



ICDL urges schools in GCC to stand up to cyber bullying

Regional Campaign seeks to educate students on the dangers and consequences of Cyberbullying

Dubai, UAE (18 March 2013) – As young people rapidly adopt new communication technologies, the need for online vigilance must also increase, according to ICDL GCC Foundation, an activist in digital skills, use and safety for-all and the sole operator of the ICDL certification program across the GCC and Iraq.

A recent study commissioned by the "National Children's Bureau" in the United Kingdom revealed that cyberbullying affects one out of five youngsters. In the United States, the "National Crime Prevention Council" estimates that almost half of American teens fall prey to online harassment.



Jamil Ezzo, Director General of ICDL GCC, said: “while the Gulf lacks official statistics to evaluate the prevalence or extent of online abuses, the fact that the region has one of the world’s highest Internet and mobile penetration levels raises its potential risks”. Ezzo explained: “Cyberbullying is a very serious concern that could cause irreparable psychological damage, especially to young people in their formative years. In the GCC, the new generation are readily exposed to mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, and social networking has become an extension of their ‘offline’ lives, which make them prone to online threats”.

There is currently no singular global definition to what constitutes cyberbullying, but psychologists and child safety advocates worldwide agree that the action is a psychological warfare that thrives on the use of technology to promote anonymity.

“The sad truth about virtual bullying is that the victim would have difficulty running away from it. Traditional bullying, for instance, has its limits because it can only happen through direct confrontations. But once cruel words or an embarrassing photo is released on the Internet, it becomes viral and starts taking on a life of its own, which could leave deeper emotional scars far into the future leading to tragic endings.” Ezzo said.

Because of its nature, cyberbullying is most common in the educational sector among students and is considered a crime that is punishable by law in many countries in the region. And in a bid to address this issue, ICDL GCC has partnered with concerned government organizations across the region in an awareness campaign that seeks to educate students, parents and educators about cybersafety and the steps to be taken to nip the issue of cyberbullying in the bud.

It is well known that children are often either too shy or too scared to speak out when they’re being bullied. ICDL GCC Foundation encourages children to sound the alarm bells at the first sign of online harassment by reporting the incident to their parents or teachers. Should the



bullying persists, local authorities have also expressed their support to the cause with laws in place to protect residents' privacy.

By launching the awareness campaign, ICDL GCC Foundation reiterates its belief that awareness is the first line of defence in battling cyberbullying, which when left unchecked, could result to dire societal consequences.

Media across the globe have been quick to document the fatal effects that online harassment can have on the human psyche. Fortunately, the GCC has so far been spared from major repetitive incidents brought about by this phenomenon, which is all the more reason to take up the cause as early as now.

Adults' proactive involvement in monitoring and reaching out to children is very important, as it could also prevent cyberbullying and other forms of online abuses. In addition, ICDL urges regional schools to take a more integrated approach to preventing cyber attacks by adopting Internet safety policy and programs. Such initiatives could go a long way in protecting children from the dangers lurking on the web.

To report incidents of cyberbullying in the UAE, residents may get in touch with a special task force through the following contact details: Abu Dhabi (Tel: +9712-512-7777; Email: ecrime@adpolice.gov.ae); Dubai (Tel: +9714- 609-6944; Email: ecrimes@dubaipolice.gov.ae) and Sharjah (Tel: +9716- 800151; Email: najeed@shjpolice.gov.ae)

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The International Computer Driving License (ICDL) is a global computer literacy initiative developed to provide knowledge about Information Technology (IT) and enhance competence of using personal computers and common computer applications for all the citizens of the world. The ICDL GCC Foundation is the sole body to implement and disseminate the program across the GCC States and Iraq with the support of leading educational institutions and accredited bodies. The Foundation mission is to enable proficient use of Information and Communications Technology that empowers individuals, organizations and society, through the development, promotion and delivery of quality certification programmes around the world.