

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 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:



Step 1
Identify Your
Boundaries



Step 2
Analyze the
Situation



Step 3
Use an Appropriate
Refusal/Boundary
Setting Strategy



Step 4
Reflect

Grades 9-12 Framework

Students in Grades 9-12 are entering a time in their life when they start to gain more independence and autonomy from their family, teachers, and other adults. During this transition, it is important for students to learn specific skills and strategies to maintain their personal boundaries with others. Similar to students in Grades 6-8, students in Grades 9-12 encounter peer pressure that can lead to unhealthy decision-making. By teaching students skills to set and maintain boundaries, students can continue to live a healthy, safe life, even when facing difficult situations in their relationships. *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting* provides students with specific strategies to uphold their boundaries even under pressure. These strategies must be explicitly taught, demonstrated, and practiced in the classroom. *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting* provides students with a foundation for setting boundaries they can continue to practice in after graduation.

Mastery of *Stage 2: Refusal Skills and Boundary Setting* for grades 9-12 means students are able to identify their boundaries, analyze a situation with peer pressure, explain their boundaries to others, and use effective strategies for upholding their boundaries and decisions.



Stage 2: Refusal Skills and Boundary Setting

The Steps:



Step 1: Identify Boundaries

Step Overview: The first step for *Stage 2: Refusal Skills and Boundary Setting* is to spend time identifying personal boundaries. First, students need to understand what a boundary is and the different types of boundaries they can have (e.g. physical, emotional, behavioral). Once students understand the different types of boundaries, they spend time identifying their own boundaries, so that they are more prepared to uphold these boundaries and/or say *no* in higher stakes situations. Use the steps for *Decision-Making* to guide students in deciding on personal boundaries and behaviors in which they do not wish to engage.

Sub Skill(s):

- Define boundaries
- Identify personal boundaries

Step 2: Analyze the Situation



Step Overview: After students identify their boundaries, they move to upholding those boundaries in different situations. This step allows students to be aware in the moment when someone is pressuring them to do something they do not want to do. To prepare for this step, students should explore the power of peer pressure. Then, students should be given questions they can ask themselves to better analyze the situation, which will help them select the appropriate refusal/boundary setting skill in Step 3.

Sub Skill(s):

- Determine your feelings
- Recognize when a boundary has been crossed
- Analyze the importance of the relationship



Step 3: Use an Appropriate Refusal/Boundary Setting Strategy

Step Overview: In Step 3, students learn how to communicate their boundary clearly in a situation when their boundary is crossed. In addition to communicating their boundary, students should learn a variety of refusal/boundary setting skills to uphold the boundary in case they are not listened to or do not feel comfortable directly communicating their boundary.

Sub Skill(s):

- Communicate your boundary
- Use a refusal / boundary setting strategy
 - Say *no* firmly and loudly. Stand tall and be clear
 - Avoid or leave the situation
 - Ask a question
 - Suggest something different to do
 - Explain why it is a bad idea for you
 - Ignore the suggestion and change the subject
 - Make a joke or use humor
 - Politely decline - "Thanks but no thanks"
 - Acknowledge the other person's feelings and explain your decision
 - Seek help from a trusted adult



Step 4: Reflect

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):

- Did I uphold my boundary? Why or why not?
- Who was trying to persuade me to do something I wasn't comfortable doing?
- What form of persuasion was hardest for me to resist?
- Which refusal/boundary setting skill(s) did I use?
- Which refusal/boundary setting skill worked the best?
- Did the person respect my boundary? If not, how do I want to follow up?
- Based on how the situation resolved, how do I want the relationship with the person to change/stay the same?
- What do I want to remember next time I am pressured to do something unsafe or unhealthy?
- Do I need to seek help and support? If so, who should I go to?



Teaching Tips

- Provide students with different types of boundaries someone can have (e.g. personal space, physical, language, emotional, information you share with others) and allow them to decide their personal boundaries for each.
- Provide students with a list of refusal and boundary setting strategies they can use when facing peer pressure. Add to the list of strategies provided to meet the needs of your classroom.
- 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, substance abuse, etc.
- Teach *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting* for different health contents, allowing students to decide on personal boundaries and plan for how they will uphold those boundaries. For example, when learning about sexual health, students can explore their personal boundaries with physical touch. When learning about substances, students can explore the relationship they want to have with those substances and how to communicate those boundaries to peers.
- Pair *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting* with *Decision-Making* to help students follow through on healthy decisions as well as using the *Decision-Making* process to decide on their personal boundaries.

See *Teaching Progression* for suggested learning activities.