

## TODD'S STORY

Todd was only 15—smart, quiet, and into video games and basketball. His parents trusted him; he got decent grades and stayed out of major trouble. But like many teens, he spent a lot of time on his phone—texting friends, sharing memes, and chatting late into the night.

What his parents didn't realize was that some of those messages weren't so innocent. He had started using emojis to talk about drugs—for taking pills and getting high. To them, it just looked like teenage slang. But behind those symbols, Todd was experimenting with substances he didn't fully understand.

One night, after a friend gave him a pill they said would help him “chill out,” Todd ended up unconscious on the floor of his room. The pill was laced with fentanyl and medetomidine. He survived—but just barely.

“I thought it was just something to take the edge off,” he later said. “We didn't even call it a drug. We called it a candy emoji.”

Todd's story is a reminder: today's drug conversations don't always look like what parents expect. Sometimes, a single emoji can be a silent cry for help.



## RESOURCES & REMINDERS

### Know Where to Get Help

#### SAMHSA's 24/7 Helpline

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

[www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline)

#### More Info

[www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov) (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

[www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org) (Partnership for Drug-Free Kids)

**When you stay informed, stay involved,  
and stay connected—your child  
is safer.**

**Especially in the age of emojis, your  
voice matters most.**

# BEHIND THE SYMBOLS



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**STAY SAFE SERIES**

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## HIDDEN DRUG EMOJIS

## UNDERSTANDING THE CODE

### Smartphone Shortcuts Used for Harm

Texting and emojis have changed the way we communicate, especially for young people. But beyond fun expressions and inside jokes, there's a darker side—emojis are now being used to hide drug activity.

Dealers and users are using everyday symbols to refer to dangerous drugs like fentanyl, MDMA, or marijuana. These codes appear in texts, on Snapchat, Instagram DMs, or encrypted platforms, often without raising suspicion.



## STAY ALERT—WHAT TO LOOK FOR

### Changes in Behavior Could Be Warning Signs:

- Sudden secrecy or hiding their screen
- New slang or unexplained emoji use
- A sharp change in mood or sleep
- Cash or packages with no explanation
- Withdrawal from family and school

## PHYSICAL SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

- Red or glassy eyes
- Weight loss or unusual fatigue
- Strange smells or hidden containers
- Frequent nosebleeds or shaky hands



## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

### Monitor Without Micromanaging

- **Regularly check** your child's phone activity and apps
- **Set boundaries and guidelines** for screen time and app usage
- **Ask open-ended questions:** "What does this emoji mean to you?"
- **Use parental controls**—but also build trust
- **Watch for** cash apps, secret apps, or alternate messaging tools



### Start the Conversation

Talking early and often matters more than being right every time. Stay calm, keep the door open, and focus on safety—not punishment.

## KNOW THE DRUG EMOJI CODES

### Common Emojis Used to Represent Drugs

These codes may vary or change. It's important to stay informed and not assume one symbol always means one thing.

#### OXYCODONE



#### XANAX



#### MARIJUANA



#### COCAINE



#### METH



#### MDMA/MOLLY



#### LEAN/COUGH SYRUP



#### ALCOHOL



#### HEROIN



#### MUSHROOMS/PSYCHEDELICS



#### DEALER TALK



## SPOT THE SIGNS AND ACT EARLY

### If you suspect drug activity:

- Don't panic—but don't ignore it
- Seek help from a counselor or health professional
- Contact a school resource officer or mental health service
- Keep communication nonjudgmental but direct
- Learn about Narcan (naloxone) in case of opioid exposure

**You don't have to be an expert to take action. You just have to care—and act.**