

Proactive Briefing Information sharing around online challenges and games relating to suicide and self-harm

To: Public Mental Health and Children and Young People leads

Dear all,

We have been made aware that well known online challenges have recently resurfaced online with themes relating to self-harm and suicide. Whilst there are several versions of the challenges being shared, they typically consist of a series of harmful tasks that are given to users over a set period of time.

These challenges have in the past attracted vast amounts of unhelpful media coverage and attention across social media platforms. However, there is no known evidence of these challenges resulting in serious harm in the UK and it is important to remember that suicide is complex and rarely the result of one thing.

PHE, Samaritans, internet safety groups and social media platforms are aware of the online challenges currently being circulated. Work is being carried out, behind the scenes to limit the accessibility of this content and to take steps to address concerns around potential risks posed, particularly to young people.

Samaritans continues to work closely with social media platforms and monitor online content and news coverage. Since initial mentions online, the challenges attracted attention across social media platforms but have not received much news coverage so far in the UK. We hope that this remains the case.

Due to the potential risk of contagion we should do all we can to limit this being shared more widely. This could initiate widespread media coverage of the challenge and raise greater awareness of it among young audiences.

While it is important to promote online safety to young audiences, parents and adults who work with children and young people, it is safer to approach this with general messages about online safety, without naming specific online games or challenges.

If you are forwarded warnings about any online challenge or game relating to self-harm and suicide, please **think carefully about what you share**. It is worth reminding people of the importance of avoiding drawing attention to it and inadvertently advertising it to young people. Some further advice below:

- **We encourage parents and adults who work with young people to talk to them about their online activity.** Let them share what they're playing or looking at, rather than asking them whether they have seen or engaged with the online challenge, which may draw their interest to it.
- **We encourage extreme caution on sharing online content with young people, that may be distressing or upsetting.** If young people express any

concern or worries over material they have seen online, or posts or comments that friends or others have made, it is important to listen to them and offer support. Remember that inappropriate online material, which could be harmful and distressing, can be reported through social media channels for review and potential removal.

- **Providing information and signposting to sources of support for all young people is important at all times.** It may also be useful to provide advice on how young people can support themselves and their friends.
- Increasingly people use the internet to express themselves and share their thoughts and feelings, or to participate in online activities. Sometimes online material and activities can be harmful and upsetting and it's important to let people know what to do if this happens, so they can look after themselves.
- **If you have concerns that someone is suicidal**, useful information can be found here:
<http://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/what-speak-us-about/if-you%E2%80%99re-worried-about-someone-else/what-should-i-do-if-i>
<http://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/what-speak-us-about/if-you%E2%80%99re-worried-about-someone-else>
- **For tips on talking about suicide online safely:**
<https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/internet-suicide/how-talk-about-suicide-safely-online/>
- **For general advice on online safety**, aimed at young people, parents and teachers visit the ChildNet website: <https://www.childnet.com/>

If you have any concerns or questions about emails you have been forwarded please do not hesitate to contact the Online Harms Advisory Service at Samaritans, onlineharms@samaritans.org, or contact Public Health England at PublicMentalHealth@phe.gov.uk