

# Raising awareness about sexual abuse in Dubai

► From keeping away from strangers, to learning about appropriate and inappropriate touches, the Childhood Carnival spoke to children from six to 12 about their rights through interactivity and fun.



Leonara Pacini reads an educational story to youngsters at a The Childhood Carnival at Mirdif City Centre, an event designed to teach children about threats to their safety and risks of abuse. Sarah Dea / The National

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Dubai // Storytelling, educational games and plays were used to raise awareness about child abuse during a special event for youngsters yesterday.

The Childhood Carnival taught children between the ages of 6 and 12 about subjects such as being wary of strangers and inappropriate touching, explaining the issues through a range of interesting interactive activities.

The event, organised by the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWAC), took place in Mirdif City Centre.

"If you bring children to a lecture and just give them a lecture, they won't get it," said Roudha Albahri, DFWAC's awareness initiatives executive. "If it is interactive, with games and such, they'll learn and it will be fun for them at the same time."

The games that were used included a "wheel of fortune" for the children to spin which contained questions for them to answer, such as: Should you give out your personal information online? Should you take a present from a stranger? Is it OK if a teacher praises you?

The young audience members were also encouraged to repeat and learn the foundation's hotline number, 800 111, and taught how to call it in an emergency.

"This is a way for children to emphasise that they are aware of the cause, they are aware of their rights, they are aware of what's wrong [and] what's right, and that they're aware of our hotline," Ms Albahri said.

The carnival included an interactive play based on the story of Little Red Riding Hood, which taught the children not to speak to strangers, to always call for their mother or father or a responsible, trusted adult when in danger, and not to judge people by how they look.

"We have storytelling," Ms Albahri said. "All stories are about how to deal with strangers, how to deal with bullies at schools – good touches, bad touches.

"And then they have a card and they write down what they've learnt from the story and they hang their message on the tree," she said, referring to a cartoonlike wooden tree.

Lamees Al Eman, a nine-year-old Emirati from the Second of December school, said: "I learnt not to listen to what strangers say and not to go with them anywhere."

Her classmates said they had learnt similar lessons.

"I learnt not to take anything from strangers," said Anoud Al Mattar, 10, an Emirati.

To engage schools in the campaign, children from Al Ittihad Private school performed a song about childhood.

The Dubai Drums were another attraction used to help get across the messages about children's rights.

The carnival, which runs under the theme of Protect Childhood, It's Precious, will conclude today with a parade of children marching through Mirdif City Centre.

"They will all be wearing T-shirts, wrist bands and carrying balloons, with the same message: 'I am aware of 800 111,'" Ms Albahri said.

The carnival also aims to teach parents and other adults about types of abuse, the symptoms of abuse and how to tell whether a child was being harmed, she said.

The carnival was supported by the Majid Al Futtaim retail and leisure group.

This month is International Childhood Protection Month and the DFWAC has been visiting schools and holding workshops on child abuse aimed at children, parents and teachers.

DFWAC helps to support victims of domestic violence, child abuse and human trafficking.

It runs the first licensed shelter in the UAE for victims of abuse. The group's 800 111 hotline is open 24 hours a day.

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