Darlington Internet Safety Partnership

The Dark Web – What is it?

What is the Dark Web?

The dark web is the name given to websites that cannot be accessed on the open internet or searched for through traditional browsers or search engines such as Google. The Dark Web websites are encrypted and can only be accessed using specific software the most common being known as Tor (The Onion Router) software.

Tor software conceals a user's activity, which means users are able to browse the internet and dark web without being identified or having your activity tracked.

Who uses the Dark Web?

Anyone can use the Dark Web providing you have the software to do so. The majority of us stick to the open internet that where all familiar with, but those seeking extra levels of anonymity and privacy may choose to use the Dark Web. Sadly the Dark Web also attracts those wanting to remain anonymous for criminal and more sinister motives.

There are plenty of examples, stories and cases of the Dark Web being used for buying and selling illegal drugs, stolen credit card details and the distribution of violent and sexually explicit material including child pornography.

Goods are traded on Dark Web markets using cryptocurrencies (bitcoins).

Users also report of being conned and ripped off on the Dark Web losing their money and not receiving the goods they paid for as criminal gangs find the added security and anonymity of the Dark Web enables them to operate without detection.

Governments around the world are now clamping down on illegal activity on the Dark Web. Law enforcement around the world are monitoring and developing tools to catch and prosecute people as well as close sites within the Dark Web down.

Sometimes people refer to the Dark Web to as the Deep Web, however these are very different.

The Deep Web is the part of the internet that contains all the information that cannot be indexed or searched for such as databases, passwords and account information etc.

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Children and Young People on the Dark Web

We have had a number of calls and emails from schools asking us about the Dark Web. We tend to get asked after pupils in schools have talked about using the Dark Web triggering concerns around what they are doing on it or exposed to.

More often than not when investigated it turns out pupils are not using the Dark Web their just sharing stories of what they think goes on. These stories are often a result of videos they have watched on YouTube or from reading discussion boards on websites such as Reddit.

A number of horror movies have been released over the years in which people are tortured and killed on the Dark Web while people watch. These movies have led to a number of stories being shared that these things are real. Stories about pay per view Red Rooms in which you can watch live murders or rapes are often spoke about when people talk about the Dark Web but there is no evidence that these exist and are nothing more than urban legends.

What we need to do when we hear children and young people discussing the Dark Web or asking us questions is to provide them with information that challenges their understanding. We also need to make sure that are aware of the risks and dangers of using the Dark Web.