

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:

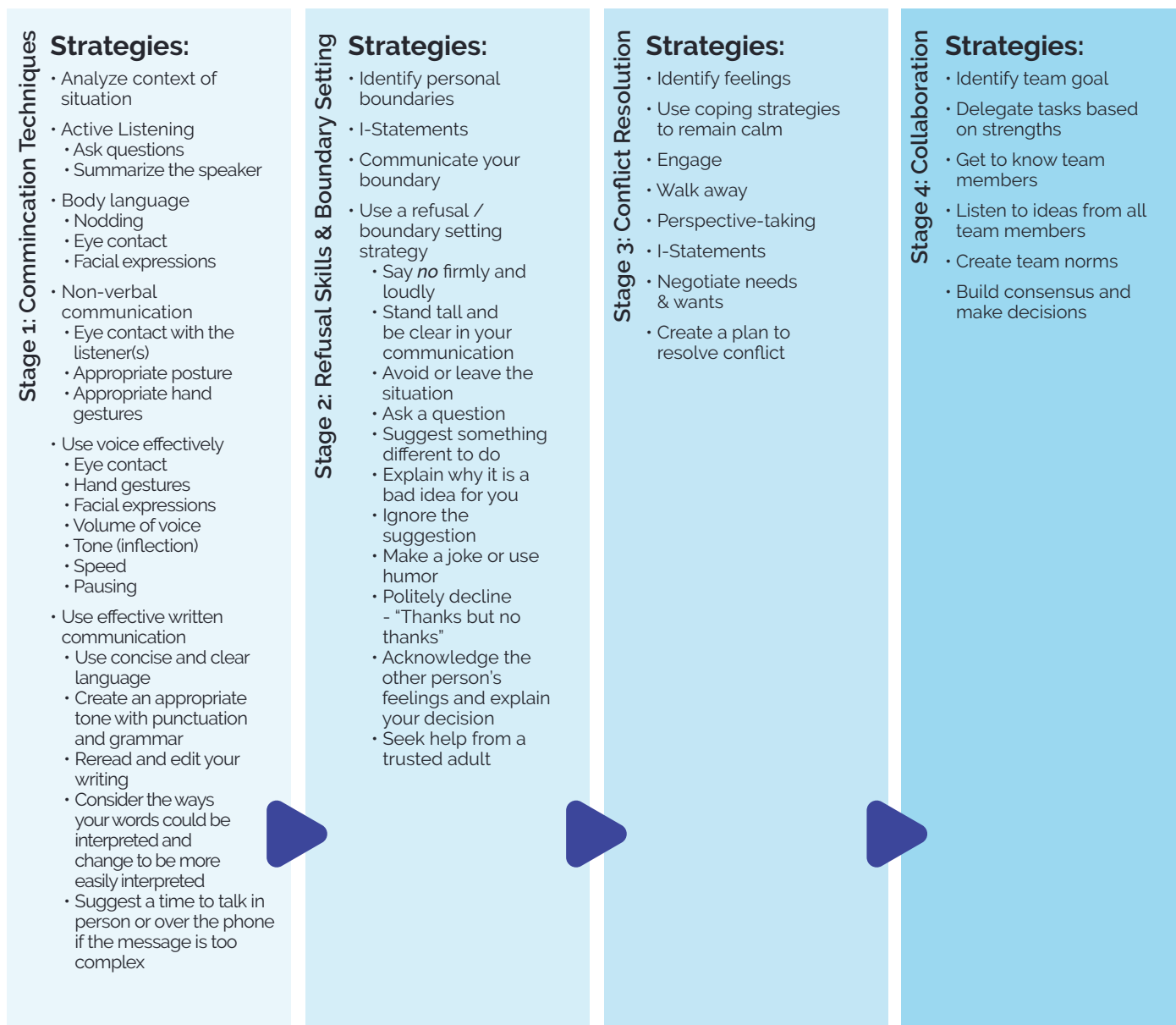
Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

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 9-12 Framework

In grades 9-12, 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 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:



Grades 9-12 Framework

In grades 9-12, students begin *Stage 3: Conflict Resolution* by asking themselves questions to help process a conflict before using strategies to resolve it. Students examine their feelings, use coping strategies to remain calm, identify the reasons for the conflict, and decide whether or not to engage in the conflict. Students should work through these questions with personal examples and provided scenarios. It is important for students to write their reflection, as well as discuss their ideas with peers, as developing awareness around conflict takes practice and time. In Step 2, students develop speaking strategies to voice their feelings and needs as well as listening strategies to ensure they are listening to others' perspectives. Since conflict often comes in heightened states, students should practice voicing I-Statements and Need-Statements in a low-stakes and safe environment. Finally, students work to create compromises by using listening strategies and ranking their needs in order to visually show the importance of certain needs and wants. The use of scenarios and role play is crucial throughout these steps in order to allow students to reflect on how they can best approach conflict outside of actual conflict.

Mastery of *Stage 3: Conflict Resolution* means students are able to explain their feelings during conflict, use coping strategies to remain calm, identify the reasons for a conflict, voice and listen to different perspectives, negotiate in order to reach a compromise, and reflect on the conflict.



Stage 3: Conflict Resolution

The Steps:



Step 1: Acknowledge the Conflict



Step Overview: Students start *Stage 3: Conflict Resolution* by acknowledging there is a conflict.

They do this by determining how they feel, using coping strategies to remain calm, identifying what caused the conflict, and deciding if the conflict is safe and worth continuing. The first step is often what happens internally for someone before moving on to the next steps. Because of this, students should practice using reflection strategies and answering questions they should ask themselves before moving forward in resolving a conflict with someone.

Sub Skill(s):

- Explain feelings
- Use coping strategies to remain calm and rational
- Identify the reasons for 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 practice using I-Statements in Step 2 to clearly state their feelings during a conflict. This step should be practiced using various scenarios to allow for students to use an assertive voice, express their needs, and acknowledge the needs of others.

Sub Skill(s):

- Define perspectives
- State feelings & needs
- Listen to perspectives



Step 3: Make a Compromise

Step Overview: After both sides or people in a conflict have voiced their perspectives of the situation, the conflict needs to be resolved. In Step 3, students learn specific strategies to make a fair compromise to move forward after a conflict. This step focuses on the use of appropriate verbal and non-verbal skills to express need and negotiate a compromise. By the end of this step, students should be ready to reflect on the conflict resolution process to determine the effectiveness.

Sub Skill(s):

- Define negotiation
- Decide on importance of 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, 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?
- What was my contribution to this conflict?
- Did I communicate my feelings and needs? Why or why not?
- Did I listen to other perspectives effectively? Why or why not?
- Was this conflict resolved? Why or why not?
- What went well during the conflict resolution?
- What could have gone better?
- How can I personally do better the next time I face conflict?



Teaching Tips

- Use scenarios that feature conflicts students in grades 9-12 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 language.
- 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.