



# PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

CAB 003-17

August 7, 2017

## SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGES AND PRANKS

Social media has significantly expanded global communication and information sharing. In the last few years, social media challenges and pranks have emerged that encourage Internet users to replicate viral trends by posting videos and photos online. Users have also utilized livestreaming functions of social media platforms to broadcast to an audience in real time. While some social media challenges have promoted charity or educational awareness, a variety of challenges and pranks have also inspired users to participate in activities that can result in serious injuries or even death. Adolescents are often the most vulnerable to partake in dangerous online games to seek the approval of friends, associates, and general Internet users from around the world. Individuals who participate in unsafe challenges or pranks often fail to measure risk appropriately and focus on the recognition and attention obtained from completing each challenge successfully. The posting of videos or photos on social media platforms, such as Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook, often encourages additional individuals to participate in the activities.<sup>1</sup>



INSIGHTS-LLC.COM

## THE BLUE WHALE CHALLENGE

Recently, a suicidal game, the “Blue Whale Challenge” or “Blue Whale,” that originated in Russia in 2015, made its way to the United States. The game involves an administrator manipulating the player through social media to complete 50 challenges, including self-mutilation and setting a date that the player must commit suicide. Some challenges include drawing a whale on a piece of paper, waking up at 0420 hours to watch a horror film, carving a whale into your body, etching a phrase on your arm or hand, cutting your lip, and ultimately, the final challenge is for the player to jump to their death from a rooftop or in front of a train on the 50<sup>th</sup> day. The player must send the administrator photos or videos as proof of completing each step in the game. Players in the late stages of the game are instructed to delete evidence of communication from their social media account. The game was rumored to be an Internet hoax; however, it was linked to over 100 deaths in Russia. At least two deaths in the United States have been identified as being associated with the game.



NEW.COM.AU

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Though the Blue Whale is just one dangerous challenge, other alarming viral trends are evolving. Parents and guardians should be aware of popular online challenges and pranks that adolescents can partake in on social media. The following are possible indicators of adolescents engaging in risky online behavior.

- Adolescents may become secretive about their online activities and obsess about using the devices with Internet access.
- Individuals may receive odd phone calls or messages through text messaging applications.
- Withdrawing behavior from activities and interaction with family and friends.
- Evidence of self-mutilation or unexplained cuts, bruises, or burns appearing on their body.
- The oversharing of personal information and explicit photos to someone online.
- Befriending unknown individuals through social media platforms.
- Receiving gifts, mail, or packages from an unknown person.<sup>2</sup>



# PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

## COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

CAB 003-17

August 7, 2017

---

<sup>1</sup> Whigham, N. (2017, July 16). The advent of social media has brought a new dynamic to those trying to navigate the challenge of adolescence. *News.com.au*. Retrieved on 07/14/2017 from <http://www.news.com.au/technology/online/social/the-adolescent-brain-and-the-dark-side-of-social-media-challenges/news-story/147b76986b97f4568d8b6a590b4cab5>.

<sup>2</sup> Internet Safety 101. Warning Signs. *Internetsafety101.org*. Retrieved on 07/14/2017 from <http://www.internetsafety101.org/predatorwarningsigns>.