

# Guidelines for Family Emoji ZWJ Sequences that currently lack RGI tone support

**From:** Emoji Subcommittee (ESC)

**To:** Unicode Technical Committee (UTC)

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## Introduction



Skin tone modifiers have many exceptions and implementation details, and many aspects of this have been discussed in past documents ([L2/19-392](#)). Efforts to add all toned emoji as RGI have not been successful; however, letting the existing 27 family emoji sit in our keyboards without resolution contradicts guidelines outlined in TR#51, [Section 2.4 Diversity](#).

As emoji keyboards advance in creating more intuitive and personalized experiences, the Emoji Subcommittee is recommending a small set of emoji to be redesigned as part of a multi-phase effort to “complete the set” of toned variants for the remaining multi-person emoji. This follows priorities set out in document [L2/20-196](#).



Fig 1: With the addition of a multi-toned handshake in Emoji 14.0  
all body part emoji now offer toned options 🖐️🖐️🖐️🖐️🖐️

## History

“Family emoji” were approved as part of Unicode 6.0 in 2010 and added to Emoji 1.0 in 2015. While the addition of these emoji were in an effort to recognize more diverse modern families, in practice these types of additions have resulted in having the opposite intended impact: creating false expectations around emoji customization and implying what is and what is not family. For example, now we have a “single parent” emoji but we don’t have families who are

multi-generational, have more than two kids, or perhaps no kids at all. Moving forward the **ESC aims to not reinforce prescriptive notions of what makes a family such as “👨👩👧”**. Similar to how written languages can be a collection of single units which are combined to create more meaningful concepts done to great effect, juxtapositioning *existing* emoji creates an inclusive, diverse range of groups of people.

#### Multi-generational families



#### Multi-racial families



#### Disabled Families



#### Families with fur babies



#### Red Headed Families



#### Families with quintuplets :)



The above examples are infinitely more inclusive than the existing “family” emoji:



## Frequency of Use

The people emoji used least frequently are family emoji. (*Highlighted in cyan, lower right corner. Note the “person-symbol” emoji outperform many of the multi-person emoji.*)

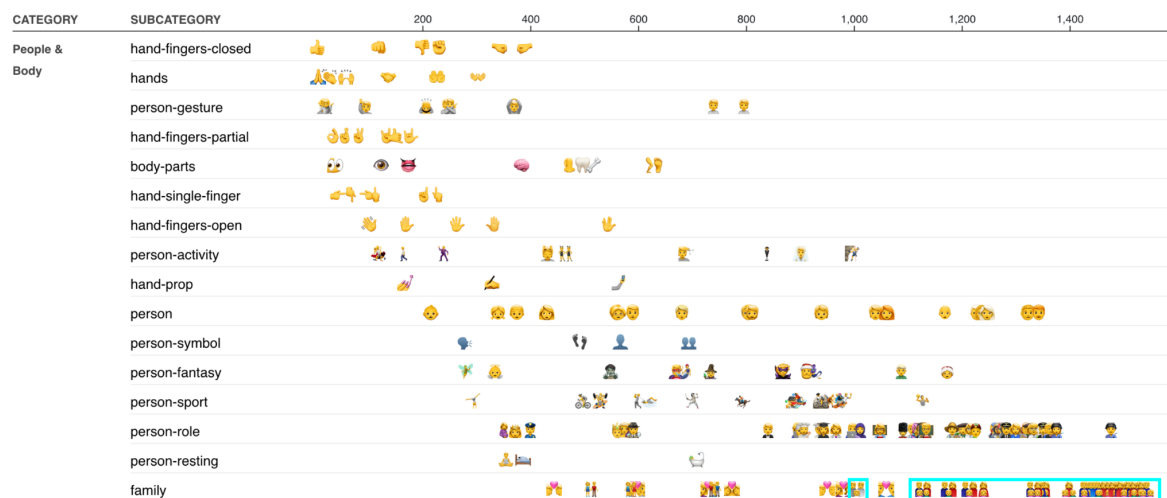


Fig 2: Emoji Frequency Data, via [Unicode](#)

## Vendor Implementation

While there is reasonable interoperability for RGI emoji, there is evidence of experimentation on the non-RGI side. Most notably, the Segoe Ui font added over 50,000 non RGI family combinations. Some fonts support non-RGI toned versions for the “Family” emoji (👨👩👧) and a couple have extended support to other family characters such as “Family, Man: Medium Skin Tone, Girl: Medium Skin Tone” (👨🏽👩🏽👧🏽). For brevity, this document only illustrates examples from these two characters to illustrate the state of the status quo.





















