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DefCon Kids guides young hackers to do good

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By Byron Acohido, USA TODAY

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Children 8 to 16 were welcomed for the first time ever at the DefCon hackers conference, held at the Rio hotel in Las Vegas this past weekend. It was part of a series of such confabs organized by [Hackid.org](#). Federal agents spoke to participants of [DefCon Kids](#) -- to persuade them that it's cool to be a good guy hacker, who helps fight crime. The kids also got to participate in hacking exercises and contests. At minimum, each came away with higher awareness of safety on the Internet and is now better equipped to be a positive role model for peers.

Wolfgang Kandek, chief technology officer of vulnerability management firm Qualys, brought his son, Filipe, 14, with him to Vegas, to participate in DefCon Kids. Dad came away with these observations.



CAPTION

By Hackid.org

My 14 year old son attended DEFCON this year for the first time and he took part in DEFCON Kids. On Saturday he was in the Social Engineering Capture the Flag (CTF) contest where he was teamed up with another 10 year old participant and had to solve a 6-step scavenger hunt. The scavenger hunt involved decryption of secret messages, collection of information from multiple people on the DEFCON show floor and a good dose of critical thinking.

On Sunday he participated in the classroom sessions - at the end his favorites were "When you can remember your locker Combination" by Deviant and "Coding in Scratch" by Chris Hoff.

As a parent I loved seeing the interest sparked in my son by the challenges and class interactions. All instructors were extremely competent and focused on the benefits of gaining a real understanding of the technologies involved and when appropriate they discussed the moral and ethical questions involved (i.e. lock picking and social engineering).

As a security professional I see every day how the lack of security knowledge is impacting the computer industry and society in general. I believe initiatives like DEFCON Kids are essential in preparing the next generation for a life in the digital domain.

As a side note: Everybody my son met at DEFCON during the challenges was enthusiastic in helping and their eyes literally lit up when their assistance was requested in locating somebody or a certain room. While the Kids were solving their crypto challenges I was approached by numerous participants that were wondering what was going on and the most common comment was: Awesome, I will bring my kid next year.

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