

Health Skill:

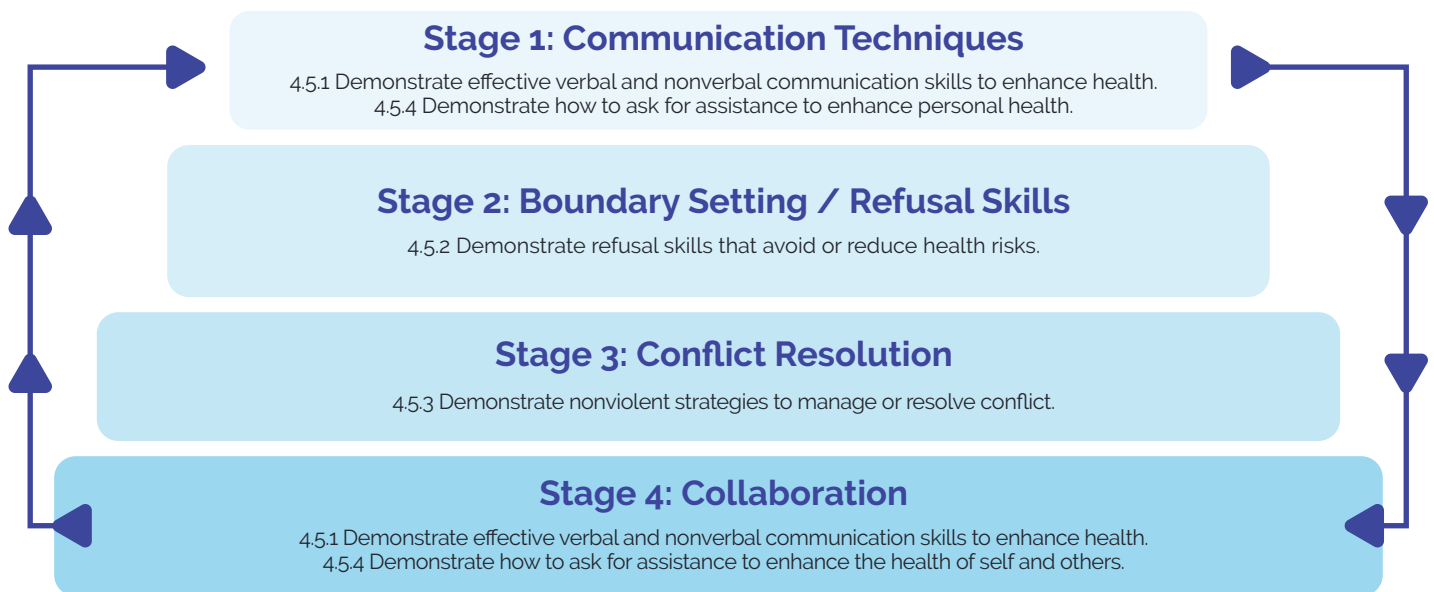
Interpersonal Communication



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:



Step 1
Listen to
My Feelings



Step 2
State My
Boundary



Step 3
Use a Refusal Skill to
Defend My Boundary



Step 4
Look Back & Learn

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.



Teaching Progression:



Step 1: Listen to My Feelings

SUB SKILLS(S):

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

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

What is a boundary? What are my boundaries? How do I know when my boundaries are crossed?

NHES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

(4.5.1) Demonstrate effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills to enhance health.

VALUABLE VOCABULARY:

*feelings,
personal preference,
boundaries,
physical boundaries,
emotional boundaries*

Step 1: Listen to My Feelings | Sub Skill: Notice My Feelings



SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITY 1:

Explain to students that our bodies talk to us to let us know what is right and wrong in different situations. Share with students that we may get a sick feeling in our stomachs, our skin may feel crawly, or we can even feel sweaty when we don't like something or when we feel that something is wrong. Tell students that our bodies talk to us to help us make better and healthier decisions. Explain that each person has different preferences for what feels right or wrong for them, and they will work to listen to their bodies to realize how they feel in different situations.

Show images of different things students could like or dislike. Instruct students to stand up if they like the item or sit down if they don't like the item. After students have decided to stand or stay seated, prompt students to describe what they felt in the bodies.

Once students have completed several rounds of the activity, have students reflect on the activity and begin considering how they can tell what feels right from what feels wrong by answering the following questions:

- How do you know when you like something?
- How do you know when you dislike something?
- What feelings do you get when you really like something?

See Next Page For Teaching Notes.

Language of Health Literacy:

*I feel _____ when _____
because _____.*



Teaching Progression: Step 1 | Listen to My Feelings (Cont.)

TEACHING NOTES:

- Examples of images: apple, broccoli, soccer, dolls, etc.
- Use different movement options as necessary to accommodate students.
- During the discussion, prompt students to explain specifically how their bodies feel when they like versus dislike something.

