

This is an advisory for the parents to monitor their children's social media activity for a new game that challenges participants to harm themselves. The Blue Whale Challenge is an app that instructs its participants (mostly preteens) to carry out increasingly dangerous tasks and self-harm over 50 days. Users are encouraged to tag friends on social media and 'challenge' them to participate in the game. Challenges start with something as simple as watching a scary movie in the dead of the night. But the tasks escalate to things like cutting themselves and etching the figure of a whale on their forearm, and by the 50th day participants are supposed to commit suicide. After every task, the player is supposed to click a picture and send it to the administrator. Social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube can be used for the game.

Parents are encouraged to talk to their children about any new games or challenges their friends may be playing. We also request parents to search their children's social media accounts for use of the #BlueWhaleChallenge hashtag or photos of a blue whale.

In addition to the above, we would also like to advise parents about the following:

- Allow children to watch/play only age appropriate shows and games. (can visit sites like: <https://www.common sense media.org/reviews> to find these)
- To be aware of the minimum age requirements for subscribing/ using social networks and conform to it.
- **Set your search engine to "safe search" mode:** For Google users go to <http://www.google.com/familysafety/>; Bing users go to <http://www.bing.com/preferences.aspx>; and, if you use another search engine, go to the safety settings and find this feature. If your child uses services like YouTube, be sure you have set the "safe" mode on those platforms as well.
- **Use the family safety tools provided by your computer's/other device's operating system:** Both Windows and Mac operating systems provide family safety settings.
- **Use family safety tool services:** Sometimes called parental controls, these tools allow you to set specific filters to block types of content you find inappropriate. Keep in mind that these tools need to be installed on *every device* your child uses to go online: game consoles, cell phones, tablets, personal laptops and computers. Some services have coverage for all types of devices, others are limited to just computers or phones. You may find that using a single solution on all devices makes your monitoring much easier. (An easy option for blocking such sites is OpenDNS.com. You don't have to download or install any software for this. Click here for more details: <https://www.trixhub.com/protect-kids-adult-sites-internet/>)
- **Periodically look at your children's browser history.** There are a number of phrases youth use to get around pornography filters – like "breast feeding" and

“childbirth” – and some fast-changing slang terms that filters may not have caught up with like “walking the dog,” which is a slang term for coition. If you see odd search terms, give the sites a quick look.

- **Have your children restrict access to their social networking sites to only known friends, and keep their sites private.** A great deal of inappropriate content is shared among private albums on social networking sites.
- **Scan the photos on your child’s cell phone once in a while.** Let your children know that at times you will sit down with them and go through the pictures they have stored on their phone.
- **Review the applications your child has downloaded to their phone or tablet.** Mobile content filters may not catch all the potentially inappropriate apps.
- **You are your strongest tool.** No technical blocking solution alone is enough to protect a determined child or teen from finding content online. Have the “talk” on an ongoing basis with your family about the content your family finds appropriate and inappropriate; this exchange should never be a one-time conversation.

“This message is not meant to alarm anyone, but rather to encourage parents to be vigilant and proactive in protecting their children from potential negative influences on the internet”

