common sense media

How can I help my kid avoid digital drama?

To adults, digital drama and cyberbullying may seem one and the same. But to kids, there's a difference. Unlike cyberbullying, which involves repeated harassment of someone, digital drama is the everyday tiffs and disputes that occur among friends or acquaintances online or via text message. A guy may change his relationship status to "single" immediately after a fight with his girlfriend to make a statement. A teen may post a comment about someone else knowing that people will see it, friends may chime in, and people will talk about it. In the same way that the word *drama* describes a performance, kids usually engage in online drama with an audience in mind.

In some cases, digital drama can escalate into an offline fight -- either verbal or physical. Here's how you can help your kid avoid this:

Help set boundaries. Understand that these days relationships often are played out both online and offline. Kids need their family's guidance in establishing appropriate boundaries for healthy relationships.

Take a time-out. With constant access to texting and posting online, kids don't get a break from the back and forth that can keep digital drama going. Have some device-free time to give kids a chance to cool off.

Let them know you're always there for them. Remind your kids often that you're always available to talk. While you're at it, remind them about 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 present extreme behavior as entertainment. Discuss why these shows are less likely to depict positive conflict resolution. Also talk about how these shows can encourage negative stereotypes about female friendships.