

Health Skill:

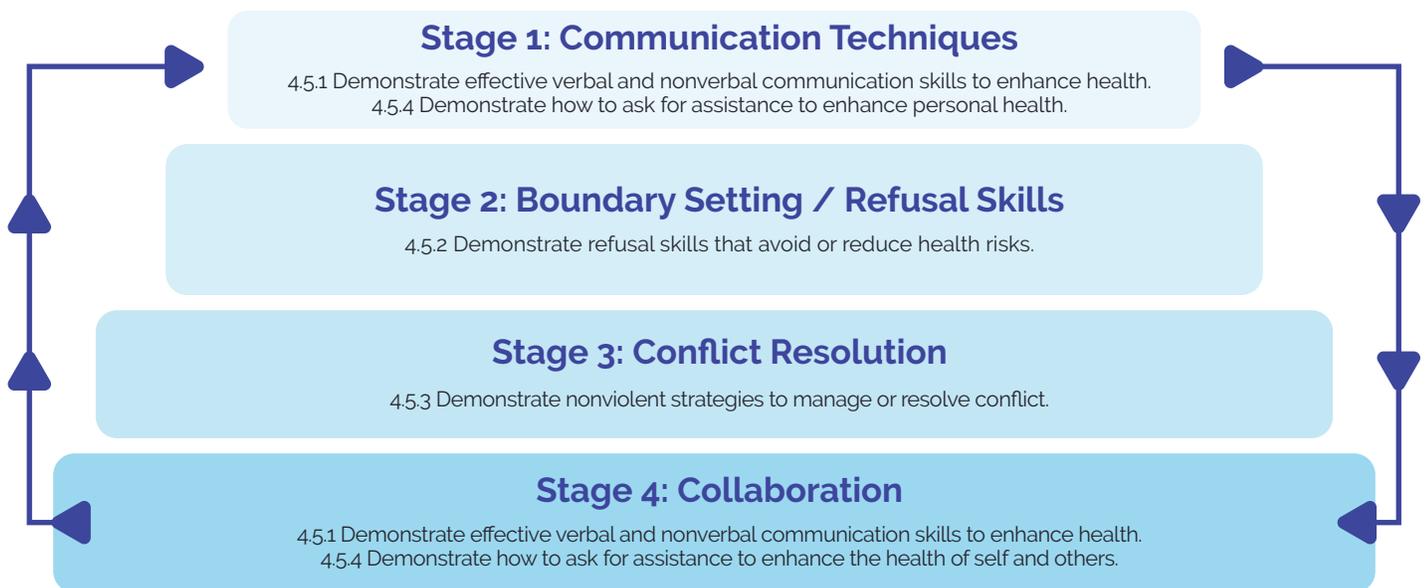
Interpersonal Communication



Background Information

The health skill, *Interpersonal Communication*, guides students to better understand, practice, and reflect on their interactions with others. By providing students with a safe space to practice strategies for healthy communication in school, students are more prepared to handle social situations throughout their life. The *Interpersonal Communication* health skill begins with practicing appropriate communication techniques, then explores healthy boundaries with strategies to uphold those boundaries, moving to examining the importance of productive conflict and conflict resolution, and ends with strategies to ensure effective collaboration. Each stage of *Interpersonal Communication* supports students to better understand themselves and their community, while working toward having more authentic, intentional communication with others.

The four stages of *Interpersonal Communication* are designed to support the growth of each student toward more complex levels of communication, beginning with the individual and ending with effective team work. The *Teaching Progression* for the four stages were developed in sequential order to ensure strategies build upon one another, leading to more inclusive, authentic, and collaborative teamwork. However, teachers can rearrange the stages as appropriate for their classroom.



NATIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION STANDARD (NHES) 4:

Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

National Health Education Standard Rationale: Effective communication enhances personal, family, and community health. This standard focuses on how responsible individuals use verbal and non-verbal skills to develop and maintain healthy personal relationships. The ability to organize and to convey information and feelings is the basis for strengthening interpersonal interactions and reducing or avoiding conflict.



Grades 3-5 Framework

In grades 3-5, students learn a variety of strategies to effectively communicate in a variety of modes. The graphic below outlines the strategies learned in each stage, beginning with *Stage 1: Communication Techniques* and ending with *Stage 4: Collaboration*. Teachers should use the strategies listed as a starting point and add strategies to meet the needs of their students.



Notes on Grade Level Progression

Activities, vocabulary, and language throughout the models are vertically aligned and build upon one another. If students require scaffolding refer to previous grade levels for additional ideas for activities and instruction that address gaps in student skills. For enrichment activities, look at higher grade levels in order to provide additional practice opportunities or for ideas on how to deepen understanding.



Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting

The *Interpersonal Communication* health skill model continues with *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting* to teach students to advocate for themselves and set appropriate, healthy boundaries in relationships. The strategies used in *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting* are designed to help students practice using a strong voice and safe strategies when they face pressure to do things that feel unsafe or unhealthy for them. By the end of *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting*, students in all grade-levels will have foundational strategies for saying *no* in high pressure social situations and maintain healthy boundaries. Students who master these techniques will be better equipped to follow through on healthy decisions in relationships and set appropriate boundaries to feel safe and comfortable with others.

The Steps:



Grades 3-5 Framework

In grades 3-5, students focus on personal physical boundary setting with others. Elementary-aged students must practice setting boundaries and verbalizing these boundaries to others because they are entering a phase of development when they are becoming more autonomous in their bodies and with their personal belongings. By practicing setting boundaries, students are more prepared to maintain healthy and appropriate relationships with peers and family. Teachers should provide students with explicit language for setting boundaries and provide a space to practice strategies for setting boundaries with others. This health skill provides specific strategies for students to say *no* to others and take control over how they are treated by others. By the end of *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting*, students will be more confident in stating *no* and have effective strategies to uphold their boundaries in high pressure situations. For more explicit instruction on decision-making, refer to *Decision-Making* for grades 3-5.

Mastery of *Stage 2: Refusal Skills and Boundary Setting* for grades 3-5 means students are able to pay attention to their feelings, set their boundaries with others, and use effective strategies for upholding their decisions and boundaries.



Stage 2: Refusal Skills and Boundary Setting

The Steps:



Step 1: Listen to My Feelings

Step Overview: When learning to set boundaries, it is important to listen to your feelings. Our bodies tell us when we do not feel safe or comfortable and learning to recognize these feelings allows us to know when we need to state a boundary or say *no*. This step allows students to stop and think about how they are feeling in order to recognize when their boundaries are crossed.

Sub Skill(s):

- Notice my feelings
- Identify when boundaries are crossed
- Identify personal boundaries



Step 2: State My Boundary

Step Overview: Step 2 of *Refusal Skills and Boundary Setting* teaches students how to state their boundary clearly and assertively, whether that is just saying *no* or stating what they need the other person to stop and do differently. Students should practice identifying when situations need a firm *no* and when boundaries may be a little more complex, like sharing personal belongings or playing with one another.

Sub Skill(s):

- Identify situations that require saying no or getting help
- Say no clearly and assertively
- State my boundaries clearly and assertively



Step 3: Use a Refusal Skill to Defend My Boundary

Step Overview: Sometimes stating boundaries clearly and assertively is not enough. In these moments, using refusal/boundary setting strategies are important to uphold the boundary and maintain important personal relationships. Students should practice using a variety of refusal/boundary setting strategies in order to prepare for different situations and contexts. This step provides strategies and language students need to state their boundaries and to resist pressure from others when needed.

Sub Skill(s):

- Explain effects of peer pressure
- Use a refusal/boundary setting strategy
 - Say *no* firmly and loudly. Stand tall and be clear.
 - Avoid or leave the situation
 - Suggest something different to do
 - Explain why it is a bad idea for you
 - Politely decline
 - Seek help from a trusted adult



Step 4: Look Back & Learn

Step Overview: Learning to reflect takes practice and intention. After an individual upholds a personal boundary, it is important to reflect on how they feel. It is possible that upon reflection, they will need to seek additional resources or help in case the situation comes up again in the future. Building time for students to reflect is crucial in developing metacognition, which supports health skills, *Self-Management and Advocacy for Self & Others*.

Reflection Question(s):

- How did I feel when someone crossed my boundaries?
- Did the situation feel safe? Why or why not?
- Was it easy or hard to say no? Why?
- Was I able to communicate my boundary? Why or why not?
- Which refusal/boundary setting skill did I use that was the most helpful?
- How did it feel to uphold my boundary?
- Do I need to seek additional help? If so, what help do I need?
- Anything else I need to do?





Teaching Tips

- Explicitly teach language to describe emotions to support students in recognizing when their boundaries are crossed.
- Practice *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting* with sharing belongings. Prompt students to identify objects they are okay with sharing and others they are not. Then, have students practice asking for consent for borrowing and saying *no* if they do not want to share.
- Use role play to give students an opportunity to practice communicating and upholding their boundaries.
- Be sure to include the following situations when learning about seeking help from a trusted adult when boundaries are crossed: sexual assault or harrassment, talk of self harm or suicide, threats toward others, etc.
- Implicitly teach *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting* by stating and upholding your own boundaries with students.

See *Teaching Progression* for suggested learning activities.