

Students alerted to cyber bullying

Net etiquette, relationships also in revised curriculum

By CALVIN YANG

PRIMARY and secondary school students in Singapore are being taught about online relationships and cyber bullying as part of a revised cyber wellness curriculum.

Schools were previously left to their own devices when it came to such programmes but, since the start of this year, curriculum time has been set aside to teach topics such as Internet etiquette.

The cyber wellness module, which comes under the Citizenship and Character Education framework, is incorporated into the curriculum for subjects such as civics and moral education, English and mother tongue languages.

When asked, a Ministry of Education (MOE) spokesman said the cyber wellness lessons go beyond simply raising awareness of the dangers of cyberspace. They also focus on topics such as cyber relationships and online identity.

Several parents The Straits Times spoke to supported the move. Housewife Nicole Lee, 41, who has a 13-year-old daughter, said: "With most parents having to work, they may not have the time to educate their children on how important it is to be responsible Web users."

On Thursday, MOE launched the mobile game app C-Quest to help parents and children navigate the online world. Designed for children aged 10 to 14, the app provides parents with a platform to discuss online experiences with their children, and allows parents to offer tips on responsible Web usage. "The game allows for an exchange of opinions and, at the same time, I can understand my child's views on the various topics," said housewife Vonni Lawer, 45, who has a nine-year-old daughter.

With cyber bullying cases on the rise, MOE has been ramping up efforts since 2007 to encourage schools to teach cyber wellness – something largely done before by voluntary welfare organisations.

According to a survey released in July by Touch Cyber Wellness, which promotes online safety among children, one in three secondary school students and one in five primary school pupils have reported that they were victims of cyber bullying.

Yesterday, the Singapore Children's Society held the Bully-Free Forum for secondary school students to share views and experiences on cyber bullying. Minister of State for National Development Desmond Lee, who was the guest of honour, said in a speech that the effects of cyber bullying often last longer than "traditional" bullying. He said: "Leveraging on anonymity and the accessibility of technology, cyber bullying can be more persistent and continues 24/7, even in the safety of one's home."

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