

Right skills can mitigate online dangers

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DOHA: Parents and teachers need not worry anymore about students freely accessing the Internet, with the confidence that they are safe from harm by exploiters in cyberspace.

Mala Bawer, Executive Director of CyberSmart Education, said students can go online without fear if they are empowered with age-appropriate skills that keep them safe from falling prey from Internet “predators”.

Bawer, who spoke on “cyber safety” yesterday at the start of the second ICT Education Conference at the College of North Atlantic-Qatar (CNA-Qatar), said there was need to bring cyber safety into the educational framework.

She said the online CyberSmart! curriculum empowers students to use the Internet safely, responsibly and effectively by learning in a technology-enhanced environment.

Through CyberSmart, participants can hear from US experts in the fields of cyberbullying, cybersecurity, school violence prevention, and character education. Their views support a framework for fostering cyber safety in an integrated, ongoing and consistent effort to teach cybercitizenship and ethical online use.

Part of the CyberSmart workshop equips educators with strategies for fostering online safety and privacy — topics students can learn and understand better with interactive learning.

In her talk, Bawer provided an overview of the past national online safety campaigns and media messages in the US, in which authorities fell short of their target of deterring cyber crimes.

She then presented university research from the US which will be used to support the premise that messages of “stranger-danger” are off the mark, scare teachers and parents inappropriately and do not arm the students with skills to keep them safe online.

She said scaring children about cyberbullying is not effective and instead they should learn about critical thinking.

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