

# Communicating Workplace Problems



## Unit 5 Overview

This purpose of this unit is to help students develop the skills needed to effectively speak-up for themselves in a work setting. Students are first introduced to some of the basic steps they need to take to effectively communicate a problem to their supervisor. This is followed by a role play scenario where students try to resolve a workplace safety problem with their supervisor.

### Activity A. Student Pre-Test—Communicating Safety Problems

Students complete the pre-test as a measure of what they already know about injury prevention strategies before the lesson is taught.

### Activity B. Introduction: Steps in Problem Solving

Through a discussion format, students are introduced to some the steps they need to follow in order to effectively communicate a workplace problem with their supervisor.

### Activity C. Role play: Chris’s Story

In this activity students work together in small groups to come up with a solution to a workplace problem using a workplace scenario. After reading through the scenario students try to come up with a different ending to the story to resolve the situation.

### Activity D. Wrap-up and Evaluation

This summarizes the steps students need to take into account before speaking to a supervisor to resolve a workplace problem.

### Activity E. Student Post-Test—Communicating Safety Problems

Students complete a post-test as a measure of what they have learned as a result of presenting unit 5.

## Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs)

### Health and Fitness

- 1.2 Safely participates in the developmentally appropriate physical activities
- 2.2 Understand the concept of control and prevention of disease
- 2.3 Acquire skills to live safely and reduce health risks
- 3.1 Understand how environmental factors affect one’s health
- 3.2 Gather and analyze health information
- 3.3 Use social skills to promote health and safety

3.4 Understand how emotions influence decision-making

4.1 Analyze health and safety information

## **Reading**

1.1 Use word recognition and meaning skills to read and comprehend text

2.1 Demonstrate evidence of reading comprehension

2.3 Expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting and synthesizing information and ideas

3.2 Read to perform a task

3.4 Read for career applications

## **Communication**

2.1 Communicate clearly to a range of audiences

2.2 Develop content and ideas

2.3 Use effective delivery

2.4 Use effective language and style

3.1 Use language to interact effectively and responsibly with others

3.2 Work cooperatively as a member of a group

3.3 Seek agreement and solutions through discussion

4.4 Analyze how communication is used in career settings

## **Social Studies (Civics)**

2.2 Understand the function and effect of law

4.1 Understand individual rights and their accompanying responsibilities

# Communicating Workplace Problems to Your Supervisor

## Time

45 minutes

## Materials

- Board or flipchart and markers
- PowerPoint slides (1–3)
- Copies of Handouts B and C

## Handouts

- A. Communicating Workplace Problems Pre-Test
- B. Chris's Story
- C. Role Play Solution Planning Sheet
- D. Communicating Workplace Problems Post-Test
- E. Communicating Workplace Problems Pre- and Post-Test Teacher Answer Key

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson students will be able to:

- Apply safety and child labor laws to real life situations.
- Discuss several appropriate ways to approach a supervisor about a problem.

## Preparing to Teach This Lesson

Before you present this lesson:

1. Locate PowerPoint slides for unit 5 *Communicating Safety Problems* on your PowerPoint slides CD and review them.
2. Have extra copies of the L&I Brochure: *Teens at Work: Facts for Employers, Parents, and Teens* (Same as handout A used in unit 3), in case students haven't saved their copies from the previous lesson.
3. Photocopy copies of handout B *Chris's Story* and Handout C *Role Play Solution Planning Sheet*.
4. If using the pre- and post-tests, photocopy handouts A and E.

## Detailed Instructor's Notes

### Activity A. Communicating Safety Problems Pre-Test (Handout A)

Procedure:

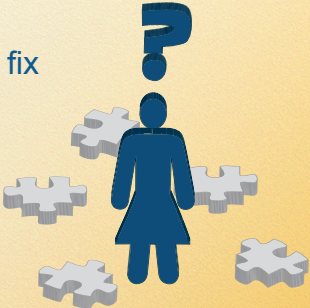
1. Students complete a pre-test to measure their knowledge about communicating workplace safety problems prior to exposure to the curriculum. Distribute copies of handout A, *Communicating Safety Problems Pre-Test*, to students prior to introducing any of the material in unit 5.
2. Collect the pre-test after its completion. Keep on file until the Post-Test is completed.
3. Answers to the pre- and post-tests can be found on Handout F *Communicating Safety Problems Pre- and Post-Test Teacher Answer Key*.

## Activity B. Introduction: Steps in Problem Solving

1. Explain to students that the goal of this lesson is to learn how to effectively communicate with a supervisor about health and safety or other problems in the workplace.
2. First, ask students the following question:  
*“Has anyone had any kind of problem at work, or a problem that someone you know has had, that you want to share with the class?”* (It does not need to be a health and safety problem.)
3. Then ask those who responded:  
*“If so, what steps did you or the person take to solve this problem?”*
4. Ask the whole class:  
*“What other steps do you think someone with this problem could take?”*
5. As students answer, make a list on the board of the steps they mention. Although you will be listening to the students’ particular experiences when making this list, try to keep the steps you list general enough to apply to a range of possible problems.
6. Show PowerPoint slides 1 and 2. This shows some of the steps involved in solving workplace problems (both safety problems and other kinds). Discuss each of these steps in more detail.

