

This article was contributed by Parent Zone

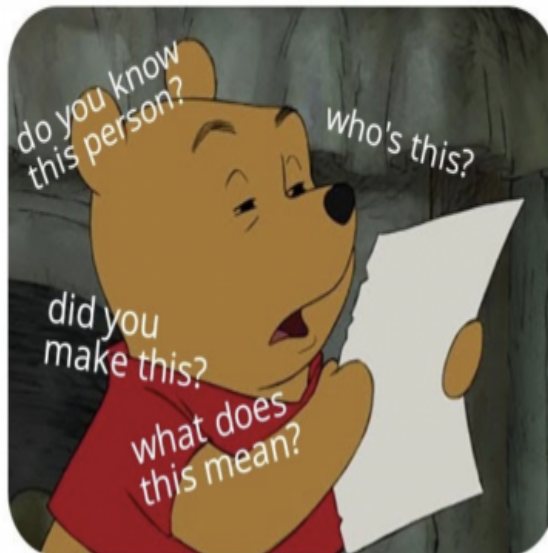
Parent Zone provides information, help, advice, support and resources to parents, teachers, health professionals, police officers, internet safety officers and HR professionals - anyone who engages with parents.

Games, apps and tech

What does it meme?

Me: Mom, look
at this meme

Mom:



Are you confused about memes, or unsure what a meme even is? You're not the only one. Don't worry: we're here to help.



They can be difficult to pin down. If we absolutely had to define online memes, we'd say they're visual images or other bits of content that are spread from person to person and often adapted in the process.

Normally, memes are images or videos that can be remixed and shared online. If you use social media, you've probably liked one on Instagram or laughed at one on Facebook.

Memes are by their very nature flexible. Anything can be 'memed' - a quote, a song, a grumpy cat photo, a video of Boris Johnson hiding in a fridge, or the staircase that Joaquin Phoenix dances down in the film *The Joker*. It's then tacked onto something else that people might be talking about.

In other words, you take an idea and relate it to something popular or familiar, usually to be humorous.

Where do they come from?

The term was invented in 1976 by the scientist Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*, based on an ancient Greek word "mimeme," meaning something imitated. He shortened it to the snappier "meme" and used it to describe anything - from an accent to a particular word, to a catchy tune - that passes through a population like a kind of cultural virus.

Once the internet arrived, memes could spread much faster. New technology made it easier for people to edit images and videos and share them with strangers - so easy, in fact, that we've made one ourselves:



Why do I not find them funny?

Lots of them aren't funny, or are only funny to those who are in on the joke. What makes for a successful meme is near-impossible to predict. Creating one is like throwing wet paper at a wall and seeing what sticks. Sometimes, one sticks so well - usually because it touches on something that everyone's talking or thinking about - that it goes viral.

If it feels as though everyone's laughing at a joke you don't get, the best thing to do is ignore the original meaning and concentrate on the new one. For example, our meme is not actually about battling athletes: it's a visual joke about what it's like to be late for a meeting. Not hilarious, and probably wouldn't stick to the wall, but you get the idea.

Are they harmless?

Memes are mostly harmless fun. But as with anything else online, there are downsides. Something that's funny to one person may not be so funny to another - and it's important to help your child understand that it's better not to insult groups or individuals, even if that isn't the original intention.

What if my child is memeing themselves?

That one molecule of Serotonin
trying to keep me going throughout
the day



These self-deprecating memes are usually meant as a joke. There may be an underlying seriousness - and perhaps the meme is a useful, indirect way of expressing feelings. If, though, you're worried that your child is making or sharing dark memes as a sign of serious distress, you could approach the subject by discussing the memes you find funny, and why. Probing memes may provoke an eye roll, but talking about them together may encourage your child to open up.

And if I still don't find them funny?

Your child won't find all memes funny, either. Being a meme-watcher is a step towards staying informed on viral internet trends, challenges, and hoaxes - which, in turn, will help you and your child become more resilient online.