

Common Sense on Dealing with Digital Drama

What's the Issue?

To adults, digital drama and cyberbullying may seem one and the same. But to teens, there is a difference. Unlike cyberbullying, which involves repeated harassment towards someone, digital drama describes the everyday tiffs and disputes that occur between friends or acquaintances online or via text. A boy may change his relationship status to “single” immediately after a fight with his girlfriend to make a statement. A girl may post a comment about someone else, knowing that people will see it, that friends may chime in, and that people will talk about it. In the same way that the term *drama* describes a performance, teens usually engage in online drama with an audience in mind.

Why Does It Matter?

Teens sometimes use the term *drama* to distance themselves from emotionally difficult behavior. But digital drama can still feel very real to teens, lead to hurt feelings, and even damage friendships. In some cases, digital drama can escalate into an offline fight – either verbal or physical.

Gender stereotypes also are woven into digital drama. Not only do many boys and girls think of drama as stupid, they also think of it as feminine. When girls are stereotyped as overly emotional and dramatic, they may have a harder time being taken seriously by others. Boys, too, may shy away from sharing their feelings for fear of being labeled “girly.”

common sense says

Help set boundaries. Families can support their teens by understanding that these days relationships are often played out both online and in public. Kids need their family's guidance in establishing appropriate boundaries for healthy relationships.

Let them know you're always there for them. Remind teens often that you're always available to talk to. While you're at it, put in a plug for the school counselor, a favorite teacher, a coach, or even a friend's parent. Knowing that they have a trusted adult to talk to may encourage teens to open up more.

Use media to talk about drama. Reality TV shows often display two extremes: women gossiping behind one another's back, and crazy catfights. Point out that most reality TV shows have staged or scripted moments to keep their episodes action packed. Also discuss how these shows can encourage negative stereotypes about female friendships.