high school.

The report tracked multiple types of sexual violence including rape, sodomy, forced oral sex and fondling. The most common form of sexual violence was “unwanted sexual fondling,” with nearly 80 percent of victims reported experiencing unwanted fondling.

According to the AP’s findings, approximately one in five students reported experiencing rape, sodomy or being penetrated with a foreign object. Rape victims skewed older at an average age of 14 1/2 years old, while sodomy victims were younger at 12 1/2 years old. Boys made up the majority of the perpetrators in all these offenses. The peak age of reported female victims was 14 and 95 percent of cases with female victims were perpetrated by males.

The AP spoke with Wilson Kenney, an Oregon psychologist who has developed student intervention programs for sexual violence, about why these assaults are so rampant in the K-12 range. “Everyone feels like we don’t have a problem, and the reason they feel that way is they have their heads in the sand,” Kenney said. “Student-on-student sexual assaults live in the shadows compared to the attention paid to gun violence in schools, most notably the Newtown shooting. There’s no Sandy Hook for sexual misconduct. But I think the potential harm is great.”

As the AP noted, 17,000 reports of sexual violence in the K-12 grades is most likely just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to how many offenses actually take place. “[17,000] does not fully capture the problem because such attacks are greatly under-reported, some states don’t track them and those that do vary widely in how they classify and catalog sexual violence,” the report, authored by Robin McDowell, Reese Dunklin, Emily Schmall and Justin Pritchard, reads. “A number of academic estimates range sharply higher.”

The amount of sexual violence reports the AP found is just as disturbing as how often these offenses were mischaracterized by school administrators and staff as bullying and hazing.

Kristen Houser, the Chief Public Affairs Officer for the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, told HuffPost that there are multiple reasons why sexual violence is often mistaken for bullying.

“One reasons for this is that sexual violence is happening as part of a larger picture of bullying and hazing,” she explained. “There is actual bullying and hazing going on and I think it’s easy to sanitize the sexual violence that is a component of that by rolling it into the larger picture of bullying.”

While some media outlets pointed to preserving a school’s reputation as a reason administrators might excuse sexual violence as bullying, Houser said it’s more complicated than that.

“You certainly have administrators who are worried about not wanting to have their school in the news or tagged, but I don’t necessarily think that it’s always driven by an intentional attempt to mislead the community about what’s happened at the school,” she said.

Monthly Webinars!

First Wednesday of Every Month

at 10 am

(Except January, July, and August).

Next Webinar

**Wednesday,
June 7, 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

Terrifying Report Reveals That Sexual Violence at School Begins Long Before College (Continued)

“It really gets to a much broader issue that the general public — and school administrators are people in the general public — doesn’t understand the issue of sexual violence or perpetration, they don’t understand how it works. We still think it’s other people who we would know or associate with. When you get into youthful offending it’s very difficult for people to accept that children or teenagers would be involved in this behavior.”

Houser went on to explain that most people in the general public don’t know the facts when it comes to sexual violence: Most people who perpetrate sexual violence as adults begin these patterns as children; and approximately half of child sexual abuse cases are perpetrated by other children.

School administrators and staff need to be pro-active when sexual violence occurs in schools, Houser said.

“We really want people to look at this report, take it seriously and recognize that schools have an obligation to maintain safe learning environments under Title IX, just like universities do,” she said. “There are reasons to do it for liability measures, but ultimately, administrators and teachers need to be reminding the school that getting intervention and looking at consequences is a help to both the victim and the perpetrator.”

In 2015, 9 Out of 10 Colleges and Universities Reported No Campus Rapes. But Was That The Truth?

The LA Times, May 10, 2017

<http://www.latimes.com/local/education/la-essential-education-updates-southern-university-women-question-data-showing-1494452260-htmlstory.html>

Nine out of 10 universities and colleges reported no campus rapes in 2015, according to an analysis of federal data released May 10, 2017 by the American Assn. of University Women.

But the association sharply questioned whether the 11,000 U.S. colleges included in the analysis were doing enough to encourage victims to report sexual violence.

