



Viral Challenges & Scare Stories – Letter Template

A letter template to support schools and colleges when addressing and responding to concerns about online challenges and viral scare stories

Publication Date:
November 2021
Rev. 4721

Children's
Safeguarding Assurance
Partnership
Blackburn with Darwen - Blackpool - Lancashire

[delete & insert school logo/letterhead - the following text has been developed as a template to support school colleagues with addressing concerns around recent online challenges/scare stories causing concern. The text can be copied and pasted (amending as appropriate) onto school correspondence, inserting your school logo/letterhead in place of this text. The template is intended as a basis for sharing with your parents/carers but in line with recommended best practice, **try to avoid including the names of specific concerns or challenges** as this will lead to further unwanted publicity and scaring.]

Dear Parent/Carer,

Viral Online Challenges - Update

Over recent weeks, there have been a number of stories in the media surrounding an '*online challenge*' which has been circulated extensively on social media involving *<disturbing images and suggestions of self-harm and suicide>*. These stories are similar to previously reported challenges and are typically based upon urban myths and hoaxes *<with no verified evidence of links to suicide in the UK>*. Such scare stories undoubtedly upset and concern children and rely upon alarmist reactions and subsequently sharing with others to further increase their reach. Whilst it is understandable to want to share and warn others of the current issue, I would strongly encourage you not to do so and contact the school should you wish to discuss your concerns.

Within school, we regularly teach about online safety and support building digital resilience which includes topics around checking the veracity of information and who to talk to if we have a concern about something we have seen online. If you would like to find out more about what views children and young people across the Lancashire region have about the online world, I would encourage you to look at the LSCB MyAdvice visual summary - a short 5-minute animated clip looking specifically at Online Safety including who they would like to talk to and what advice they would give to others (see: <https://youtu.be/kQLAYB9zQCM>).

Whilst it is important that we do not forget that the online environment brings immense benefits and positives, there are also real risks and dangers and research shows that the single most effective thing we can do to help keep our children safe online is to have a conversation about the online world. In light of the most recent *<online challenge/scare story>*, I would strongly encourage you to take the opportunity to have this conversation. Should you find this a daunting prospect (as many parents and carers do!), there is useful guidance available from the parents and carers section of the Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership website (<https://www.safeguardingpartnership.org.uk/online/parents-carers>) including specific advice and tips about having '*the online safety conversation*'.

Safeguarding is a key priority at [insert school name], whether it is on school premises or beyond. Effective safeguarding includes the risks of the online world and it relies upon the whole school community to actively participate and support this priority. We host [annual] Parental Awareness Sessions in school (details of which are published via the school's website) and I would encourage you to attend wherever possible. I hope you will find this information reassuring but should you have any specific concerns on this or any other safeguarding matter, please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Kind regards,