



COMMUNICATION SKILLS WITH PEERS





Effective Peer-to-Peer Communication for Students

Teaching students how to communicate effectively with their peers is essential to building lasting and meaningful relationships. Individuals who are strong communicators tend to be more trusted and well-liked than those who aren't (Costigan & Brink, 2019). Increased communication skills in students can improve their engagement and enthusiasm in the classroom (Diloyan, 2019), which in turn can lead to stronger classroom relationships and deeper learning. As students learn how to communicate with each other, they are better able to prevent and resolve problems and maintain stronger relationships (CLIMB, 2019).



What Is Effective Communication?

Effective communication requires skills in both speaking and listening. As students practice speaking to each other, guide them to use direct eye contact and open body language, which shows that they are invested in the conversation. I-statements are an effective way to communicate difficult thoughts or ideas (Erickson & Noonan, 2018), and providing students with an I-statement framework can encourage them to consistently speak to others with respect.

According to the Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning (2021), when students practice responding to their peers, it is important that they ask open-ended questions to learn more about others' thoughts and ideas. Their responses should be supportive, relevant, specific, and constructive (Anderson, 2020), which can be achieved with a language framework rooted in assertive communication. Consider modeling the following language for students (Vogelsang & McGee, 2015):

- I heard you say [X], what does this mean?
- I am curious about your opinion on [X], can you tell me how you learned about it?
- What makes [X] interesting or important to you?

To encourage effective listening skills, prompt students to ensure that everyone feels heard and respected during a conversation, which builds trust (CLIMB, 2019) and strengthens a classroom's sense of community. Guide students to repeat what the speaker said internally and consider it for five to ten seconds before responding, which helps students practice listening for understanding rather than listening to respond. Students can practice reporting aspects of their conversations with peers in class to the whole group, which can encourage careful and thoughtful listening (Young, 2014).

When students communicate effectively with their peers, they have the ability to offer another person empathy, openness, and responsive feedback (CLIMB, 2019). Teaching students how to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and ideas to their peers, as well as to listen well to others' thoughts, feelings, and ideas, are cornerstones of healthy and lasting relationships. As students practice speaking and listening in a kind and respectful way, they will be positioned to thrive well beyond the classroom.



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