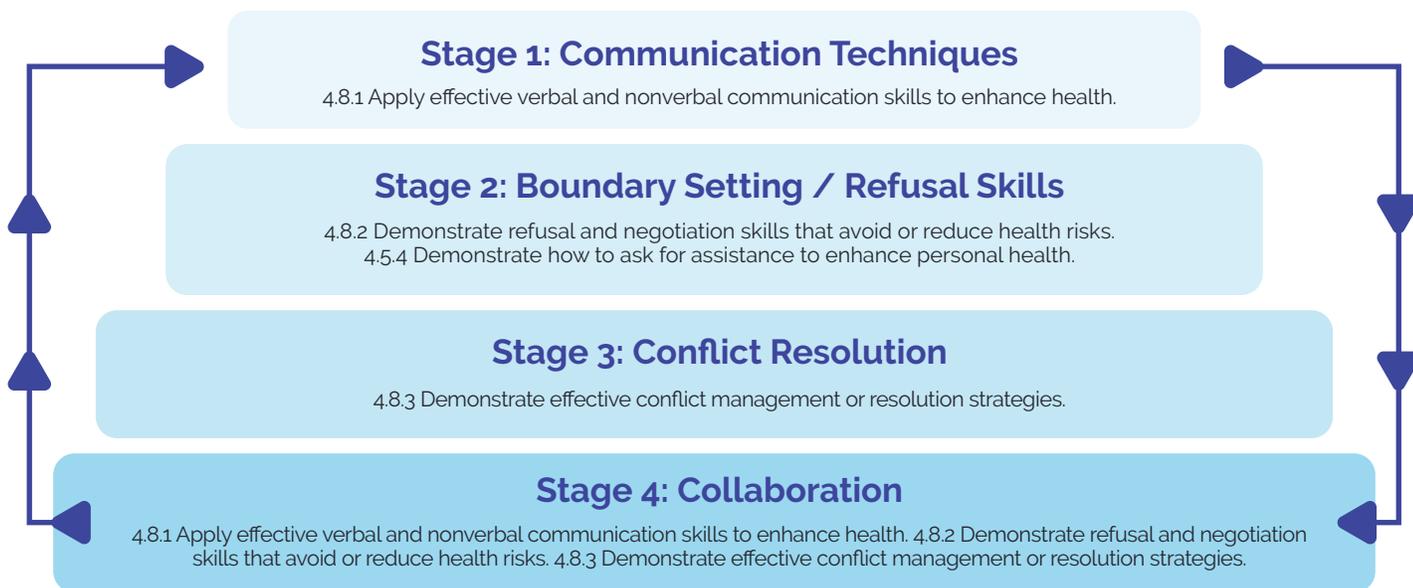**Health Skill:**

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.

Stage 1: Communication Techniques

4.8.1 Apply effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills to enhance health.

Stage 2: Boundary Setting / Refusal Skills

4.8.2 Demonstrate refusal and negotiation skills that avoid or reduce health risks.
4.5.4 Demonstrate how to ask for assistance to enhance personal health.

Stage 3: Conflict Resolution

4.8.3 Demonstrate effective conflict management or resolution strategies.

Stage 4: Collaboration

4.8.1 Apply effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills to enhance health. 4.8.2 Demonstrate refusal and negotiation skills that avoid or reduce health risks. 4.8.3 Demonstrate effective conflict management or resolution strategies.