Step 1: Listen To My Feelings | Sub Skill: Identify When Boundaries Are Crossed



SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITY 1:

Define *boundaries* for students. *Boundaries* are *limits and rules that we place on ourselves and others in order to feel safe and happy.*

Share with students that our feelings alert us when someone has crossed a boundary. Explain to students that we need to know when our boundaries are crossed to be able to name our boundaries and tell others they need to stop doing something.

Read students different scenarios of people having their boundaries crossed. Create scenarios that address issues you observe your students facing. Have students decide if they strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each scenario. When students make their decision, ask them to discuss their ideas with classmates around them and why they agree or disagree with the boundary in the scenario.

After students complete the activity, use the following questions to lead a student discussion.

- What boundaries did you notice were most important to you?
- What strong feelings do you get when you know something is wrong?
- Why is it important to listen to your feelings?

Language of Health Literacy:

I would feel _____ if _____. This situation would make me feel _____, so I know my boundaries were not crossed.

I would feel _____ if _____. This situation would make me feel _____, so I know my boundaries were crossed.

TEACHING NOTES:

- Example Boundary Scenario: My sister went into my room and took my favorite toy without asking. I told her that she needed to respect my space and ask permission before taking my toys.
- Adapt to a movement activity by labeling corners of the room with the words strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree and have students move to the corner that corresponds with their feeling.
- Model and provide the *Language of Health Literacy* to support students in explaining their answers and their own boundaries.



Teaching Progression: Step 1 | Listen to My Feelings (Cont.)

Step 1: Listen to My Feelings | Sub Skill: Identify Personal Boundaries



SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITY 1:

Tell students that each person has a personal boundary for their physical space. Explain that some people like to have conversations very close together, while others like to stand three to four feet apart. Tell students that they will practice noticing their personal boundaries for space with a classmate.

Have students get with a partner and make two lines facing each other in the classroom. The lines should be about 15 feet apart. Tell students that when you say, "go," they will take one step at a time toward each other. Have students take two to three steps toward each other. Pause the activity and explain to students that they now need to listen to their feelings to decide their personal boundaries. Tell students that when they feel that their partner is at a comfortable distance to simply put both hands up and say, "Stop." Continue the activity until all partners have defined their physical boundaries.

Use the following questions to reflect on personal space boundaries and differences among people.

- How did you know when you wanted your partner to stop?
- What specific feelings did you have when they were getting too close?
- Why do people have different boundaries?
- How do we learn our friends' and families' boundaries?

Language of Health Literacy:

Boundaries are _____.

Boundaries help people to _____.

One of my boundaries is _____ because _____.

I feel _____ when _____, so I want/do not want _____.



SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITY 2:

Provide students with different categories of boundaries and examples of each. Have students create a list of personal boundaries for the different types of boundaries they have or want in their own life.

TEACHING NOTES:

- Examples of types of boundaries: property, emotional, physical, language, behavioral, etc.
- Provide different boundary statements to support students in creating their own boundaries, such as, "My friend asks me to share my food at lunch everyday. I feel comfortable sharing my sandwich but not my pudding."



See *Decision-Making* for guidance on supporting decision making around difficult boundaries.



Teaching Progression:



Step 2: State My Boundary

SUB SKILL(S):

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

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

Is this a healthy choice? Do I feel comfortable with the situation?

NHES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

4.5.1 Demonstrate effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills to enhance health.

VALUABLE VOCABULARY:

boundaries, refusal, safety, help, assertive

Step 2: State My Boundary |

Sub Skill: Identify Situations That Require Saying No Or Getting Help



SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITY 1:

Explain to students that there are situations when they will need to be very clear with their boundaries. Provide students with a list of situations that would require them to say *no* or set a boundary. Give students several more serious boundary setting scenarios. Then, have students create a list of situations when they would need to give a firm, clear *no* to another person or if they need to get help.

Language of Health Literacy:

_____ is a situation that requires me to just say *no*.

I would say, "No," or "Stop," if _____.

I would seek help from a trusted adult if _____.

TEACHING NOTES:

- Example Scenarios:
 - You are walking home, and a person pulls their car over. They insist that they should give you a ride and ask you to get in their car.
 - Someone is touching you inappropriately, someone is trying to give you drugs, someone is hurting you physically.
- Keep in mind that some students may be triggered by this task or ask not to complete it in written form. Offer personal conversations or drawing options as deemed appropriate for your classroom and the students in need of additional supports.



Teaching Progression: Step 2 | State My Boundary (Cont.)



SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITY 2:

Tell students that if they feel that they are not being listened to by others or if they do not feel safe, it is important to talk to a trusted adult immediately. Ask students to identify which scenarios they would seek help from a trusted adult.

