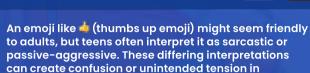
What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

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.

GENERATIONAL MISCOMMUNICATION



SHIELDING BULLYING OR PEER PRESSURE

cross-generational conversations.

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

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 + 'woozy' face + pill emojis) 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 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:

(Clown face) Foolishness or cowning around

(Hot face) Intense

(Moai) Stone-faced,



(Pleading face) Over-affectionate or 'simping'



(Eyes) Watching drama unfold



(Goat) Greatest of all time (G.O.A.T.)



(Nails) Confidence, sassiness, or indifference



(Triangular flag) Red flag; a warning sign about someone's behaviour



POTENTIALLY CONCERNING EMOJIS

(Ear of corn) Slang for pornography (avoids censorship algorithms)

(Snowflake, snowman, snow cloud)

(Falling leaves, herb, maple leaf)

(Pill) May reference drug use or

(Key, lying face) Related to

Can symbolise cannabis

prescription misuse

👯 🕆 Can symbolise cocaine

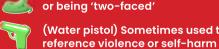
cocaine use



(Wilted flower) Often used to convey



emotional struggle or sadness (Snake) Can represent betrayal



(Water pistol) Sometimes used to



(Warning) Used to emphasise drama, threats or emotional turmoil



(Steaming bowl) Refers to nudes ('noods' is an abbreviation of noodles)



unbothered

doing great

Keith Broni is a globally renowned emoji expert and the Editor in Chief of emojipedia.org, the world's number one emoji resource. He has an MSc in Business Psychology from University College London and an MBA from Quantic School of Business and Technology.





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