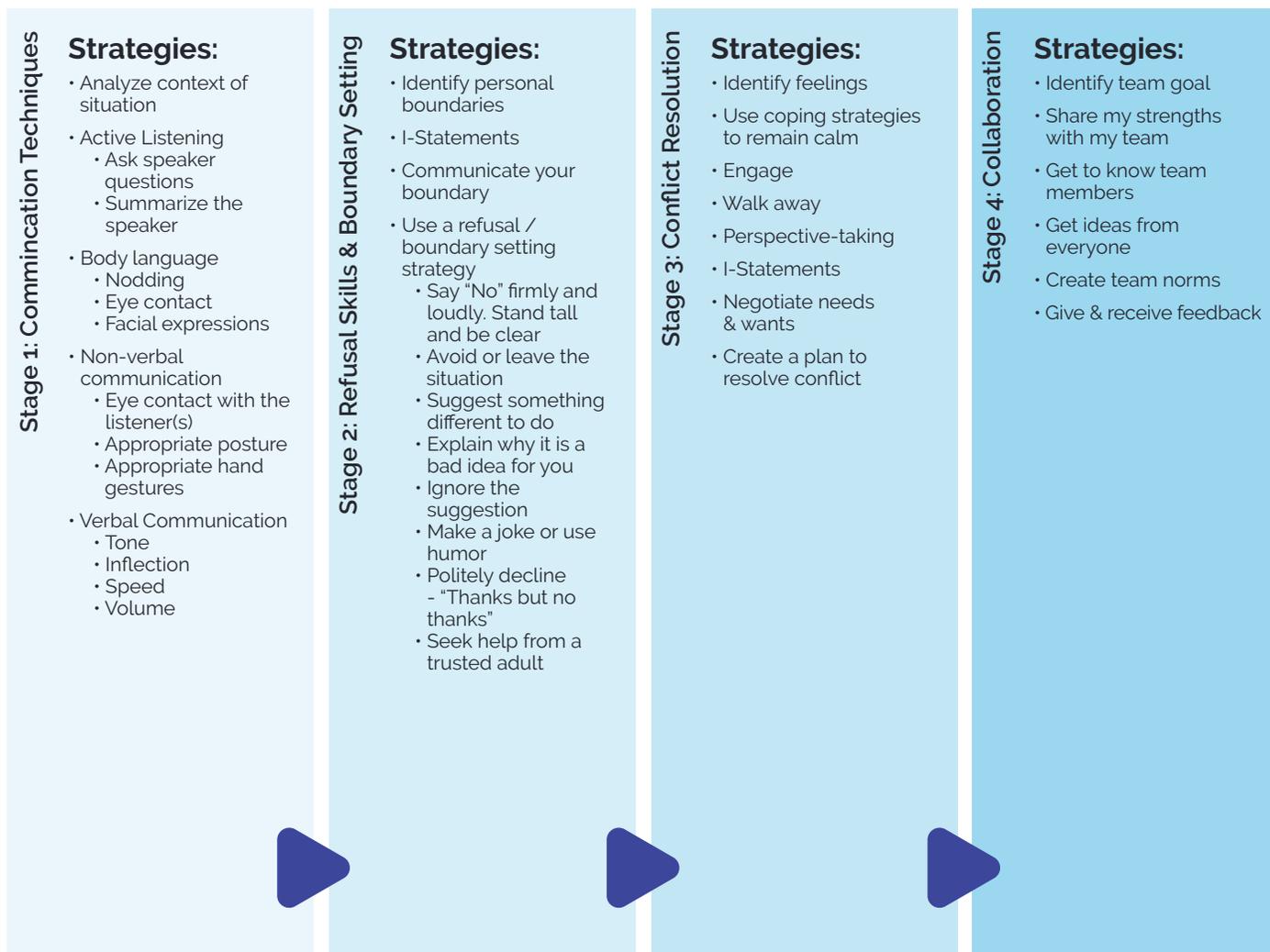**NATIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION STANDARD (NHES) 4:**
Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

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.

Stage 1: Communication Techniques

Strategies:
- Analyze context of situation
- Active Listening
  - Ask speaker questions
  - Summarize the speaker
- Body language
  - Nodding
  - Eye contact
  - Facial expressions
- Non-verbal communication
  - Eye contact with the listener(s)
  - Appropriate posture
  - Appropriate hand gestures
- Verbal Communication
  - Tone
  - Inflection
  - Speed
  - Volume

Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting

Strategies:
- Identify personal boundaries
- I-Statements
- Communicate your boundary
- 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
  - Ignore the suggestion
  - Make a joke or use humor
  - Politely decline - "Thanks but no thanks"
  - Seek help from a trusted adult

Stage 3: Conflict Resolution

Strategies:
- Identify feelings
- Use coping strategies to remain calm
- Engage
- Walk away
- Perspective-taking
- I-Statements
- Negotiate needs & wants
- Create a plan to resolve conflict

Stage 4: Collaboration

Strategies:
- Identify team goal
- Share my strengths with my team
- Get to know team members
- Get ideas from everyone
- Create team norms
- Give & receive feedback

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.

