SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE

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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.

UNDERSTANDING EMOJIS

What do these emojis really mean?

Emoji	Meaning
🍑 🍆	Body parts, often sexual innuendo
💦	Sexual references
🔌	'Plug' or drug dealer
🥶	Reference to being on drugs or emotionally numb
🚗 📦	Delivery, sometimes drugs
😈	Mischief or risky behaviour
🧃	'Lean or drug-laced drinks
💊 🔴	"Red Pill" ideology-part of online misogynistic group
💣	Drop the truth-sometimes linked to extremist or aggressive views
🔵	Used to mock people who haven't woken up to Red Pill views
💯	Refers to the belief that 80% of women are only attracted to 20% of men - used to justify misogynistic beliefs

⚠ NOTE: THESE SYMBOLS ARE NOT INHERENTLY HARMFUL, BUT CONTEXT IS KEY. WHEN USED TOGETHER OR IN SPECIFIC COMMUNITIES, THEY CAN REFLECT EXPOSURE TO TOXIC OR EXTREMIST ONLINE CONTENT.
THE SYMBOLS MAY ALSO HAVE DIFFERENT MEANINGS DEPENDING ON AREA AND AGE OF CHILDREN.

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.

If you are worried about the emojis your child is using or their online activity, speak to our safeguarding team.

We're here to support you with guidance, resources and a listening ear.

SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

Helping younger children stay safe from harmful online cultures

As our children grow up in a digital world, they are exploring the internet earlier and more independently than ever before. While the internet can be a great place to learn, play and connect, it also has some corners that are not safe or suitable for children.

What is 'incel culture'?

The word 'incel' stands for 'involuntary celibate.' It refers to a group of mostly men and boys who gather online to express anger and frustration, often blaming women or other people for their problems. Some of this content is deeply negative, promotes hate or violence and spreads unhealthy ideas about relationships, gender and self-worth.

While this may sound extreme, the early signs often show up in more subtle ways, such as:

- **Videos or memes** that make fun of girls or women
- **Jokes** about "nice guys never winning" or "girls only like certain types of boys"
- **Online personalities** who talk about 'alpha males', 'dominance', or 'how to be a real man' in aggressive or exaggerated ways

Young children can easily come across this type of content, especially on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and gaming communities.

Why algorithms matter

Most websites and apps your child uses, YouTube, YouTube Kids, TikTok, Netflix, and even games, use algorithms to suggest what to watch next. These algorithms aren't designed to be 'safe', they are designed to keep us watching.

This means:

- if your child clicks on a video, the platform may recommend more like it, even if it's misleading, aggressive or inappropriate for their age.
- a silly or funny video might lead to more serious, darker videos if a child keeps watching.

Algorithms don't always know what's good for children — they just show what's popular and engaging.

Here are practical ways to help protect your child and build healthy online habits early on:

01 BE CURIOUS ABOUT THEIR DIGITAL WORLD

Ask open, non-judgmental questions:
- "What do you like watching online?"
- "Who are your favourite YouTubers or characters and what do you like about them?"

02 USE CHILD-FRIENDLY PLATFORMS – AND MONITOR THEM

- Use YouTube Kids, BBC iPlayer Kids, or Netflix Kids with parental controls.
- Watch with your child to monitor age-appropriate content, even on kids' platforms.

03 EXPLAIN THE BASICS OF ALGORITHMS

In simple terms:
- "Platforms show us things they think we'll like, even if it's not always good for us. So it's okay to skip things or ask for help if something doesn't feel right."

04 TEACH EARLY CRITICAL THINKING

Children can understand important online concepts, such as:
- Not everything on the internet is true.
- People may say unkind things online for attention.

05 LIMIT TIME AND EXPOSURE

- Set clear screen time rules
- Try a "no solo screen time" rule for younger children – encourage having devices used in shared spaces.

Start safe, grow safe

Children are naturally curious and the internet will always be part of their world. The earlier we help them build healthy habits, question what they see and feel safe coming to us with concerns, the better equipped they will be to navigate more complex content as they get older.