

Digital Drama

When it comes to discussing social media, it's important that adults and kids speak the same language. What grown-ups think of "cyberbullying" might be explained away by kids as "digital drama." But it's not trivial. Digital drama brews in the offline world and simmers online when kids feel emboldened to say or do things that they wouldn't face-to-face. Checking in with kids and observing them as they interact with technology can ensure your conversations are productive and helpful.

- **Ask how they are ... then ask again.**

It may seem simple, but ask your kids how they are doing on a daily basis. Also, watch for telltale signs that they are suffering from digital drama — a change in mood or behavior — as your kids interact with their phone and other devices. They may be absorbing subtle social messages in not-so-healthy ways. Ask lots of questions to determine how your kids view media and interact with technology. What are their favorite tools? Why do they value technology? What are some benefits as well as pitfalls of our 24/7 world?

- **Hit the pause button.**

If your child is on the receiving end of someone else's hurtful online behavior, encourage him to "take it offline." It may be tempting to continue the conversation online; however, face-to-face can be more constructive. The lack of body language, facial expressions, and tone with online communication easily can lead to misunderstandings. Encourage kids to "walk in another's shoes" to make sure that they are considering all perspectives. At the very least, "taking it offline" will give your child time to process how to act — rather than just react.

- **Read between the lines.**

With the popularity of photo sharing, kids often receive evidence that they were not included ... which then leads to feelings of exclusion. Imagine your child seeing a photo of friends at dinner and realizing that she was not invited. While it is true that no one is included in everything, it is a hard rite of passage for kids to learn — and often they just need a sympathetic ear or an alternative social activity. Unfortunately, some kids use online photos to intentionally tag the kids who weren't invited — a not-so-subtle message of exclusion. In these cases, let your children know that they are supported, and talk about strategies to mend a riff or dispel a fight.

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Digital Dilemmas are brief hypothetical situations and corresponding questions designed to foster cross-generational conversations about different aspects of adolescents' digital lives. Use this fictitious scenario, based on real-life stories, to spark a conversation at home with your children and open up the discussion about these very important topics.

Impersonation

Erin was home sick from school watching a movie when she looked down at her phone and saw her screen filled with text messages written in capital letters and punctuated with exclamation points. "I HATE YOU!!! HOW COULD YOU?!" Erin panicked: she had no idea why she was receiving the flood of vicious text messages. She frantically texted two of her friends, but both were in class, and her calls went to voicemail. A few hours later, Erin pieced together what had happened. Someone had hacked onto her best friend's Facebook page, acting as her, and sent perverted messages to her best friend's boyfriend. Her best friend was furious and was convinced that it was Erin, since Erin was the only person who had her password. Erin hadn't been at school to defend herself, so their other friends had already heard about the incident and were mad at Erin, too.

- ? What is your gut reaction to this story?
- ? Is sharing passwords something that people who you know do? Who would you share your Facebook password with and under what circumstances?
- ? What would you do in this situation if you were Erin?
- ? Is impersonation something you ever see on social media? Are there ever situations when it is funny or just a joke?