Dear Parents and Guardians,

We would like to make you aware of a social media game called "Blue Whale Challenge" that originated in Russia and is gaining popularity in the United States.  It is a dangerous game that targets tweens and teenagers and encourages the player to participate in challenges or tasks over the course of 50 days that gradually increase in intensity. The last challenge to "win" the game is for the participant to die by suicide.

There have been no incidents of the Blue Whale Challenge reported in Howard County. However, the Maryland Center for School Safety recently released a statement stating that the game is beginning to gain popularity among pre-teens and teenagers throughout the United States.  One incident has been noted in the National Capital Region. The University of Maryland Center for School Mental Health has released the following guidance for parents and guardians:

●       Provide guidance to youth about the challenge. If you know someone is engaging in the Blue Whale Challenge, it is possible that their device may be compromised.  Share that you can help with the device and send the message that adults are there to help. If youth express signs of distress, it is important to connect them to mental health professionals.

●       Monitor youth’s use of electronic devices. Discuss the websites, links, and social media apps they are using. Caregivers can monitor media use by looking through browsers and search histories.

●       Know the warning signs of psychological distress. Observable signs include changes in behavior (e.g. outbursts or being withdrawn) or physical health (e.g. weight loss or gain; loss of appetite), hopelessness, sadness, boredom and depression. If you see signs of distress, ask if they are considering suicide. Asking about suicide does not increase risk of suicide.

●       Have discussions with your child about distress. When having conversations with children, listen to their thoughts, remain calm, and be nonjudgmental. Avoid statements like “you should get over it.” Talk to community or school mental health professionals if you are concerned about someone’s health or safety.

●       Call for help. If someone makes an immediate threat to hurt or kill themselves, call 911. If a person shows warning signs of distress, but does not make an immediate threat, you can encourage him/her to:

○        Call Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center:  410-531-6677

○        Call Maryland Suicide Hotline:  1-800-422-0009

○        Call National Suicide Prevention Hotline:  1-800-273-TALK (8255)

○        Text Crisis Text Line at 741741

With summer on the horizon, continued vigilance of the numerous games, movies, television series and other influences is paramount.  If you have concerns about the mental or emotional well-being of your child this summer, seek help from a community-based mental health provider or contact the school counselor, school psychologist or other student services staff at your child’s school.  Some additional resources are listed below:

●       Talking to Kids When They Need Help[http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/help-kids.aspx](https://mail.hcpss.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=Sehh1HFXGYXusByAIhL-TGVG6iz3hgT0O6Vrlvhai4yUysv1uanUCA..&URL=http%3a%2f%2ftrack.spe.schoolmessenger.com%2ff%2fa%2fkI8Ac3GTRzXQ8lyfvrpeMw%7e%7e%2fAAAAAQA%7e%2fRgRbEYpSP0EIAOyS-KoTVyxXB3NjaG9vbG1YBAAAAABCCgAD0lYwWT4iPGpSHG1hcnRpbl92YW5kZW5iZXJnZUBoY3Bzcy5vcmcJUQQAAAAARCxodHRwOi8vd3d3LmFwYS5vcmcvaGVscGNlbnRlci9oZWxwLWtpZHMuYXNweEeseyJzZW50VGltZU1zIjoiMTQ5NjM0MDAyMDY3OSIsImVudiI6InByb2QiLCJzZXF1ZW5jZSI6IjAiLCJzaGFyZGlkIjoiNSIsInVzZXJpZCI6IjI2NCIsImVtYWlsU291cmNlIjoiQ1VTVE9NRVJfSk9CIiwicGVyc29uaWQiOiIxMTk4MTkiLCJjdXN0b21lcmlkIjoiNjExOCIsImpvYmlkIjoiMzYxNTYifQ%7e%7e" \t "_blank)

●       Parent Guides from Connect Safely[https://www.connectsafely.org/guides-3/](https://mail.hcpss.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=INCgMlaef0I69_dS06wWGA8EI9h_2rMUjrV61H3ZfTKUysv1uanUCA..&URL=http%3a%2f%2ftrack.spe.schoolmessenger.com%2ff%2fa%2f9zqJctqM1s2LG0HT5fZ08A%7e%7e%2fAAAAAQA%7e%2fRgRbEYpSP0EIAOyS-KoTVyxXB3NjaG9vbG1YBAAAAABCCgAD0lYwWT4iPGpSHG1hcnRpbl92YW5kZW5iZXJnZUBoY3Bzcy5vcmcJUQQAAAAARCdodHRwczovL3d3dy5jb25uZWN0c2FmZWx5Lm9yZy9ndWlkZXMtMy9HrHsidXNlcmlkIjoiMjY0IiwicGVyc29uaWQiOiIxMTk4MTkiLCJlbWFpbFNvdXJjZSI6IkNVU1RPTUVSX0pPQiIsInNlbnRUaW1lTXMiOiIxNDk2MzQwMDIwNjc5IiwiZW52IjoicHJvZCIsInNoYXJkaWQiOiI1Iiwiam9iaWQiOiIzNjE1NiIsInNlcXVlbmNlIjoiMCIsImN1c3RvbWVyaWQiOiI2MTE4In0%7e" \t "_blank)

●       Prevention of Cyberbullying[https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/prevention](https://mail.hcpss.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=IOaeqKLAGWLlcvkhmS2onXezGNbuik3okOODUrtO4ZeUysv1uanUCA..&URL=http%3a%2f%2ftrack.spe.schoolmessenger.com%2ff%2fa%2fDqHMnIey_L2Z0xq7QZUuYA%7e%7e%2fAAAAAQA%7e%2fRgRbEYpSP0EIAOyS-KoTVyxXB3NjaG9vbG1YBAAAAABCCgAD0lYwWT4iPGpSHG1hcnRpbl92YW5kZW5iZXJnZUBoY3Bzcy5vcmcJUQQAAAAARDVodHRwczovL3d3dy5zdG9wYnVsbHlpbmcuZ292L2N5YmVyYnVsbHlpbmcvcHJldmVudGlvbkeseyJwZXJzb25pZCI6IjExOTgxOSIsImVtYWlsU291cmNlIjoiQ1VTVE9NRVJfSk9CIiwiZW52IjoicHJvZCIsImN1c3RvbWVyaWQiOiI2MTE4Iiwiam9iaWQiOiIzNjE1NiIsInVzZXJpZCI6IjI2NCIsInNlbnRUaW1lTXMiOiIxNDk2MzQwMDIwNjc5Iiwic2hhcmRpZCI6IjUiLCJzZXF1ZW5jZSI6IjAifQ%7e%7e" \t "_blank)