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Stage 3: Conflict Resolution

Conflict is a natural and vital part of our social interactions, and when conflict is addressed using healthy communication skills, it leads to growth and understanding. Everyone engages in conflict, and explicitly teaching specific strategies for resolving these often uncomfortable situations helps turn unproductive conflict into productive conflict. In *Stage 3: Conflict Resolution*, students explore their experiences with conflict and learn new strategies for handling different types of conflict. *Stage 3: Conflict Resolution* allows students to reflect on real-life situations. Finally, I-Statements are a crucial part of *Stage 3: Conflict Resolution* as their use allows a person to express how they are feeling without placing blame.

The Steps:

Step 1
Acknowledge
the Conflict

Step 2
Explain
Perspectives

Step 3
Make a
Compromise

Step 4
Reflect

Grades 6-8 Framework

Teaching explicit conflict resolution strategies is especially important in middle school to help students build independence in relationships. Students need to be given specific tools and strategies to better cope with their emotions, and students need to know questions to ask themselves to aid in their metacognitive process for addressing conflict. In grades 6-8, students begin *Stage 3: Conflict Resolution* by examining their personal relationship with conflict. Students examine the different ways people handle conflict and examine effective strategies for addressing tension in relationships. Students explore the necessity of determining when it is appropriate and safe to engage in conflict with others. Next, students work on specific ways to challenge people's opinions respectfully, while focusing on listening to different perspectives. Finally, students practice a negotiation protocol for more complex issues and examine situations when a person may need to rely on others for support.

Mastery of *Stage 3: Conflict Resolution* for grades 6-8 means students are able to identify conflict, use coping strategies to stay calm and rational, decide when it is necessary to seek help, use I-Statements to express feelings, and work to compromise to resolve conflict.

Stage 3: Conflict Resolution

The Steps:

Step 1: Acknowledge the Conflict

Step Overview: The first step of *Stage 3: Conflict Resolution* provides students with an opportunity to process the conflict in order to better understand how they should address the conflict. By asking themselves a series of questions, students are better able to assess if they are in the right state to address the conflict, use coping strategies to remain calm, and decide whether or not to engage in the conflict.

Sub Skill(s):

- Define conflict resolution
- Ask yourself questions to process the conflict
- Decide how you feel
- Stay calm
- Identify what caused the conflict
- Decide to engage or walk away

Step 2: Explain Perspectives

Step Overview: One of the most important aspects of solving a conflict is to allow both sides to explain their perspective of the situation. This step requires both sides to have a chance to speak, and for both sides to listen to each other's needs. Students should practice using I-Statements in Step 2 to clearly state their feelings during a conflict and listen to others when they share their feelings.

Sub Skill(s):

- Define perspective
- Use an assertive voice
- Use I-Statements

Step 3: Make a Compromise

Step Overview: The third step to resolving a conflict is to make a compromise by creating a plan. The plan is a way for each side of the conflict to feel heard and move forward with their relationship. The planning stage can be challenging for students because they need to be able to get what they need or want and allow for the other person to also get the things they need or want. To create an equitable plan takes time and requires students to practice negotiation skills.

Sub Skill(s):

- Define negotiation
- Negotiate needs & wants
- Create a plan

Step 4: Reflect

Step Overview: Learning to reflect takes practice and intention. After an individual works to resolve a conflict, they then must reflect on how they feel after the conflict and if additional follow up is necessary, and what they want to remember next time they are in a conflict. 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 respond to this conflict?
- Am I proud of how I communicated my needs and feelings?
- What went well during the conflict resolution?
- What could have gone better?

Teaching Tips

- Use scenarios that feature conflicts students in grades 6-8 face to provide opportunities for students to go through the steps of *Stage 3: Conflict Resolution*.
- Teach I-Statements to support students in expressing their feelings during conflict. See the *Language of Health Literacy* for Step 3: Explain Perspectives for I-Statement langauge.
- Be careful not to convey that all conflict is bad, rather focus on the idea that conflict is normal and can lead to better outcomes and stronger relationships since it allows people to be honest about their feelings.
- Use role play to provide students the opportunity to work through conflict in low stakes environments.
- Share the steps of *Stage 3: Conflict Resolution* with other content area teachers, so they can use similar language when conflict occurs in their classrooms.

See *Teaching Progression* for suggested learning activities.

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