

INTERNAL MEMO

DATE:	March 1, 2019
TO:	Elementary and Secondary Administrators
FROM:	Sharon Stephanian David Hoy
SUBJECT:	Internet Challenges and Hoaxes

Recently there has been extensive media coverage and concerns raised regarding internet hoaxes and “challenges” that target children online via popular social media channels. These hoaxes or “challenges” often receive extensive media coverage and create anxiety and stress for children, caregivers and educators. At this time there is no evidence to suggest that these “challenges” pose a real threat to our students; however, they are still unsettling for some.

Similar to how we respond to television shows or other forms of social media that cause fear or spread misinformation, we encourage all Board staff to be responsive to the questions and emotions that come from our students.

Given the widespread media coverage, it is likely that classroom conversations will arise on this topic. We encourage educators to take this as an opportunity to clarify misinformation, promote help-seeking behaviours and to model for students appropriate stress management and healthy coping strategies.

Should questions pertaining to suicide arise in the classroom, we encourage all educators to refer to our *“Talking with Students about Suicide”* best practices guide located in the We Help Sharepoint site under the Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention folder.

Below, please find a letter that you may wish to send home to families recommending good practices to adopt safe internet use by their children.

HWDSB

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Please feel free to contact David Hoy, Manager of Social Work Services/Mental Health Lead or Dana Gillespie-Tozer, Assistant Manager of Social Work, should you have any questions.

[Date]

Dear Families,

We have been receiving calls from concerned caregivers about disturbing, viral hoaxes or “challenges” that target children online via popular social media channels. These “challenges” often receive extensive media coverage and create anxiety and stress for children and their families.

We encourage caregivers to take this as an opportunity to have intentional conversations with their children about what they encounter online. These discussions could include:

- Reminding children to never contact strangers online, on any platform;
- Encourage children to share any worries or concerns with you;
- Ensure children understand the importance of not giving personal information to anyone they do not know;
- Tell children no-one has the right to make them do anything they do not want to do;
- Set privacy systems on devices with your child as a way to have the conversation about safety.

It is also important for parents to know what children can access online. We have the following suggestions for families:

- Set privacy settings for all social media and gaming applications;
- Keep video games and YouTube watching in shared family spaces;
- Set up video game restrictions to friends only;
- Set up “restricted” mode on YouTube for your child’s account so inappropriate content is not available to them or stream YouTube content through a family-friendly site such as www.watchkin.com.
- Look for digital citizenship safety tips - here’s an example: Online Safety Rules for Kids <https://canadasafetycouncil.org/online-safety-rules-kids/>

We suggest that you build the above practices into your family’s internet use routine. If you have any questions or need support with respect to discussing online safety with your child, please contact the school office.