Strategies to Stop or Redirect Questionable or Prohibited Conversations

You hear someone talking about specific exam content. Let’s walk through some scenarios to learn five ways to stop and/or redirect. Note that while we aim to be specific, we cannot predict every possible scenario, so this list is not inclusive of all red flags needing action.

YOUR FIRST OPTION IS TO SIMPLY ASK FOR A PAUSE.

Just as operating room nurses can call a time-out for patient safety, feel empowered to call a time-out on the conversation. Share your opinion that the discussion feels very specific. Bring others into the pause. Ask where they heard this information. Ask if they are aware of PNCB exam ethics. Direct them to the PNCB toolkit which gives examples of prohibited discussions and outlines consequences.

REDIRECT AND EDUCATE PEERS. MAKE SURE EXAM ETHICS IS A TALKING POINT.

The content outline is the essential resource as they prepare. Point colleagues to it if asked about specific exam topics. Ask them if they’ve reviewed the content outline, line by line, to identify their personal knowledge gaps. Suggest that they look up all topics areas, and especially areas of weakness, in a textbook on PNCB’s reference list. They can also consider completing CE on those topics.

If red flags arise, pause the conversation and refer to PNCB’s toolkit to help them stay on the right side of exam ethics. If problem conversation continues, use the firmer tactics below.

ASK FOR A PAUSE. INFORM THOSE INVOLVED ABOUT THE BIGGER IMPLICATIONS OF EXAM ETHICS VIOLATIONS.

Possible talking points include:

- Exam ethics violations have a big impact. A certification board can stop an exam nationwide for everyone.
- This is against what we stand for as nurses.
- Ethics violations like this can hurt our profession (or specialty).
- This kind of discussion can jeopardize our future certification chances.
- For advanced practice: Passing this exam allows us to diagnose and treat children. To practice safely for our future patients, we can’t earn certification unethically.

At this point, you are ethically obligated to report this experience to PNCB. You can call or email PNCB or use the anonymous tip reporting form. You can additionally recount the incident to a supervisor, clinical educator, or faculty member.

There may be times you don’t feel comfortable speaking up. Maybe the person talking is a supervisor or person with influence. In this scenario, you may need to remove yourself from the situation unfolding, but you still have a responsibility to act.

YOU MUST STILL REPORT THE INCIDENT.

You can call or email PNCB or use the anonymous tip reporting form. You can report the incident to a supervisor, clinical educator, or faculty member too.