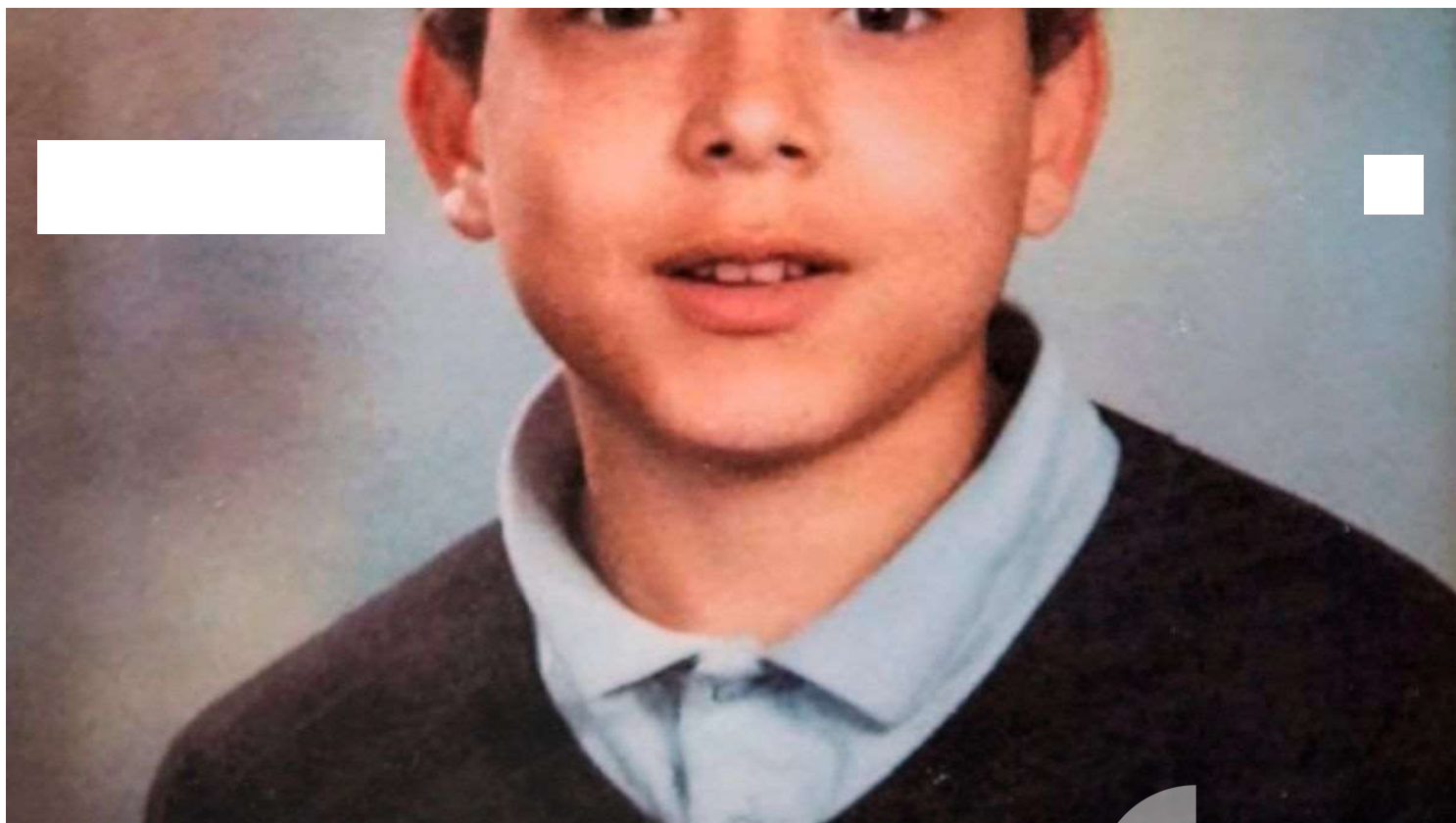


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Conor, 13, is believed to have died after taking part in the Blue Whale Challenge

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## Dad's stark warning after 13-year-old son dies during sickening new Blue Whale Challenge craze

Conor Wilmot, 13, is believed to have died playing the sick game - and here's how you can keep your child safe online

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By **Larissa Nolan**

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A dad who lost his son to a sickening, viral online craze has issued a stark warning to other parents to help them keep their children safe.

