

What Do Emojis Really Mean? A Techwise Parenting Guide for 2025



◆ AI Governance ◆ Strategic AI Leader ◆ Systems Thinker ◆ Neopolymath ◆ Futurist ◆ AI Integration ◆ Public Speaker ◆ Tech Women 2024 Global Achievement Award Winner 🏆 ◆ Leading Women in AI ASU+GSV 2025 Honoree 🏆
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We tend to think of emojis as harmless digital doodles. Tiny icons that help express emotion in text. A smile, a heart, a thumbs-up. But for today's teens and tweens, emojis have become more than expressive decoration. They form a fast-moving, coded language used not only to connect with peers but also, in some darker corners of the internet, to conceal, radicalise, and exploit.

If you are a parent, carer, or educator, this shift matters. Because what looks like a red heart or a snowflake could, in the wrong context, carry troubling meaning. And if you have ever felt out of your depth trying to keep up with online culture – you are not alone.

A New Lexicon of Risk

In the wake of [Netflix's](#) gritty new drama *Adolescence*, police and online safety experts are once again urging adults to pay attention to the hidden meanings behind common emojis. In the series, a teenage boy is drawn into dangerous online communities where emojis act as gatekeepers to radical ideologies. While fictional, the story is based on very real dynamics.

Take the **pill emoji** 💊 - originally used to represent medicine. In some online spaces, it now signals alignment with the *manosphere*, a loose network of misogynistic influencers. Being "red-pilled" refers to a worldview rooted in hostility towards women, often cloaked in ironic memes and language that teens encounter on platforms like [Reddit, Inc.](#), [Telegram Messenger](#), [Discord](#), or [TikTok](#), where the vast

majority of users engaging with manosphere and incel-related content are young men, typically between the ages of 16 and 25.

According to academic and government reports, including research from the Centre for Countering Digital Hate and studies published in the journal *New Media & Society*, these online spaces are dominated by male users who are particularly vulnerable to radicalisation through peer reinforcement and algorithmic suggestion ([CCDH Report 1](#), [CCDH Report 2](#), [Sage Journal, 2025](#)).

Teens, Emojis, and Sex: What Parents Need to Know

Sexting is common between tweens and teens, and emojis are part of it. While some icons seem innocent or even silly, teens often use them as shorthand for body parts or sexual activity. Here are some of the most common:

- 🍆 **Eggplant** / 🍌 **Banana** – Penis
- 🍑 **Taco** / 🍒 **Cherries** – Vagina or breasts
- 🍑 **Peach** – Buttocks
- 🇹🇹 **Tongue** – Often sexual, especially when paired with 🍆 or 🍑
- 💧 **Sweat droplets** – Represents arousal or orgasm
- 👁️ **Eyes** – A request to “look” at something, often a photo
- 🐫 **Camel** – Slang for sex (“hump”)
- 🏠 **Circus tent** – Erection
- 🤪 **Dizzy face** – Shock or exposure to something explicit
- 🧑🏻 **Women with bunny ears** – Sex workers or suggestive content

When combined, these emojis can form a coded message with clear sexual undertones. For instance, a 🍆 + 🇹🇹 + 💧 combo isn’t about healthy hydration.

Teens, Emojis, and Drugs = A Coded Conversation

Drug references also appear frequently in teen emoji use, often in ways that would pass unnoticed by an adult. Some common ones include:

- ❄️ **Snowflake** / 🏂 **Skier** / 🐡 **Blowfish** – Cocaine
- 🌳 **Tree** / 🌿 **Herb** / 🥦 **Broccoli** / 🍁 **Maple leaf** – Marijuana
- 💊 **Pill** – Prescription drugs or ecstasy
- 🍯 **Plug** – Drug dealer
- ⛽ **Fuel** / 🚬 **Cigarette** / 💨 **Puff of smoke** – Vaping or inhalant use
- 😋 **Drizzling face** – Ecstasy or intoxication

Again, these emojis are often used in combination to mask their meaning. A single 🌿 might not raise suspicion, but 🌿 + 🍯 + 💨 should.

Other emojis with concerning associations include:

-  **Dynamite** – Symbol of radicalisation or extremism
-  **100** – Refers to the so-called “80/20 rule” used in incel ideology
-  **Kidney bean** – A cryptic way to label someone as an incel
-  **Purple heart** – Sexual interest
- , ,  – Common emojis used to signal cannabis
- , ,  – Slang for cocaine

One Rule: Context Is Everything

Not every eggplant is sexual, and not every snowflake is cocaine. But if you spot these emojis in a conversation, especially in clusters or with slang, it’s worth asking about. Keep calm, stay curious, and open the door to a real conversation.

These associations aren’t universal. Meaning can vary by region, culture, and age group. For example, a black heart might be aesthetic on one platform and signal distress on another. That is precisely the challenge: emojis are dynamic, context-dependent, and often invisible to the untrained eye.

