## Blue Whale Challenge

In February 2017 a number of reports emerged in the media regarding a "suicide game" most commonly known as the Blue Whale Challenge.  As part of this game the player signs up and agrees to follow instructions over the course of the next 50 days.  It is reported an administrator assigns a series of tasks for the participant ranging from listening to a song to cutting themselves, which the player must accomplish.  The player "wins" when they undertake the final task of committing suicide on the 50th day.

The game was originally reported by a Russian website which stated that 130 suicides of children had occurred in a 6 month period with at least 80 of the suicides being linked to the Blue Whale Challenge in Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.  However, on closer inspection none of the deaths have been found to have a conclusive tie to the game.

The initial report was criticised at the time of the publication with some later reports  suggesting that this was a hoax, with other online sources stating it was reasonable to assume that depressed or suicidal teenagers are simply drawn to the same social media groups and not that they were causing them to commit suicide.  However, the Blue Whale Challenge reports do continue in online media, with some sites reporting that the inventor of the "game" is presently in a Russian jail where they are in custody.

While it is unclear whether or not the Blue Whale Challenge is a hoax, children, young people, parents, carers and professionals must always remain vigilant and take appropriate action to ensure safety and wellbeing online.

## Apps and online services

Another safeguarding concern is in relation to the use of apps and online services on smartphones, tablets and other devices which do not have appropriate controls in place.  Apps and online services can be used in ways that are not always positive, especially where appropriate safeguards are not in place. It is recommended that devices used to access apps and online services have the appropriate controls including:

- **Age restrictions:** Think about the age restrictions on the sites your family use. Common Sense Media (commonsensemedia.org) and NetAware (net-aware.org.uk) are great sites to see what other parents think of the age rating on different platforms so that you can make an informed decision of whether your family should be using them.

- **Privacy setting:** Most social networking sites have privacy settings to help you manage the content you share and who you share it with; you can decide if you want your posts to be shared with your online friends and followers only or with the public. You can also decide who can contact you on sites you use within the privacy settings.

- **Block and report:** Make sure your child knows that they can block or report any user that makes them feel uncomfortable online. Childnet (childnet.com) have guidance on how to make reports on different websites.

# What should I do if I have a concern?

The Internet has many advantages for children and young people; however, everyone must be aware of the dangers of using the internet. Although it is unclear whether the Blue Whale Challenge is a hoax, any apps and online services can be misused, which may result in children or young person being at risk of multiple vulnerabilities including self-harm, bullying, grooming, and exploitation.

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre provides advice and guidance for everyone regarding e-safety on their website www.thinkuknow.co.uk.

If you are concerned about a child or young person there are a number of places you can go to speak to someone for information, report your concerns and get help.

**For children and young people:**

If you have any online concerns or are concerned about a friend, you can contact Childline on 0800 1111.

CEOP helps to keep children and young people safe online. If something scary or bad has happened to you or a friend online, CEOP (www.ceop.police.uk/Ceop-Report) will talk to you to find out what has happened and to help keep you or your friend safe.

**For parents and carers:**

For parents and carers, you can talk to the NSPCC 0808 808 5002 who provide help on how to keep children safe online. Parents can also report abuse of children to CEOP (www.ceop.police.uk/Ceop-Report).

**For professionals:**

If you have a concern regarding the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person you should make a referral to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Team (MAST) on 01609 780780. Further information can be obtained from www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/worried-about-child.

Professionals can also speak to the Professionals Online Safety Helpline on 0344 3814772 for advice and guidance as well as report concerns to CEOP (www.ceop.police.uk/Ceop-Report).

**For schools:**

The NYCC online safety guidance for schools and settings can be accessed from http://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=27322.

Schools ICT also provide a range of links for schools which can be shared with parents. For more information please see http://websitebuilder.schoolsict.co.uk/learning-zone.

The North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Board Website also has a collection of safeguarding resources for schools available as follows:

- Key Stage 1 - 2
  http://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/admin//uploads/resources/ks1-2-safeguarding-resources.pdf
- Key Stage 3 - 4
  http://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/admin//uploads/resources/ks3-4-safeguarding-resources.pdf