

We have learned that there are a number of rumors circulating about a smart phone app or online game called the **Blue Whale Challenge**. Stories indicate that it is a social media challenge targeting 10-14 year olds. Rumors suggest that this game 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.

It is the Department's intent to make you aware of the rumor and to share the most current information related to this issue. We are aware of instances across the country where administrators and other sources have been sharing information on this issue, and we do know that some students in Maine are aware of the app.

Here is a recently published article about the Blue Whale Challenge, from Cyberbullying.org, that may provide some more helpful context around the app and specific rumors associated with it: <http://cyberbullying.org/blue-whale-challenge>. Please take 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."*

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