TEACHING NOTES:

- Keep in mind that some students may be triggered by this task or ask not to complete it in written form. Offer personal conversations or drawing options as deemed appropriate for your classroom and the students in need of additional supports.



See *Access Valid & Reliable Resources* for guidance on supporting students on locating trusted adults.



See *Advocacy for Self & Others* for guidance on supporting students asking for help.

Step 2: State My Boundary | Sub Skill: Say No Clearly And Assertively



SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITY 1:

Explain to students that in serious situations like the ones they identified in the learning activity above, they will need to say *no* clearly and assertively. Demonstrate using the *Language of Health Literacy* for the class, and have students practice in small groups how they would verbalize saying *no* for each scenario.

Language of Health Literacy:

No, I will not _____. Please leave me alone.

Stop _____ right now. You are making me feel uncomfortable.

No, you cannot _____. That makes me feel unsafe.



See *Stage 1: Communication Techniques* to reinforce verbal and non-verbal speaking strategies.



Teaching Progression: Step 2 | State My Boundary (Cont.)

Step 2: State My Boundary

Sub Skill: State My Boundaries Clearly And Assertively



SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITY 1:

Explain to students that sometimes stating boundaries is more than saying *no*. For situations when their boundaries are crossed and they feel safe enough to do so, they need to state their boundary clearly. Demonstrate for students how a person would appropriately state their boundaries to a peer using the *Language of Health Literacy*. Ask students to share what they notice about how you are stating your boundaries.

Language of Health Literacy:

_____ (name), when you _____ it made me feel _____. Can you please/ I think you should/ I need you to _____.



SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITY 2:

Provide students with different categories of boundaries and examples of each. Prompt students to decide if the situation allows them to state their boundary clearly and assertively. If so, have students name the boundary that is being crossed. Finally, instruct students to practice stating the boundary to a partner.

TEACHING NOTES:

- Model and provide the *Language of Health Literacy* to support students in stating their boundaries.
- Remind students that when they are effectively communicating with others they should stand tall, use a clear voice, and make eye contact with the person they are speaking to. For more detailed lessons on effective communication strategies, see *Stage 1: Communication Techniques*.
- Example Scenarios and Responses:
 - You were waiting in line for the swing when another student cut in front of you and took your spot.
 - Response: I have been waiting in line for the next swing. When you cut in front of me and took my spot, it made me feel upset and sad. I think you should give me the swing and wait your turn.
 - You are drawing a picture and a classmate takes one of your markers without asking.
 - Response: That is my marker. When you took my marker without asking, it made me mad. Can you please give me my marker back, and ask next time you want to borrow something of mine?
- See *Resource Bank* below for additional scenarios.



Teaching Progression:



Step 3: Use a Refusal Skill to Defend My Boundary

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

VALUABLE VOCABULARY:

*peer pressure,
refusal strategies,
personal boundaries*

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

What refusal strategies do I feel comfortable using? How do I set healthy boundaries with others?

NHES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

(4.8.1) Apply effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills to enhance health. (4.5.2) Demonstrate refusal skills that avoid or reduce health risks.

Step 3: Use a Refusal Skill to Defend My Boundary

Sub Skill: Explain Effects Of Peer Pressure



SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITY 1:

Tell students that often we state our boundaries but are still pressured to make a different decision.

Use the following questions to prompt students to reflect on peer pressure.

- What is peer pressure?
- When have you felt pressure to do something that went against your boundaries?
- How did you respond?
- How did you feel about your decision?

Language of Health Literacy:

Peer pressure is _____.

Peer pressure can make boundary-setting harder because _____.



Teaching Progression: Step 3 | Use a Refusal Skill to Defend My

Step 3: Use a Refusal Skill to Defend My Boundary

Sub Skill: Use A Refusal/Boundary Setting Strategy



SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITY 1:

Explain to students that sometimes they may not feel safe or comfortable directly communicating their boundary, and therefore, they should be ready with 2-3 refusal strategies, in addition to stating their personal boundary. Model for students how to use multiple strategies.

Place students in small groups (2-3 students) to practice using refusal strategies. Provide students with 4-6 scenarios to practice strategies.

Provide students with a handout outlining the following refusal strategies:

Refusal/Boundary Setting Strategy	Language of Health Literacy:	Example:
Say "No" firmly and loudly. Stand tall and be clear.	"No, I do not want to _____."	"No, I do not want to let you borrow my soccer ball."
Avoid or leave the situation.	"I need to leave. I have _____ to do."	"I need to leave. I have to be home soon, or my mom will be upset with me."
Suggest something different to do.	"I want to _____. Anyone want to join me?"	"I want to play basketball. Anyone want to join me?"
Explain why it is a bad idea for you.	"I really can't do that because _____"	"I really can't do that because it makes me feel uncomfortable."
Politely decline.	"Thanks for _____, but I can't _____."	"Thanks for asking me to go to the skate park after school, but I can't do that today."