Conor Wilmot, 13, is believed to have **died** after taking part in the twisted Blue Whale Challenge which sees children given different tasks online to perform over 50 days before eventually killing themselves.

His body was found by his dad, Greg, in a field near his home in Sixmilebridge, Co Clare, Ireland on May 11.

He believes he found something on the Internet which led to his death.



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He told the **Irish Mirror** : "Parents nowadays do not realise how much their children are into the world of virtual reality where, to them, everything is reality.

"They find it hard to discern between the two and I don't see how we are going to tackle this as a major problem. Any nutcase can post terrible things on social media."

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Gardai have seized Conor's mobile phone and computer to determine whether he was playing the game before he died.

### What is the Blue Whale Challenge?

It is a vicious, **viral** game which goads vulnerable youngsters into taking their own lives. It is spreading online through social media and there are concerns it has hit UK schools.

It has already been linked to 130 teenage deaths in Russia.

Players are assigned daily tasks by an administrator, which they have 50 days to complete.

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Some are trivial - e.g. watching a horror movie and waking up in the early hours - but others are horrifying including self harm.

The tasks get more and more dangerous and extreme, with some scoring the shape of a whale into their skin on their arm.

On the 50th day, they are encouraged to take their own lives.

## How do we ensure our kids have the freedom to develop technology skills but keep them safe online?

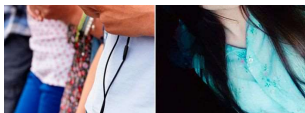
Today's generation of parents grew up without the web yet are raising boys and girls who have never known life without it.

Child and adolescent psychotherapist Colman Noctor said it's up to parents to watch kids' web usage the same way we monitor potentially dangerous activity.

He said: "Everyone looks for the ideal parental control software –but I don't believe in using  
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“Technology is like alcohol or food – for most of us there is no issue, but there is a vulnerable population who will develop a problematic relationship with it.”

He added: “As adults, we engage in technology with an informed baseline of pre-internet behaviour.

“That’s the vast difference between us and our children – they don’t have a baseline experience of something other than the internet.

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trouble, before intervening then, is only closing the door when the horse is gone.

“This is a portal to the outside world – you don’t allow that freedom in the non-virtual world so why would you do so in the virtual?

### **Why are children playing the game in the first place?**

While our physical neighbourhood has never been smaller, our virtual neighbourhoods have never been bigger.”

Aine Lynch, chief of the National Parents Council (Primary) said kids can be drawn to “games” like Blue Whale for a variety of reasons.

She said: “Maybe everyone is talking about them as the cool thing to do, maybe a best friend is doing it, maybe they know it’s risky and that is the attraction in itself.

“One of the best things a parent can do when it comes to an internet issue, is to relate the problem back to the real world.

“When you let your child go out, you find out where they are going, and who are they going with. It should be the same with the internet.

“You want to ensure that if they do get into difficulty in the online world, make sure they know they can come back to you about it. They should feel confident you won’t over-react and they won’t be in trouble, or punished.

“They always think the internet is going to be taken away from them – and this could stop them raising the alarm.”

### **How do I speak to my child about this?**

International Internet safety expert Dr Rachel O’Connell says there are things parents and teachers can do to minimise a young person’s exposure to online harm.

Dr O’Connell also believes the most important thing is to ensure children feel they can tell an adult if anything distressing is happening online.

She added: “Parents should also try to encourage conversations about what sites and apps their children access and who they’re connecting with. This dialogue is essential to keeping our kids safe online.”

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