### Steps in Problem Solving

- 1** Define the problem
  - Be able to clearly describe the problem
- 2** Get advice from a parent, teacher or co-worker
- 3** Choose your goals
  - Think about what needs to happen to fix the problem
  - Write down possible solutions
  - Decide which solution is best
- 4** Know your rights
  - Become familiar with the hours you are allowed to work and the tasks you are not allowed to perform

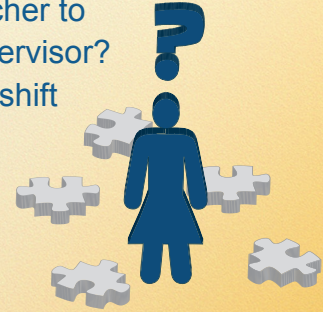


Slide 1 Health and Safety Awareness for Working Teens

## Steps in Problem Solving

### 5 Decide the best way to talk to the supervisor

- Would I feel more comfortable approaching my supervisor alone or with a co-worker?
- Would I like my parent, guardian or teacher to come with me when I meet with my supervisor?
- When is a quiet or slow time during the shift when my supervisor would be the least busy or distracted?



### 6 If necessary, contact an outside agency for help

- If you continue to have trouble after talking with your supervisor, you may need to contact the Department of Labor & Industries.

Slide 2

Health and Safety Awareness for Working Teens

- **Define the problem or problems:** Being able to describe the problem clearly is the first step toward solving it.
- **Get advice from a parent, teacher, or co-worker:** If there is a union at the workplace, the student may also want to ask them to help.
- **Choose your goals:** Students should think about what needs to happen to fix the problem; write down possible solutions.
- **Know your rights:** Students should become familiar with the hours they are allowed to work and the tasks that teens are not allowed to perform. Students should also become familiar with their safety rights.
- **Decide the best way to talk to the supervisor:** What should be discussed? Who should go along?
- **If necessary, contact an outside agency for help:** If the student continues to have trouble after talking to the supervisor, the student may need to call the appropriate government agency.

### Activity C. Role Play: Chris's Story (30 minutes)

1. Pass out copies of student handout B *Chris's Story*.
2. Ask for volunteers to play the roles of Chris, Mr. Johnson, and Dana. Have the volunteers come to the front of the class and read their parts aloud to **the class**.

3. Ask students what laws were violated in the story. Suggest they look at the Labor & Industries brochure used in unit 3 if necessary. As volunteers answer, write their responses on the board.

Possible answers include the following:

- Chris was not given information about the cleaning chemicals.
  - The employer didn't give Chris protective clothing (gloves).
  - No worker under 18 may use a meat slicer.
  - No one who is 14 or 15 may work that late on a school night.
  - Some students may interpret Mr. Johnson's comments as a threat to fire Chris if she won't stay and work. An employer may not threaten to fire someone because they won't do something illegal.
4. Divide the class into groups of 3–6 students Use groups of mixed ages if possible.
  5. Explain that each group should come up with an alternate ending to Chris's Story, showing what Chris could have done about the health and safety problems. Assign each group one issue in the story to focus on (for example, working too late, working around chemicals, or using the meat slicer).
  6. Encourage groups to think about these questions:  
*How should Chris approach the supervisor about this problem?*  
*What are the different ways the supervisor might respond?*  
*Where else could Chris get help?*
  7. Groups may refer to handout A if necessary. Explain to the students that they will be role-playing the alternate endings they've come up with; they should assign parts, decide roughly what each person will say, and take notes if necessary.
  8. After about 15 minutes, bring the class back together.
  9. Ask several of the groups (or all, if there is time) to act out their alternate endings to the *Chris's Story* skit.

Possible endings include the following:

- Chris asks a co-worker, friend, parent, or teacher for advice.
- Chris tells the supervisor she is uncomfortable with the late hours and prohibited duties.
- Chris asks a union or community organization for information on workers' rights.

- Chris quits the job because of the long hours or other inappropriate requests.
- Chris refuses to use the meat slicer because, by law, he/she is too young.
- Chris files a complaint with OSHA or the labor law enforcement agency.

10. Ask the class to comment on how effective each group's ending is.

Questions to consider include the following:

*How serious is the problem?*

*Is it urgent to get it corrected?*

*Will any of these approaches endanger Chris's job?*

*Which approaches will be most effective in solving the problem?*

11. Review the problem-solving steps from activity A, step 3 of this lesson.

#### **Activity D. Wrap-up and Evaluation**


1. This lesson has focused on how to speak up effectively at work when there is a problem. It's important for students to know their rights, but it's also important for them to think through how they want to approach a supervisor with a problem. It's usually helpful to talk the situation over first with parents, teachers, co-workers, union representatives, or another trusted person—and then plan out the conversation. If necessary, there are agencies that can help you, like OSHA or the federal or state labor law enforcement agency.



