

# Common Sense on Digital Relationships

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## What's the Issue?

Teens are living out romantic relationships online – flirting, fighting, making up, and breaking up. Online talk can be a healthy and even powerful way for some teens to get closer to others, but sometimes it can go too far. Some couples become “tethered” to one another through their devices. They text when they wake up, all through the day, and right before bed. Their relationships are yet another aspect of their 24/7 digital lives.

## Why Does It Matter?

Getting close to others online can be comforting when all is good, but what happens when relationships get rocky? Couples might trade public insults through status updates, wall posts, and bulletins. This situation may even worsen when couples break up, especially if the breakup is nasty or done with an impersonal text or email. As a consequence, both parties are left with a backlog of personal communication that can now be forwarded to others and used for revenge, blackmail, or harassment. Even in a less-messy breakup, couples often have to remove photos from their profiles and change their relationships status to “single.” Young love is complicated enough without the added pressure of constant access and public scrutiny.

## What Families Can Do

The topic of digital relationships can be sensitive, and families can support teens by keeping communication open and honest. Remind them that you are always available to talk. While you're at it, put a plug in for their school counselor or a friend's parent. Knowing that they have a trusted adult to talk to will be comforting.

### common sense says

- **Don't dismiss digital talk.** Don't underestimate the power of texts, IMs, and other digital media to strengthen existing relationships. Teen relationships often move fluidly from online to off.
- **Talk about what's private.** Teens may differ with their parents in what they view as private and what's okay to share. But remind them that intimate posts or messages can be copied and shared with thousands of people in an instant.
- **Check out [ThatsNotCool.com](http://ThatsNotCool.com) and MTV's “A Thin Line” campaign.** These sites give kids the language and support to take texting and cell phone power back into their own hands. It's also a great resource for parents who are uncomfortable dealing directly with this issue.