

The Dark Web

Introduction: We can only search 4% of online content that is public; this is the Open or Surface Web. Roughly 90% of content represents the Deep Web & 6% the Dark Web. The terms 'dark web', 'dark net' & 'deep web' are often used interchangeably - many definitions include the dark web as part of the deep web. The dark web was created by US military researchers to facilitate anonymous information exchange. No special skill or equipment is needed & it is typically done via special software and programmes.

Why it matters: In the digital world we live & work in, we can no longer think of 'e-safety' as a separate entity when safeguarding children or adults. The online world and the 'real' world are so integrated that digital safeguarding IS safeguarding. Anyone accessing the dark web can be exposed to criminality or disturbing & illegal images; or be able to purchase illegal items.

Questions to consider: Do you know how the young people you work with use the internet? How do you build your own awareness to facilitate dialogue? Find out more from:

www.ceop.police.uk

www.internetmatters.org/hub/guidance/what-is-the-dark-web-advice-for-parents/

www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/what-is-the-dark-web/

What to do: Understanding a young person's internet use is an integral part of safeguarding and supporting them. Young people may not necessarily be using the dark web for illicit reasons; equivalent risks exist on the open web. Open a dialogue with young people – make sure they know who they can go to no matter how or where they have accessed concerning content. Refer to the Children and Families Hub if you have concerns or 999 in an emergency. See www.childrenssociety.org.uk/information/professionals/resources/what-is-the-dark-web for more information.



Information: Deep Web: hidden from public view with limited access via search engines – mainly intranet sites, password protected areas of sites, eg social media profiles, online banking pages etc. **Dark Web:** only accessible through special software, commonly TOR (The Onion Router). Networks are encrypted repeatedly, making a user anonymous. The dark web is not illegal and not all content is illegal, eg the anonymity of the dark web can be used for whistleblowing. However due to the level of privacy it provides, many illegal activities and transactions take place within the dark web.

Safeguarding concerns

Anonymity: there are a range of dark web forums that young people could access anonymously including suicide 'advice' pages, pages that promote self-harm, pro-bulimia & pro-anorexia forums. Perpetrators of child abuse can hide their identity. Policing the dark web is inherently problematic. **Hidden services:** access to hidden services exposes young people to a wide variety of items and content that is unlawful. **Illegal activity:** accessing/ buying illicit materials puts young people at risk, including being exploited by criminals and those seeking to radicalise them.

Reasons to use the dark web: hide your identity, access dubious content, avoid having personal data collected, engage in criminal activity, access hidden services, access forums & media exchanges eg for paedophiles or terrorists. Child Criminal Exploitation includes grooming and coercing children to use the dark web to buy or sell drugs, weapons and stolen items. Young people could also use the dark web to seek information around extremist views which is less available on the open web.