Family Emoji					
Apple	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Noto Emoji	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Samsung					
Segoe UI					
Twemoji					
Facebook					

Fig 3a: Non RGI Family Emoji Implementation for Family











Family, Man: Medium Skin Tone, Girl: Medium Skin Tone					
Apple	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Noto Emoji	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Samsung	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Segoe UI					
Twemoji	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Facebook					

Fig 3b: Non RGI Family Emoji Implementation for Family,  
Man: Medium Skin Tone, Girl: Medium Skin Tone

## Recommendation

Adding toned support for the last remaining “people” emoji (see Fig 4) poses unique solutions and associated consequences [L2/20-196](#). **This document is an update on established ESC priorities pursuant to [L2/19-101](#) with a focus on FAMILY emoji.** In 2019, the subcommittee explored seven paths forward to extend skintone support to the existing 27 family emoji as described in [L2/19-392](#). Later, in 2020 this path was ultimately declined as described in [L2/20-114](#).

However, TS #51, section 2.4 Diversity outlines, “Unicode emoji characters for people and body parts are intended to be generic and shown with a generic (nonhuman) appearance, such as a yellow/orange color similar to that used for smiley faces.” Given the design of family emoji are distinctly human in appearance and lack tone support this is not congruent with our broader guidelines and principles. With no path forward to formally add variant support, **the ESC recommends these 27 emoji to be redesigned with a more generic appearance:**

[illegible]

*Note: These guidelines are written with the intent to ensure interoperability between emoji experiences. It is up to the discretion of font designers to consider if their emoji are intended to appear outside of their platform and have already have added tone support*

# Overview

ESC recommends redesigning the following 25 emoji as symbols, signaling to customers that these do not behave like the other “person” or “toned” emoji which have the appearance of customization.

## Why a redesign

The subcommittee does not suggest redesigning emoji lightly nor frequently. The last time — 2018 — was part of an initiative to address [poor interoperability](#) between gendered emoji.

Generally, the ESC only makes recommends a redesign of an existing emoji for the following reasons:

1. Generalize for broader use
2. Unintended connotations
3. Improve interoperability

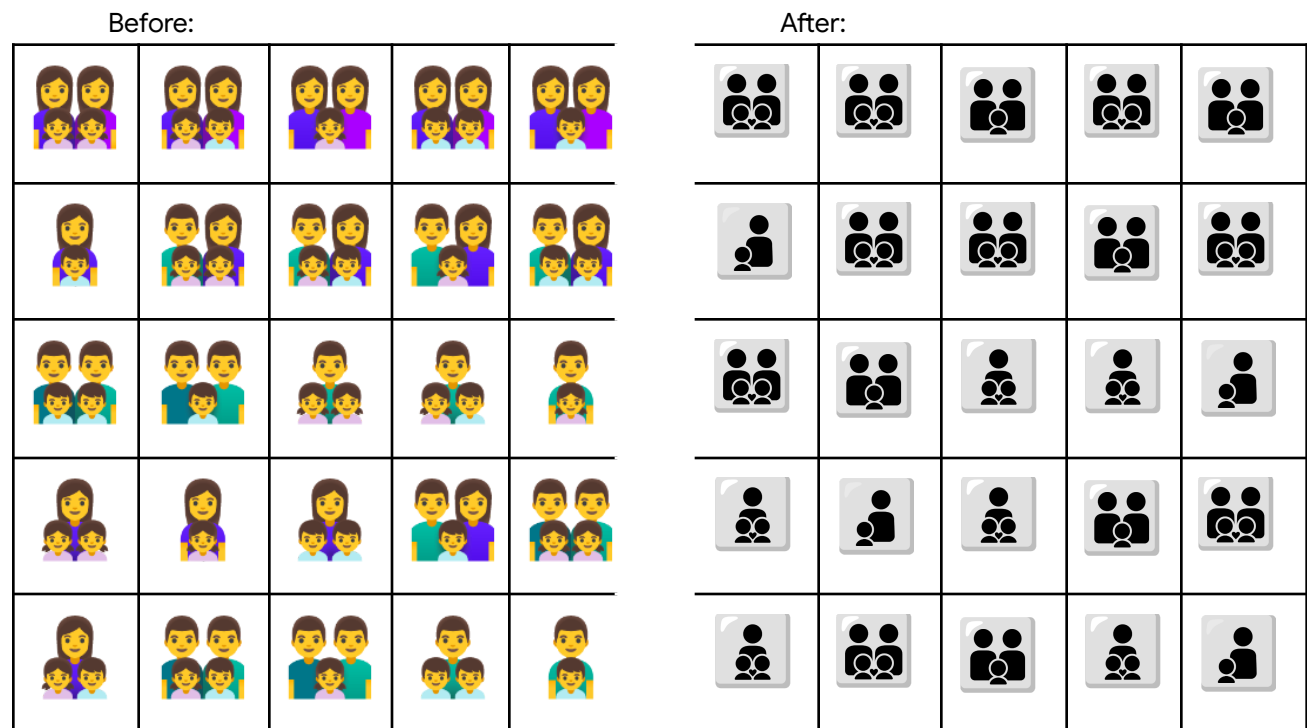


Fig 4. Family Emoji today (left), Family Emoji moving forward (right)

## Additional notes

1. These “Family emoji” would move from “people” category to the “symbols” category
2. Vendors can use their own discretion to determine if these legacy emoji should remain in their keyboards