

Health Skill:

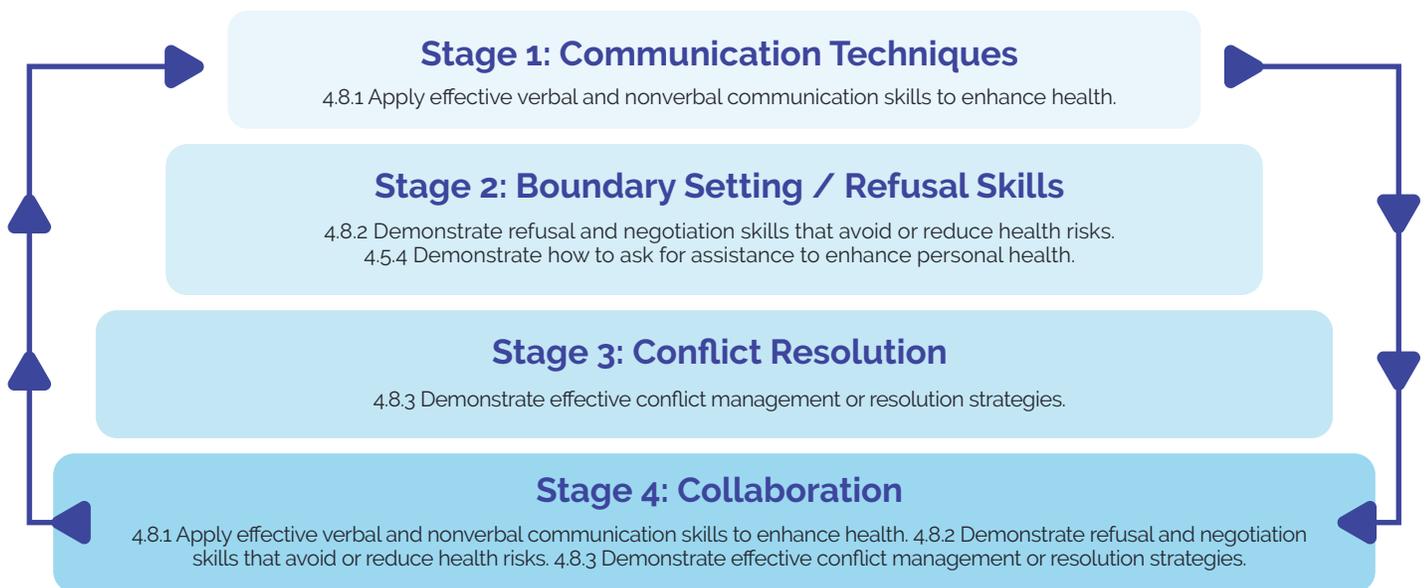
Interpersonal Communication



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 6-8 Framework

In grades 6-8, 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 1: Communication Techniques

The health skill, *Interpersonal Communication*, begins with *Stage 1: Communication Techniques* to teach students to engage in more meaningful conversations with others. The communication techniques used in *Stage 1: Communication Techniques* are designed to help students practice effective methods of listening and speaking. It is important to keep in mind that there is not one best way to communicate. Communicating with others is personal, cultural, and part of an individual's identity. The communication strategies suggested in this model help students explore more ways to communicate with others, but these strategies are not meant to discredit other communication styles. Since communication techniques are rooted in individual culture and social norms, these techniques are suggested tools for students to incorporate into their own personal communication style. Teachers should use their knowledge of students to tailor listening and speaking strategies to meet the needs of their students and honor students' cultural backgrounds. By the end of *Stage 1: Communication Techniques*, students in all grade-levels will have the foundational tools necessary for engaging in more complex interpersonal situations. Students who master these techniques will be better equipped to engage in setting boundaries, resolving conflict, building strong teams, and advocating for themselves and others.

The Steps:



Grades 6-8 Framework

Appropriate and effective communication changes depending on the context, and this concept is often confusing for many middle school students, who are beginning to analyze their personal identities and where they fit in socially. Therefore, teachers should explicitly teach students different ways to effectively communicate and provide them with space to practice different communication strategies. These strategies are meant to give students options when navigating different situations. *Stage 1: Communication Techniques* for grades 6-8 allows students to practice various communication strategies as well as reflect on the impact of their communication style on others. By the end of *Stage 1: Communication Techniques*, students become more aware of their personal communication style and begin to practice different strategies to effectively convey their own message to others.

Mastery of *Stage 1: Communication Techniques* for grades 6-8 means students are able to use active listening strategies, speak with purpose, and determine appropriate speaking/listening strategies for different contexts.



Stage 1: Communication Techniques

The Steps:



Step 1: Examine the Context

Step Overview: Since effective communication techniques are dependent on context, students start this stage by examining changing their communication styles to match the context. The concept of context affecting communication style is developmentally appropriate for middle school students because this age group is continuously examining how they present themselves to the world. Finally, students examine how context impacts their personal communication style in their own lives and reflect on the reasons people change communication to match the context. This introduction to communication and context will support students as they develop their personal communication style in Step 2 and Step 3 of *Stage 1: Communication Techniques*.

Sub Skill(s):

- Define communication
- Analyze contexts
- Examine body language



Step 2: Listen to Others

Step Overview: Using effective listening strategies allows individuals to respond appropriately when someone is communicating, helping to foster relationships and support understanding. Students continue to build effective communication strategies in Step 2 by learning and practicing how to be a more engaged listener. Listening requires an individual to use appropriate body language as well as asking questions and summarizing while someone is speaking to ensure the full message or idea is being grasped.

Sub Skill(s):

- Define active listening
- Use appropriate body language
- Engage with the speaker
 - Ask questions
 - Summarize what you hear



Step 3: Use Effective Speaking Strategies

Step Overview: After learning effective listening strategies, one must then master effective speaking strategies to convey their own ideas and messages clearly. This step provides students with the nonverbal and verbal speaking strategies they need to clearly communicate their needs, wants, and feelings.

Sub Skill(s):

- Use non-verbal communication effectively
 - Eye contact with the listener(s)
 - Appropriate posture
 - Appropriate hand gestures
- Use voice effectively
 - Tone
 - Inflection
 - Speed
 - Volume



Teaching Tips

- Select listening and speaking strategies that are responsive to the needs of your classroom. Communicating with others is personal, cultural, and part of an individual's identity. The communication strategies suggested in this model help students explore more ways to communicate with others, but these strategies are not meant to discredit other communication styles.
- Since communication styles are so personal, avoid making judgements about the right and wrong ways to communicate. Instead, prompt students to think about context and whether or not a specific communication technique is appropriate or inappropriate for the context. Allow students to come to their own conclusions about appropriate and inappropriate ways to communicate.
- Provide opportunities for students to role play the different listening and speaking strategies in order for them to demonstrate the strategies in class.
- When first learning listening and speaking strategies, prompt students to tell stories or give speeches unrelated to health content. For example, students could tell a story about a family vacation, the death of a pet, or an obstacle they experienced recently.
- Pair *Stage 1: Communication Techniques* with other stages in of *Interpersonal Communication* as well as *Decision-Making*, *Goal-Setting*, *Self-Management*, and *Advocacy for Self & Others*.

See *Teaching Progression* for suggested learning activities.