**VCAA Strategies for teaching sensitive topics: *Protective interrupting***

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Hello, my name is Jessica Harris, I’m a Specialist teacher with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. Today I’ll be talking about protective interrupting, to assist with the delivery of the respectful relationships within Health and Physical Education.

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As the classroom teacher, the person who has the best relationship with your students, you are the key to the successful delivery of this program, building the capacity for social and emotional learning for our next generation. Your students may at times say things that make you feel uncomfortable or angry, but as the person in control of the room, it’s important to remain calm and controlled, and model positive and respectful relationships within the classroom.

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When teaching topics such as respectful relationships or sexuality within the Health and Physical Education area of the Victorian Curriculum, it is likely that some students may wish to share information about themselves, a friend or even a family member, that might make them vulnerable.

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As the classroom teacher, who will already have a working relationship with the student, it is important that we can recognise when a conversation may potentially reveal sensitive information, so that we can interrupt and change the direction of the conversation, to protect the student or others involved. We call this strategy ‘protective interrupting’. These conversations may not always lead to the disclosure of abuse, but may provide the opportunity for the student to disclose later on, in a safe and confidential manner.

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If you believe a child may be about to share something that could be considered private or would be better not to share in a classroom situation, as the teacher, you can employ protective interrupting to redirect the conversation.

Protective interrupting can include a range of strategies such as:

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* Gently and respectfully interrupting the child by acknowledging them, then preventing them from sharing any further information with a simple change of topic, or even “thank you, it sounds as though you have something important to talk about, let’s talk more at recess”.
* Asking a follow-up question to another student, or directing the conversation towards either the lesson aims, towards yourself or even to another topic.

By being prepared for students to share sensitive information about themselves or another person, teachers are making sure that their classroom environment is safe and students can feel comfortable discussing some of the content covered in the respectful relationships teaching and learning program.

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If at any point you believe that a child is in danger, it is important that you follow up these conversations in a safe environment. Students may potentially disclose information for which you are legally mandated to report. Information about mandatory reporting is available on the Department of Education website, under Child protection: reporting obligations.

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There is also a section on the Department’s website called ‘Protect’, which clearly outlines best practise when responding to incidents and disclosures.

Thank you for joining me to learn about strategies for protective interrupting within the classroom.