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Pre-schools teach kids about cyber safety, using tech responsibly

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Some may find the idea of teaching pre-schoolers about cyber security absurd. After all, six-year-olds do not have bank or e-mail accounts.

Yet, these are concepts that NTUC First Campus is introducing to children through hour-long lessons on digital literacy conducted once every two weeks.

The pre-school operator started these classes in June for its Kindergarten 1 and 2 children across all 20 Little Skool-House centres.

At the Little Skool-House branch at Ulu Pandan Community Club, senior English language teacher Eileen Chia, 31, teaches the children about data privacy and cyber-bullying prevention through story-books like *Troll Stinks* by author Jeanne Willis.

The pre-schoolers read the story of how two goats steal a farmer's mobile phone and send mean messages to a troll's number. They later realise they have hurt the feelings of a baby troll who had read the texts.

When prompted, the children suggested that people should protect their mobile phones with fingerprint passcodes and not send hurtful messages in the name of fun.

Ms Coreen Soh, 48, general manager of Little Skool-House and chief child development officer at NTUC First Campus, told *The Straits Times* that the aim is not so much to teach children how to use digital tools, but to educate them on potential dangers online and how to use technology responsibly.

Keagen Tan, six, said he now understands the importance of keeping passwords safe to prevent the misuse of mobile phones.

His father, Mr Tan Chee Hau, 41, a civil servant, said: "It's inevitable that children are exposed to the In-



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Senior English language teacher Eileen Chia watching Keagen Tan and Teng Hairuo, both six, search for posters related to Internet safety at the Little Skool-House branch at Ulu Pandan Community Club on Nov 9. The pre-school is one of those that teach children about data privacy and cyber-bullying prevention.
ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

ternet, online websites and apps from a young age, so it's better that they know about the safety aspects than to have to explore them on their own."

Associate Professor Loh Chin Ee, deputy head of research for English language and literature at the National Institute of Education (NIE), said that given the pervasiveness of digital devices and ease

of access to online resources, children should be introduced to concepts of digital health and well-being at an early age.

"Concepts such as personal privacy, managing screen time, and searching for and evaluating online sources are some concepts that young children can engage with in a meaningful way," she said.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic,

there has been a considerable shift towards digital learning in primary and secondary schools, with more lessons being conducted via the Singapore Student Learning Space, the Ministry of Education's online learning portal.

Likewise, pre-schools have developed programmes to prepare children for online learning.

At some of Star Learners' 43 pre-

schools, where children focus on a book and its themes for each term, digital apps and tools are used to help K2 children develop thinking and reasoning skills through related hands-on activities.

Miss Alysha Mohd Sani, 20, an English language educator at Star Learners Child Care at Choa Chu Kang Sports Centre, conducted a lesson where K2 children had to

work in groups to make "moon rocks" out of baking soda, water and glitter.

They used iPads to take pictures of what they were doing and to record spoken answers to questions.

The centre's principal, Ms Siti Yasmira Johan, said lessons like this expose children to some sim-

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