

Parenting strategies to promote health and address risk factors among teenagers

Wed, Sep 24, 2025

Amelia Russell 00:00

So I'll just get started and welcome you all to the Positive Choices webinar series. My name is Amelia Russell, and I work at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney on Positive Choices. So thank you all for joining us today. We're all coming together from different parts of the country. So I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connection to land, water and community. I'm currently on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and pay my respects to Elders past and present. I'd like to further acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which you are on, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present, and to acknowledge any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us for the webinar today. Before we get into today's presentation, there's just a few housekeeping points to go through. So as participants, you're on what's called listen only mode, so that means we can't see or hear you. We are recording the session, and we'll make it available through the Positive Choices website, along with the slide handouts after you should receive an email from Zoom with the link within about 24-48 hours. We're also going to have a Q and A session at the end of the webinar. So can you please put any questions you have throughout in the Q and A box that you can see in that little green circle there. And if you're new to Positive Choices, just a quick introduction. So Positive Choices is the website that provides access to trusted evidence based alcohol and other drug information and educational resources suitable for parents, school staff and students. It's funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, and was developed by the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney, in consultation with school staff, parents and students. So some of the resources that are housed on Positive Choices include factsheets, videos, webinars and games, as well as classroom based drug prevention programs that have been tested in schools and shown to reduce drug related harms. So I'd encourage you to visit the website and have a look around at some of these resources. But now on to today's webinar, which will cover parenting strategies to promote health and address lifestyle risk factors among teenagers. We're very excited to have Dr Lily Davidson and Dr Katrina Champion presenting for us today, Just an introduction, introduce them both. So Dr Lily Davidson is a postdoctoral researcher at the Matilda Centre. Lily's current focus is on co-designing, optimising and evaluating the Health4Life Parents and Teens intervention aimed at preventing the onset of the Big Six health behaviors that lead to chronic disease. And Dr Katrina Champion is a Senior Research Fellow at the Matilda Centre and Sydney School of Public Health. She is program lead of Healthy Lifestyles research at the Matilda centre and holds a Sydney Horizon Fellowship focusing on innovative approaches to improve the physical and mental health of Australian adolescents. So thank you so much, Lily and Katrina, over to you.

Katrina Champion 03:04

Thanks, Amelia. I'll just get my slides up, and then we can get started. All right, so thank you everyone for joining. It's great to be here this afternoon to talk to you about parents and how parents and people working and caring for young people can help them to be as healthy as possible before we get started. I'd also like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today. I'm on Gadigal land here in Sydney, and pay my respects to Elders past and present. So my name is Katrina. I work at the Matilda Centre at the University of Sydney, and I lead a team of researchers that are focused on trying to prevent risk behaviors and to improve healthy behaviors among adolescents, and with a particular interest on trying to understand how these behaviors relate to mental health and well