From Flirting to Fear: Grooming and Secrecy Online

For decades, young people have used slang, acronyms, and symbols to communicate privately. In texting culture, this secrecy has often been playful - a way to keep conversations from adult scrutiny. But emojis, when combined with acronyms and social platforms, can also be weaponised.

In January 2024, the [Australian Centre To Counter Child Exploitation](#) issued a warning: emojis are increasingly used by predators to *groom* children online. [The centre urged parents](#) to familiarise themselves not only with explicit images but also with codes like:

- **CD9** – Code 9: Parents are around
- **POS** – Parent over shoulder
- **LMIRL** – Let’s meet in real life
- **ASL** – Age/Sex/Location

These acronyms often appear alongside emojis in messages designed to bypass filters and avoid detection. A “friendly” conversation filled with peaches, winks, and upside-down faces may, in some cases, signal something much more serious.

Cultural Differences Matter

It's important to note that not all emoji meanings carry the same weight across borders. What one teen in the UK might use ironically, a preteen in the US might interpret literally. An emoji used jokingly in Sweden might be loaded with meaning in Australia. Tools like [Bark](#), Net Aware, or local police guides can help clarify how emoji are being used in your region – and why that matters.

So What Can Parents and Educators Do?

1. **Open the Dialogue** The most effective tool is conversation. Ask your child how they use emojis. Stay curious, not accusatory. Encourage them to teach you the language they use online.
2. **Use Tools Wisely** Screen time controls and parental monitoring apps (like Bark, Family Link, or Screen Time) can help, but they should complement, not replace, trust and communication.
3. **Know the Signs** Sudden changes in online behavior, secretive texting, or unexplained new “slang” may be worth exploring further. Do not panic, but do ask questions.
4. **Stay Informed** Digital culture evolves rapidly. Follow sources like Bark's emoji dictionary, police-issued guides, or digital parenting newsletters. Bookmarking one or two reliable sources can keep you in the loop.
5. **Remember – Context is Everything** Emojis are not inherently dangerous. A peach is still a peach. But when used in certain patterns or accompanied by suggestive acronyms, they can take on a new meaning. It is the *combination* of symbols, timing, and context that tells the real story.

Final Thought: The Language of Safety

Language is the heartbeat of every culture, and that includes digital culture. Emojis, like any form of language, can be joyful or dangerous, creative or coded. For families raising children in this new terrain, understanding emoji culture is not surveillance. It is about safety, trust, and being techwise – together. Let's ensure our children know we're listening, not policing. That we are not trying to decode every message, but rather, be a safe place they can turn to if something online feels wrong.

Because in a world of red pills and peach emojis, nothing replaces a real conversation.

Ps. 🧠💞🔍

Vocabulary Corner

Emoji A small digital image or icon used to express an idea, emotion, or concept in messaging and social media.

Manosphere An informal collection of websites, influencers, and forums that promote sexist, anti-feminist, and often misogynistic ideas, often targeted at young men.

Incel Short for “involuntary celibate.” Refers to a subculture of men who express hostility toward women due to perceived rejection and often share radicalised, misogynistic beliefs online.

Red-pilled A reference to *The Matrix* film, used online to describe someone who believes they have “woken up” to a hidden truth—often used in extremist or conspiracy communities to justify harmful worldviews.

Grooming A process used by predators to build trust with a child online, with the aim of sexual exploitation. This can happen gradually through messaging, compliments, emojis, or gifts.

Dog whistle A coded message that carries one meaning for the general public and a hidden meaning for a specific audience. In digital culture, emojis are sometimes used this way to signal controversial or illicit content.

CD9 / POS Text-based acronyms used by teens to alert others that a parent is nearby.

- **CD9:** Code 9 – Parent present
- **POS:** Parent Over Shoulder

LMIRL An acronym for “Let’s meet in real life.” Often used in contexts where an online conversation may be shifting to a physical meeting.

ASL Stands for “Age / Sex / Location.” A question sometimes used by strangers to initiate contact with young users online.

Plug Slang for a drug dealer. The emoji 🍷 is often used in this context.

Sexting The act of sending sexually suggestive messages, images, or videos, typically via mobile phones or messaging apps.

80/20 Rule An idea popular in incel and manosphere circles suggesting that 80 percent of women are only interested in the top 20 percent of men. Often used to justify feelings of rejection and resentment.

Context collapse A media theory term that describes what happens when private, coded messages (like emojis or slang) are suddenly exposed to a wider audience that doesn't share the same understanding—leading to misinterpretation or conflict.

Cyber slang A constantly evolving set of words, acronyms, and emoji combinations used by digital natives to communicate quickly, creatively, or privately.

About TechWise Parenting

TechWise Parenting is a quick-read newsletter designed to help families make informed decisions about technology. Each issue breaks down complex topics so that parents can confidently support their children's digital learning.

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