Show PowerPoint slide 3.

**Summing It Up**

- **Know your rights**
  - The L&I brochure on teen labor laws is an important resource. Show it to your friends and parents.
- **Know your responsibilities**
  - It's your responsibility to follow safety rules and to report any problems you see.
- **Know your employer's responsibilities**
  - Your employer must keep the workplace safe and give you safety training.
- **Know how to solve problems**
  - Plan what you are going to say ahead of time
  - Come up with some possible solutions
  - Resources include co-workers, friends, parents, teachers, and government agencies like the Department of Labor & Industries



**Slide 3** **Health and Safety Awareness for Working Teens**

Remember:

- Know your rights.
- Know your responsibilities.
- Know that your employer has a legal responsibility to keep your workplace safe.
- Know how to solve problems as they arise.

Encourage students to ask their employers about the procedures for bringing up problems they run into at work—before the problems occur. If you are responsible for placing students in jobs, this may be a topic you want to raise with employers.

Remind students that their employers have a responsibility to provide them with a safe workplace and to give them specific training about hazards on their job.



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

As an employee it is important to know how to appropriately communicate with your supervisor if you encounter a problem in the workplace.

List three things that you need to consider ahead of time before talking to your supervisor to help you effectively communicate your problem and increase the odds that your supervisor will listen to your concern.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



*Scene: Sandwich shop. Chris is a 15-year-old high school student. Mr. Johnson is her supervisor, and Dana is one of Chris's co-workers. It is Thursday evening.*

**Mr. Johnson:** Chris, Andre just called in sick so I need you to work extra hours. I'd like you to stay until 10 tonight.

**Chris:** But Mr. Johnson, I have a test tomorrow and I need to get home to study.

**Mr. Johnson:** I'm really sorry, but this is an emergency. If you want to work here you have to be willing to pitch in when we need you.

**Chris:** But I've never done Andre's job before.

**Mr. Johnson:** Here's what I want you to do. First, go behind the counter and take sandwich orders for a while. Ask Dana to show you how to use the meat slicer. Then, when it gets quiet, go mop the floor in the supply closet. Some of the cleaning supplies have spilled and it's a real mess.

*Later: Chris gets the mop and goes to the supply closet.*

**Chris:** Hey, Dana! Do you know what this stuff spilled on the floor is?

**Dana:** No idea. Just be careful not to get it on your hands. You really should wear gloves if you can find any. Andre got a rash from that stuff last week.

### **Developing Your Role Play**

1. Discuss with the class what laws are being violated here.
2. Work in your small group to come up with a different ending to the story. Choose one problem in the story to focus on. Think about these three questions:

*How and when should Chris approach the supervisor about these problems?*

*What are the different ways the supervisor might respond?*

*Where else can Chris get help?*

3. Practice role-playing your ending with your group. You will perform for the class later.



## Role Play Solution Planning Sheet

### Directions:

Work in your small group to come up with a different ending to the story. Your group will be role-playing your alternate story ending. Assign parts to your group members. Decide what each person will say, and write it down on the back of this worksheet.

### Step 1

**Choose one problem in the story to focus on.**

1. What is the problem your group will be focusing on? *(Note: your teacher may assign your group the problem to focus on.)*

### Step 2

**To better help you plan what to say, think about these questions before writing out your solution to the skit.**

1. What laws were being violated in this scenario?

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2. How and when should Chris approach the supervisor about the problem?

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3. What are the different ways Chris's supervisor might respond?

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4. Where else can Chris get help?

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### Step 3

Using the back of this worksheet to decide what each character will say and write out the dialog for your characters. Use this as your script for the role-play.





Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

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List three things that you need to consider ahead of time before talking to your supervisor to help you effectively communicate your problem and increase the odds that your supervisor will listen to your concern.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



As an employee it is important to know how to appropriately communicate with your supervisor if you encounter a problem in the workplace.

List three things that you need to consider ahead of time before talking to your supervisor to help you effectively communicate your problem and increase the odds that your supervisor will listen to your concern.

Possible Answers

1. Clearly define and identify the problem you are having in the workplace by clearly describing the problem.
2. Get advice from a parent, teacher or co-worker ahead of time.
3. Come up with a solution ahead of time that would fix the problem.
4. Become familiar with what your workplace rights are.
5. Decide on the best way to talk to your supervisor:
  - schedule an appointment ahead of time
  - meet with them during a quiet or slow time during the shift
  - decide if you want a co-worker, parent, guardian, or teacher present when you meet.
6. Contact an outside agency for help.