being. In today's webinar, we'll start by giving a little bit of context. So we'll set the scene about young people and introduce what we call the Big 6 risk behaviors. We'll then talk about why parents are so important for teenage health. We'll then introduce a program that Lily and our team have been developing over the last two years called the Health4Life Parents and Teens program, but we're really going to spend most of the time trying to provide some practical tips and strategies for parents about each of the Big 6 risk behaviors, and then we'll finish with some Q and A at the end. So to get started, I just wanted to set the scene a little bit about what it's like to be a young person today. We know that there's more adolescents in the world than any other point in history. There's about 2 billion adolescents worldwide, so that's young people who are aged from 10 to 19 years of age. When we look at the most recent data, we know that adolescent health is under growing pressure. So about one in five are now obese, and about 1 in 10 young people have a mental disorder such as depression or anxiety. In Australia, the statistics are also quite alarming. About 40% of our young people experience a mental disorder in any given year, and this has increased by 50% in the past decade or so. There's also emerging things, emerging threats, such as vaping and e-cigarette use, which has tripled among our young people since 2019. When we asked young people themselves, what are their biggest issues, or what are they worried about, I think that gives some really useful insights. So Mission Australia conduct a really good survey each year in about 15,000 young people, and when they asked them what they were most worried about last year, the biggest thing was cost of living, followed by climate change in the environment, violence, safety and crime and mental health. And so I think what this says is that young people today are growing up in a world that's faster, it's complex and it's pretty uncertain, and this really shapes young people's health and wellbeing. When we ask parents a similar question, what are they most concerned about when they think about young people today? We conducted a survey a couple of years ago now where we had about 150 Australian parents take part. And perhaps unsurprisingly, the thing that they were most worried about was adolescent technology use, so excessive screen time, times on phones, TV, video games and, of course, social media, particularly the type of content that they were exposed to online. The next biggest concern that parents voiced was mental health. So this included the rising rates of vaping that I spoke about, as well as stress, such as stress from school and academic demands and juggling it all. And the third issue that parents were concerned about were physical health aspects, so physical inactivity, low activity levels and poor sleep, and how to motivate young people to get better sleep and be more active. So I think this leads nicely into a bit of an introduction about these Big 6 risk factors that we're going to be focusing on today. So the Big 6 some of the strongest risk factors for chronic disease, so that's things such as cancers, heart disease, type two diabetes and other poor health outcomes, including mental health. The Big 6 are alcohol use, excessive screen time, so recreational screen time, not for school work or work, poor sleep, not being physically active enough, poor nutrition and diet, and smoking. My five year old was watching me as I was preparing these slides recently, and she was kind of following along quite well. She saying, okay, so you can't drink too much. You shouldn't watch too much TV. And then she got to the end, and she thought the picture of smoking was a vacuum, which I thought was funny. She said, okay, and you just can't vacuum too much, which I guess is a good thing, she's not thinking about smoking at her age. We also know that these Big 6 risk factors, they typically emerge during the teenage years, and they commonly co-occur. So in a recent study that we conducted among Australian teens, we found that nearly two thirds of 12 year olds reported engaging in three or more of these Big 6 behaviors at once. And I think the other important thing to know about these behaviors is that they tend to persist into adulthood. So a young person who is physically inactive as a teen is more likely to be physically inactive as an adult, and this, of course, has increased risk for those chronic diseases and poor health outcomes in later life. So we're focusing today's talk on parents. And I think a key point here to make is that parents matter even into the teenage years. So even though teenagers do begin to start to assert their independence, and they want more autonomy over their decisions and their lifestyle choices. And peers certainly start to play a bigger role, parents are still a really key influence on young people's health and development. But from our research, we know that many parents actually feel ill equipped to respond to some of the teenage health issues, and I think this relates back to the point at

the beginning that things are changing. The situation is changing all the time. Things are complex. There's emerging risks, new digital threats, so it's hard to keep up. And the parents that we've worked with over the past couple of years for one of our current research projects express that they sense this loss of control as their children become teenagers. So while it was perhaps easier when they were younger children to be in control, as they went into the teenage years, they said they had a sense of loss of control. So there's a couple of quotes here. One of the parents said, "everything's online. So like it or not, they're all on screens a lot more so you don't have as much control I find". Another parent said, "even though we stick to the sleeping routine, the eating routine, exercising, it only takes one person to disrupt the whole thing, and then I've got no control over it." We also know that there's a range of other barriers that stop parents being able to support their teenage children to be healthy. These include things such as time, role modeling, so finding it difficult to sleep and exercise well yourself, juggling different needs of different parents, financial constraints, single parenthood or co-parenting, and also the idea that there's actually too much information out there, and having difficulty being able to know what to follow and what is accurate. So to address some of these concerns, as I mentioned over the past couple of years, Lily and myself and our team have been working on a program that's funded by the federal government called the Health4Life Parents and Teens program, and this is a study that is being trialed or tested at the moment, and the aim really is to provide parents with some skills and knowledge to help them better able to support their young people. It's an online program that consists of a range of different components, the primary or core component being a set of podcasts delivered by expert health professionals about each of those Big 6 behaviors, and now, if technology cooperates, I'll just play a little introductory video to give you a bit more of a sense about what this study and program looks like.

Video 11:40

Did you know that six key lifestyle habits can help to improve your teenagers health and well being, both now and in the future? The Big 6 key behaviors to support lifelong health for your teen are food and nutrition, staying active, getting enough sleep, limiting screen time, avoiding alcohol and not smoking or vaping. As a parent, you play a big role in helping your teenager build healthy habits today and for a bright future. That's why our team at the University of Sydney, with the help of experts around Australia, have designed their Health4Life Parents and Teens program. The Health4Life Parents and Teens program was made by working with parents and teens from low and middle income communities to make sure that all families have useful tools to improve their health. We're looking for parents of teenagers living in eligible suburbs across New South Wales to take part in the trial of the Health4Life Parents and Teens program. The aim is to find out which parts of the program parents find most useful for helping them to improve their teenagers health behaviors. Eligible parents will complete six short online sessions over six weeks each week, we will talk about a different one of the Big 6 health behaviors. The online sessions will feature a podcast interview with a health expert offering practical tips for parents to help their teenagers make healthy changes in the Big 6 behaviors. Parents can earn up to \$60 for completing two program surveys and extra rewards for referring other parents to take part. By taking part, you will also be supporting research that aims to improve the health of 1000s of teenagers across Australia. To express interest or to see if you are eligible, scan the QR code on the screen now, or visit our website to find out more at www.parentsandteens.org.au.