If the person will not accept your no or respect your boundary, seek the help of a trusted adult.



Teaching Progression:



Step 4: Look Back & Learn

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?

VALUABLE VOCABULARY:

reflection

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

How do I want to use these strategies in my own life?

NHES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

(4.8.1) Apply effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills to enhance health. (4.5.2) Demonstrate refusal skills that avoid or reduce health risks.



SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITY 1:

Ask students questions that will help them understand the importance of looking back on the situation that required them to uphold their boundaries and reflecting on what they learned. For example ask the following questions:

- 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 NOTES:

- Model this reflection process by sharing with students a time when you upheld a boundary and how it impacted your health and relationships.
- Provide multiple opportunities for students to answer these questions.
- Allow students to reflect in a variety of modes, including: writing, partner discussion, whole-class discussion, and one-on-one conferencing.



Assessing Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting

Students in grades 3-5 will have mastered *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting* by demonstrating their ability to showcase the performance indicators identified in Standard 4. Use the student friendly language below to support rubric creation and feedback to students.

Standard 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

4.5.2 Demonstrate refusal skills that avoid or reduce health risks.

- I can listen to my feelings about things I don't want to do.
- I can recognize when someone tries to make me do something I don't want to do.
- I can say no clearly and assertively
- I can use refusal and boundary setting strategies to say *no*

ASSESSMENT TOOL #1 (4.5.2)

Assign each student a scenario in which they face peer pressure to do something potentially unhealthy.

Example: You are staying the night at your best friend's house. After her parents go to sleep, she tells you to get dressed because Sam is outside and he wants to walk around the neighborhood.

Have students respond to the following four questions to analyze the situation:

- Who is asking me to make a decision?
- How does this person affect me?
- What are the consequences if I say *yes* or *no*?
- How do I feel?

ASSESSMENT TOOL #2 (4.5.2)

Place students into small groups (3-4). Tell students that they will be creating their own skits to demonstrate to the class how to use appropriate refusal/boundary setting skills. Model and provide the *Language of Health Literacy* from Step 2 and 3 to support students in creating their skits.

After students have created their skits, have all or some groups perform for the class. While students are watching, have students complete a checklist of the refusal/boundary setting skills they observe.



Content Area Connections

Build content understanding through connections with other courses. Share suggestions with teachers to develop plans for content overlap and student language connections.

The use of effective refusal and boundary setting skills helps to create a safe and welcoming classroom. When planning for partner or group work, use the *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting* to reinforce healthy ways of communicating. Explicitly teaching students how to say *no* when appropriate and voice their boundaries empowers students to advocate for themselves and ensures that students are set up for success and using common language.

Utilize content structures and topics in classrooms to reinforce student understanding and to support ongoing student development. *Stage 2: Refusal Skills & Boundary Setting* can be used across content areas when students feel uncomfortable with behavior around them. For example, if during story time, a peer is pressuring them to get off-task, they have the strategies they need to uphold the decision to do well in school and set this boundary with their friend. Teachers should also model healthy boundary setting with students by communicating their own boundaries and listening when students voice their own (e.g. participating in a learning activity makes them feel unsafe).

Reinforce the understanding that effective refusal skills and boundary setting can help in all areas of life by exploring the following questions with students across contents. Add specific content information in place of the italicized words as necessary. These questions are meant to be used when students are interacting with others, during partner or group work, or when reflecting on how their personal boundaries can help enhance and maintain their health. These questions are a guide for independent reflection when students are challenged to understand how best to communicate their boundaries and how others may be communicating to them.

- What does your body feel in *this moment*?
- What boundary is being crossed in *this moment*?
- How did you respect *this person's* boundary?
- Who is crossing *this boundary*?
- How could you state your boundary about *this* with *this person*?
- What boundary does *this person* have that might be coming up for them?

VOCABULARY REINFORCEMENT:

Utilize the vocabulary words below to reinforce student understanding and to showcase the ability to use words across content areas. For example, an entire grade-level team can decide to teach these words within the specific contexts of their classes to deepen understanding of vocabulary and language use.

*boundary, no, safe, comfortable, physical touch,
share, consent, refusal, personal space*



Resource Bank

RMC Health

- [Health Education Skills Model](#)

National Health Education Standards

- [Standards & Performance Indicators](#)

Practice Saying No Scenario Lesson

- <http://www.nea.org/tools/practice-saying-no.html>

Saying No and Sticking To It Lesson ideas

- <https://www.cmich.edu/colleges/se/Geography/Michigan%20Geographic%20Alliance/Environmental%20Education/Documents/GR%206-ATOD%20layout%207.pdf>