



# Safeguarding Newsletter

Emojis aren't just digital decoration — they're often used as a coded language that young people use to express identity, humour and emotion. Without context, they can easily be misunderstood by adults, leading to confusion or missed signals. Some emojis may even mask risky behaviours or emotional struggles.

This guide helps decode this ever-evolving language, empowering parents and educators to have more open, informed conversations with the children in their care. It also highlights the meaning of some common emojis and offers practical tips for staying clued-in without snooping or suspicion.



## What Parents & Educators Need to Know about EMOJIS

Emojis are more than playful expressions — they form a fast-evolving digital language that many adults struggle to decode. For young people, this 'secret code' is central to how they communicate identity, humour and emotions. With over 5 billion emojis sent daily on Facebook Messenger alone, understanding these symbols is key to engaging meaningfully with digital youth.

### WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

**GENERATIONAL MISCOMMUNICATION**

An emoji like 🍷 (thumbs up emoji) might seem friendly to adults, but teens often interpret it as sarcastic or passive-aggressive. These differing interpretations can create confusion or unintended tension in cross-generational conversations.

**SHIELDING BULLYING OR PEER PRESSURE**

When embedded in emojis, mean-spirited jokes or exclusionary language can fly under the radar. Terms like 'mid' or 'delulu' may seem harmless, but they can be used to undermine peers in subtle ways.

**RAPIDLY SHIFTING MEANINGS**

Emoji meanings can change overnight. A person standing emoji (🧑) once signified awkwardness but might now be repurposed for something entirely different. This ever-changing lexicon can leave adults in the dark and young people vulnerable to misunderstanding or misuse.

### MASKING DISTRESS OR HARM

Some emojis are used to discreetly signal troubling behaviours. For instance, 🍃 (falling leaves emoji) or 💊 (pill emoji) might suggest drug use, while 🍷 (wilted flower emoji) could hint at emotional struggles. Such usage can obscure serious issues, making them harder for trusted adults to detect.

**NORMALISING RISKY BEHAVIOURS**

Emojis can make harmful actions seem light-hearted or fashionable. Strings like 🍷🍷🍷 (fire + 'weezy' face + pill emoji) may appear humorous but can reference partying, intoxication or dangerous challenges, which might otherwise raise red flags.

## Advice for Parents & Educators

### LEARN THE LINGO

Stay updated with emoji trends and definitions using resources like [emojipedia.org](http://emojipedia.org) or Urban Dictionary. Knowing current meanings builds confidence when engaging with young people and helps spot potential concerns early.

### CREATE SAFE SPACES FOR DISCUSSION

Encourage casual chats about emojis, online slang, memes, or social media trends. Showing interest without judgement reassures young people that they can talk about their digital world openly and safely.

### ASK, DON'T ASSUME

Approach unfamiliar emojis with curiosity rather than suspicion. A light-hearted "What does 🍷 (juice box emoji) mean these days?" can open conversation and show that you respect their knowledge.

### PRIORITISE TRUST OVER SURVEILLANCE

While parental controls and monitoring tools can be useful, emotional safety matters most. Be someone children and young people feel they can come to — not just someone who's watching them.

## EMOJI CHEAT SHEET

The following slang terms and emojis are some common examples — please be aware this isn't an exhaustive list.

COMMON EMOJIS:	POTENTIALLY CONCERNING EMOJIS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>👁️ (Clown face) Feelsness or clowning around</li> <li>🧊 (Cold face) Cool, stylish or ruthless</li> <li>🔥 (Hot face) Intense attraction or excitement</li> <li>😐 (Meh) Stare-faced, unbothered</li> <li>👑 (Crown) "Slaying"; as in doing great</li> <li>👉 (Handing face) Over-affectionate or 'simping'</li> <li>👁️👁️ (Eyes) Watching drama unfold</li> <li>🚗 (Car) Greatest of all time (G.O.A.T.)</li> <li>👉👉 (Horns) Confidence, sassiness, or indifference</li> <li>🚩 (Triangular flag) Red flag; a warning sign about someone's behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🍷 (Ear of corn) Slang for pornography (avoids censorship algorithms)</li> <li>❄️ (Snowflakes, snowman, snow cloud) Can symbolise cocaine</li> <li>👉👉 (Key, lying face) Related to cocaine use</li> <li>🍃 (Falling leaves, herb, maple leaf) Can symbolise cannabis</li> <li>💊 (Pill) May reference drug use or prescription misuse</li> <li>🍷 (Wilted flower) Often used to convey emotional struggle or sadness</li> <li>🍷 (Snake) Can represent betrayal or being 'two-faced'</li> <li>🔫 (Water pistol) Sometimes used to reference violence or self-harm</li> <li>🚩 (Warning) Used to emphasise drama, threats or emotional turmoil</li> <li>🍷 (Steaming bowl) Refers to nudes ('noods' is an abbreviation of noodles)</li> </ul>

### Meet Our Expert

Keith Branzi is a globally renowned emoji expert and the Editor in Chief of [emojipedia.org](http://emojipedia.org), the world's number one emoji resource. He has an MSc in Business Psychology from University College London and an MBA from Queen's School of Business and Technology.

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