Worried about MoMo

You may have seen some press about the alleged "MoMo Challenge." A reader has and she's worried.

"I am very concerned about the Momo challenge that parents are being warned about. My twin great-grandkids age 2 years and the 5 and 6-year-olds also watch the YouTube videos and while I was looking for a program to put on for the 2 yr olds, a horrible looking scary face popped up and scared even me. I quickly closed the tab and now I do not know which video this was on. The parents say do not use the YouTube for kids app. YouTube has been saying these are all hoaxes and does not affect all the videos and that you tube is actively working to identify the programs they are appearing on. I believe them. It has only happened once for us, but I cannot get the picture of that horrible face out of my mind. Any suggestions on how to go forward in protecting our kids and ourselves until better security is in place by YouTube?"

Here's the deal. MoMo is the name given a creepy-looking face kids use to scare each other. Sometimes they'll slip it into the middle of a video to startle people. Kind of like jumping out and yelling "Boo!" to startle someone.

The alleged MoMo Challenge claimed that instances of this face were actually challenges trying to convince kids to harm themselves. Now, there's no evidence that any kid has harmed themselves in reaction to seeing this ugly meme or that it was ever connected with some type of self-harm challenge. That appears to be a nice ghost story that plays on the fears of parents.

YouTube is a site that features user-generated content. USG means that users make and upload videos. Whenever you're dealing with USG, there's always the possibility that someone will slip something like that scary MoMo image in there.

It's also possible for someone to copy a video of a popular show and slip that scary face in there just to say, "Boo!" That said, real life is not a Japanese horror movie. Looking at a scary picture isn't going to cause someone to die.

Whenever you're dealing with USG, it's a good idea to watch the videos first and then create a playlist from videos you've already
approved. YouTube uses programs that scan for certain images, like nudity. But they probably didn't have their filters trained to look for the spooky little bug-eyed girl. Now they do. So it will be harder for any videos containing the image to be uploaded.

Paying for a streaming service with pre-produced professional programs for kids is one way to be more confident that the content is appropriate. Previewing all videos yourself to be sure is a better way.

I would not suggest leaving kids alone to navigate their way through any service like YouTube.