

Regional School Unit 57

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RSU 57 prepares respectful, responsible and creative thinkers for success in the global community.

June 8, 2017

Dear Parents & Guardians,

The Maine Department of Education recently informed Superintendents of a rumor circulating about a smart phone app called the Blue Whale Challenge. I believe it is important to share this information with you in order to raise awareness and to keep our children safe.

The Blue Whale Challenge rumors indicate that the app is a social media challenge targeting 10-14 year olds. Rumors suggest the app encourages at-risk, vulnerable teens to perform specific, and sometimes harmful, tasks assigned by an anonymous group administrator. Escalating over the course of a 50-day period, the tasks lure participants into sharing personal information, and as the game progresses that information is then used against the "players" in the form of threats if they choose to stop playing. On the last day of the challenge, the only way to "WIN" is to die by suicide.

Following is a link to a recently published article about the Blue Whale Challenge from Cyberbullying.org that may provide additional helpful information as well as specific rumors associated with it. <http://cyberbullying.org/blue-whale-challenge> Please take special note of the last two paragraphs, which contain information that supports the importance of awareness and prevention strategies:


"My concern about the sudden captivation in the Blue Whale centers on hackers who will capitalize on interest in the activity to lure curious clickers into compromising their computers and networks. And even though there has yet to be any confirmed suicide directly connected to the game, it could lead to trouble for vulnerable youth looking for attention. A suicide contagion has been well documented in research and so even just increased discussion of suicide in relation to this game is potentially problematic. Instagram now warns users who search the app for #bluewhalechallenge that they may encounter images that encourage hurtful behavior.

“Whether the Blue Whale Challenge/Game/App is true or not is mostly beside the point. There certainly are many pro-suicide websites and individuals or groups online who encourage others to commit suicide. Today it may be a Blue Whale, tomorrow it could be some other high profile provocation. Take this opportunity to talk with your children about what they might encounter online (positive and negative) and foster a relationship with them so that they know they can turn to you if they run into trouble or are feeling down. Frequent and open dialog is the best way to inoculate our kids from the variety of life challenges they are likely to confront, whether perceived or actual, online or off.”

The serious implications and sensitivity of the subject matter make it imperative that we keep you informed. If and when more information becomes available, we will certainly share that as well. Below are some resources you may find helpful:

- Maine Crisis Hotline (888) 568-1112
- www.maine.gov/suicide
- Questions regarding education laws related to suicide prevention, contact Susan Berry, Maine DOE (207) 624-6695, susan.berry@maine.gov
- Suicide prevention and postvention responses and/or resources, contact Greg Marley, NAMI Maine, Maine Suicide Prevention Program (207) 622-5767 x2302

Sincerely,



Larry Malone
Superintendent