

Safeguarding Section

The hidden meaning behind emojis

Children are beginning to explore the digital world at a younger age, whether through games, messaging apps or learning platforms. Alongside this, they're also discovering emojis: colourful little symbols that help them express feelings, reactions and sometimes much more.

With the release of Netflix's *Adolescence*, attention has been drawn to how emojis can carry hidden or inappropriate meanings, even among younger users. While this series focuses on teenagers, it's a reminder that even younger children are seeing and copying what they encounter online.

While most emojis are harmless and fun, a growing number of them are being used to communicate hidden messages— sometimes these are linked to bullying, inappropriate content or even illegal activity, such as drugs. That's why it's essential for parents to understand the double meanings behind some of these seemingly innocent icons.

How you can support your child

- ✓ Talk early and often : ask your child what emojis they like and what they mean to them.
- ✓ Set age-appropriate boundaries: keep communication apps limited to age-safe platforms.
- ✓ Model good digital habits: let them see you using emojis kindly and appropriately.
- ✓ Stay curious, not critical: if you spot something that concerns you, ask questions gently before jumping to conclusions.

General Expressions:

- 🔥 (Fire) – Cool, awesome, or attractive
- 💀 (Skull) – "I'm dead" (used when something is extremely funny)
- 😂 (Laughing Face with Tears) – Something is hilarious
- 👁️ (Eyes) – Paying attention or something suspicious
- 🤡 (Clown) – Someone being foolish or embarrassing

recognised ones:

- 🌿 (Leaf) or 🍃 (Herb) – Marijuana
- 💊 (Pill), 🍷 (Clinking Glasses), 🍾 (Champagne Bottle) – Drugs or alcohol
- 🔌 (Electric Plug) – A drug dealer or supplier
- 🚀 (Rocket) – Getting high or taking drugs
- 🕒 (Hourglass) – "Time is running out" (can refer to body shape or urgency for risky behaviour)

Friendship & Relationships:

- ❤️ (Red Heart) – Love or deep friendship
- 💙 (Blue Heart) – Platonically caring about someone
- 💜 (Purple Heart) – Could indicate romantic interest but also used in fan culture (e.g., K-pop fans)
- 🖤 (Black Heart) – Dark humour or expressing sadness
- 🙏 (Fingers Crossed) – Hopeful, but sometimes used for unclear or unofficial relationships

Sexual Innuendos:

Some emojis have become widely used as symbols for body parts or sexual content:

- 🍑 (Peach) – Buttocks
- 🍆 (Eggplant) – Male genitalia
- 🍌 (Taco) or 🍒 (Cherries) – Female anatomy
- 💧 (Sweat Droplets) – Sexual activity or attraction
- 🔥🍑 (Fire + Peach) – Suggesting someone has an attractive body