

DefCon Encourages Kids to Explore Safe Hacking

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For the first time, children were allowed at DefCon, an annual convention dedicated to the world of underground hacking, which took place this past weekend at the Rio Hotel in Las Vegas.

DefCon 'Kid's village' was host to 20 eager kids, ages eight to 16, who were instructed by experts on the art of being a "white hat," or benevolent hacker, teaching them how to develop their hacker skills in a safe and legal fashion.

Attendees took part in hacking games such as one "Capture the Flag" game, engineered by Chris Hadnagy, author of the book *Social Engineering: The Art of Human Hacking*.

The game entailed deciphering clues, picking locks, coaxing information out of people, and reading subtle facial expressions. All the kids, who worked in pairs, completed the tasks, with one team tricking people into giving them answers instead of deciphering the codes themselves. The trick almost landed the team in first place.

But the winning team was awarded with night-vision goggles and a remote control helicopter equipped with a surveillance camera.

Hadnagy told AFP that he's never experienced a DefCon like this one. Usually, he sees people walking around with Mohawks and people indecently exposed but this year he witnessed a more family-friendly environment.

"Kids were hugging their moms and hanging out with them," he said.

Many supportive parents stood by proudly as their children expertly cracked codes and even taught the professionals a few things.

One 10-year-old girl who went by the code name CyFi discovered a new form of software vulnerability in smartphones and tablets running on Apple or Android mobile software, when she hacked a program's in-game time after becoming bored while waiting for her virtual crops to grow in a farming game.

The makers of the software have been notified of her discovery.

Brother and sister team Jake and Anna Malmrose especially enjoyed a Japanese puzzle boxes game developed by Lock-cracker Marc Weber Tobias. Their father considered buying the game for his kids.

According to Malmrose, who is a software engineer and owns a computer company, hacking runs in the family.

"Our second oldest, now in college, was about 10 when we lost a key to our fireproof safe," he

told AFP.

"He looked up how to pick a lock on his own and he opened it for us with a paperclip. That was useful."

Though hacker sare usually known for conducting illegal activity, many have turned redeemed their talent into a career. Jeff Moss who founded DefCon in 1993 is known as Dark Tangent in the hacking world, but has since become a member of the White House homeland defense council.

Government agents, who were once berated at the event in a game called "Spot the Fed," now participate in panels like "Meet the Fed." The U.S. National Security Agency now attends the event in order to recruit talented hackers. This year, agents brought a cryptography exhibit to entertain attendees.

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