“If these numbers were accurate there’d be cause for celebration, but we know for a fact they’re not,” Lisa M. Maatz, the association’s vice president of government relations and advocacy, said in a statement. “These numbers don’t reflect campus climate surveys and academic research, let alone what we’ve heard from students themselves.”



Data on campus sexual violence vary widely. One 2006 study frequently cited by the Obama administration found that 19% of female college students have been sexually assaulted, while a 2014 Dept. of Justice study put the figure at less than 1%.

The university women's association analyzed 2015 campus crime data reported to the U.S. Dept. of Education under the federal Clery Act. Among California universities, UCLA reported 17 rapes, UC Berkeley 18, UC Irvine 19 and USC 11.

The analysis also found that about 9% of campuses reported at least one incident of domestic violence, about 10% reported dating violence and about 13% reported stalking.

“The data tell us that students don’t feel comfortable coming forward with their experiences,” Maatz said.

She said the numbers underscored the continued need for "robust enforcement" of Title IX, the ban on sex discrimination by schools receiving federal funds. The U.S. Dept. of Education’s Office for Civil Rights stepped up enforcement of Title IX under the Obama administration, but it is unclear whether Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos will continue to do so.

Teen Dies From Too Much Caffeine, Coroner Says

CNN, May 16, 2017

<http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/15/health/teen-death-caffeine/index.html>

Too much caffeine caused the death of a 16-year-old high school student from South Carolina who collapsed during class last month, according to the county coroner.

Davis Allen Cripe died from a caffeine-induced cardiac event causing a probable arrhythmia, Richland County Coroner Gary Watts announced in a news conference Monday. During an arrhythmia, or abnormal heart rhythm, the heart may not be able to pump enough blood to the body, and lack of blood flow affects the brain, heart and other organs.

The teen consumed three caffeine-laced drinks -- a cafe latte, large Diet Mountain Dew and an energy drink -- in a two-hour period before collapsing in his classroom at Spring Hill High School on April 26, Watts said.

Among those at the news conference Monday was the teen's father, Sean Cripe.

"Like all parents, we worry about our kids as they grow up. We worry about their safety, their health, especially once they start driving. But it wasn't a car crash that took his life. Instead, it was an energy drink," Sean Cripe said of his son's death.

Watts said Davis had purchased the latte at McDonald's around 12:30 p.m. After that he consumed the Diet Mountain Dew and the energy drink.

Davis collapsed at the school in Chapin, near Columbia, just before 2:30 p.m. and according to Watts, was pronounced dead at 3:40 p.m.

Davis' autopsy showed no undiagnosed heart conditions and that Davis was healthy and had no conditions that could have triggered by the caffeine intake. Also, no other drugs or alcohol were found in the teen's system, according to Watts.

"This was not an overdose. We lost Davis from a totally legal substance," Watts said. "Our purpose here today is to let people know, especially our young kids in school, that these drinks can be dangerous, and be very careful with how you use them, and how many you drink on a daily basis."

Sean Cripe said he hopes that if nothing else comes out of this, parents and kids will realize the dangers of caffeinated beverages.

"Parents, please talk to your kids about the dangers of these energy drinks," he said.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that adolescents, age 12 to 18, should not consume more than 100 milligrams of caffeine per day. An intake of caffeine greater than that has been associated with elevated blood pressure in adolescents, Sheri Zidenberg-Cherr, nutrition specialist and vice chairwoman in the department of nutrition at the University of California, Davis previously told CNN.

When it comes to energy drinks specifically, "children and adolescents are advised to avoid energy drinks. They can contain a significant amount of caffeine as well as other stimulants," she said.

A 2014 study found an estimated 73% of children consume some kind of caffeine each day. While there is no designated standard for children, according to the US Food and Drug Administration adults can consume 400 milligrams of caffeine per day -- equivalent to four or five cups of coffee -- without experiencing side effects.

Caffeine is a stimulant that can improve alertness and mood. It can also be habit forming. Too much caffeine can cause mild symptoms such as shaky hands and an upset stomach. Severe symptoms can include high blood pressure, seizures and coma, according to the National Capital Poison Center.

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

