

## **The Blue Whale Phenomenon – what can be done....**

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A 14 year old boy commits suicide in Mumbai. Police investigations are probing the role of an internet game in the suicide. The game is named Blue Whale. Why is the name Blue Whale associated with such a game – it is a thought to ponder. It gets its name from a common belief that blue whales deliberately beach themselves in order to end their own lives.

### **About the Game**

The game has been claimed to have started in Russia and has been incriminated in teenage suicides in Russia and Europe. It is an online social media group where you may not be able to download the game from a play store but have to be invited to play after you put in an application. The game encourages players to kill themselves, via a series of challenges and games. The group administrator according to reports, assigns daily tasks that one must complete for a 50 day period. These range from watching horror movies and waking up at unusual hours to engaging in self injurious behavior. The tasks get more extreme and difficult as days pass. Reports have claimed that on the 50th and final day, the administrator instructs the players to attempt and commit suicide. There are reports that those who want to back out on the last day are threatened that their family members would be hurt if they don't abide by the game rules. There is no exit from the game.

The biggest fear is that since it is an online entity and spread over the internet, it can be accessed from anywhere. Parents must remain vigilant about their children's online activities. It would also help if they talk to their children to help create awareness about malicious content online. Reports have accounted the spreading of this game to the USA, Europe, UK and now even India. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook are probable platforms where the administrator gets in touch with the participant after those interested throw out postings on social media asking for a curator.

### **What Parents and We Can Do About It**

1. Parents need to constantly maintain healthy and open conversations with their children and teenagers about various aspects of internet use, video game use and the rational use and dangers of the same.
2. Parents need to constantly monitor what their children are doing online. They need to be aware of the internet and they should monitor what their children are doing online. They need to know what games their children play, who they chat with and also be aware of various social media sites that their children post on.
3. They must explain to children the difference between a virtual video game world and the real world and that the two do not coalesce or meet. There is a need for children and teenagers to realize a difference between the two and also understand that while they play an online game for enjoyment, the game is an artificial world and cannot become a reality.
4. Very often teenagers try to emulate in reality what happens in an online game and there is a need for a clear mental distinction between the real and the virtual world.
5. Teenagers and children may express unfulfilled needs and emotions via a game they play and the character they imbibe while playing these games. Parents need to understand the games their children play and speak to them about the online characters they assume and why they do so. If

the child expresses unfulfilled desires and emotions via these characters (avatars) and games, one must try to help the child fulfill those needs in real life rather than the virtual world.

6. Children must be encouraged to socialize in the real world and have friends and social outings with real people rather than being secluded in a gaming community that is virtual and may be harmful for them.
7. Talk about depression and suicide very candidly with the child or teenager. Parents must let the child/teenager know that come what may, suicide is never an option and that as parents they will always be available for them. Children and teenagers must be encouraged to speak about any depression and anxiety they have rather than address the issue online or via game play.
8. Parents must never hesitate to consult a mental health professional whenever they sense that something is amiss with their children. It is better to rule out a psychological problem before it may happen or in the initial phases rather than wait for the problem to assume alarming proportions.

### What Schools and Colleges Can Do

1. Schools and colleges must not shy away from mental health issues but rather must take bold steps to address such issues in their classes and campuses. Principals and senior school management needs to get proactive in the same.
2. School and college counselors must conduct sessions with children and parents on the positive and negative effects of digital media and on rational and judicious social media use along with the perils that may lurk online.
3. Suicide must addressed from a prevention perspective in all schools and colleges right from the age of 10 and above to prevent any child from taking a step that he or she should not.
4. Teachers may address these issues as a part of routine classroom sessions and during the course of routine classes.
5. Teachers and counselors in schools and colleges must give children time when they approach them wanting to speak to them about any problem.
6. The slightest hint of a problem must be addressed and should not be shoved away.

The internet and online games are here to stay. We have two choices either to sit back and watch what is happening or to take the challenge head on. I would go with the latter. There is a need for parents, teachers, schools, colleges, principals and everybody to rise to the challenge that these games may pose and tackle them. The future of our children depends on what we do today. Let work together to build a better future for the next generation.

### REFERENCES AND SOME LINKS

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