Katrina Champion 14:10

There we go. So hopefully that just gives you, gave you a little bit of a taster about the program. As I mentioned, the podcasts make up the core program, and we were lucky to have a range of different experts across the country deliver that information for parents, and also just to note that that information, or the program, was grounded in the latest evidence, so based on the latest research about what we know works in terms of parenting in relation to adolescent health. So now I'm going to hand over to Lily, and this is where we're going to really start to dive a bit deeper into each of those Big 6 and talk about some practical things that parents can do to support their children. So thanks, Lily.

Lily Davidson 14:56

Thanks, Katrina. Hi everyone. I'm Dr Lily Davidson, I'm a postdoctoral researcher at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney, and I'll be following on from what Katrina was talking about in the first part of the session. So we're going to be unpacking a little bit of the information from our program about each of these Big 6 and sort of why they're a problem for teens, and what parents or people who work with teens can do about this too, to help our teens live a healthy lifestyle. So starting with the first one of the Big 6, we're talking about screen use and social media. And in our work, we generally are talking more about sedentary, recreational screen use. So this is screen use that is not active and not for educational purposes. So it's sort of recreational screen use outside of school work and homework. And we know that 90% of teens in Australia spend too much time on screens, more time than is recommended, which is over two hours per day outside of school work and homework. So in a survey of 10,000 high school students, only 10% or 1 in 10, actually met that guideline, and 90% were using too much screen time. Now, not all screen time is bad. Screen use can be positive, it's helpful for education, relationships, and it helps them build digital skills that they'll need in the future, and sometimes passive screen use is not an unhealthy thing. For example, watching a movie together as a family can be quite a good thing for relationships and for their well being. But when screen time can be bad for teens is when it displaces other things they should be doing, like being physically active, socialising in person, focusing on their education and getting a healthy night's sleep. A particular problem is the use of screens into the night. So that's sort of during the night or leading up to bedtime, and particularly if that screen use is active and not passive. So when we say active screen time, we're talking about messaging people, playing video games, being on social media. And passive screen use is things like maybe hearing a podcast or even just watching a show with the phone on Do Not Disturb. Teens can also be exposed to harmful content, like content that's faked with AI or has been visually adjusted in some way, content that is sexualised, violent or bullying, or exposure to people online that they really shouldn't be interacting with. We also know from the research that social media can be particularly harmful for teen girls, so some of the content they're seeing on Instagram and Snapchat and the social comparison can have negative impacts on their mental health and their physical health. And for boys, violent gaming and pornography is a particular issue with screen use. So what can parents actually do about this? Well, we'll be extracting a few sort of key points from our programs that the evidence supports. So the first one is to set rules and limits. So some examples of this are, it being really important to kind of put a ban on screens during meal time, such as at dinner time around the dinner table, putting daily limits, for example, on social media, 30 minutes a day could be the maximum in your household. And there are third party apps that can help you to limit that and sort of monitor and control that. We want to reduce active screen time at least an hour before bed to help teens get to sleep. So it can be okay if your teen helps, finds it helpful to have a podcast or relaxing music or, or even to sort of be quietly watching a show, but that active messaging and engagement with screens, we really want to reduce that close to bedtime. Ideally, we want no phones in the bedroom at night. So for example, you can put a charging station in the living room and kids phones go out there during the night, but if they are to have it in the room with them at night, we really want to encourage Do Not Disturb mode. Later, Katrina will talk about some evidence of how important that really is for getting a good night's sleep. Being a good role model. So we need to practice what we preach with teens. So all the kind of points that I mentioned are things we want to be trying to enact ourselves so that they see this and follow suit. And it's important that parents have times where screens are put away or even left at home, so perhaps sometimes in the afternoon or on the weekend, screens and phones don't need to come with us all the time to show teens that good modeling of behavior, and finally, to set goals and monitor use. This is associated with lower screen use. So some goals in your household might be sort of daily limits on social media or TV time. It's important to reward good behavior when those goals are met, and for there to be some known consequences in your household for not following those rules, such as losing phone time or screen time privileges, and also encouraging alternative activities and structure. So it doesn't always have to be kind of about rules and taking things

away, but kind of putting in structure in other parts of their life, such as physical activity, school time, extracurriculars or even part time jobs, to kind of just displace that time that can be spent doom scrolling on the phone. And it's really important for parents to remember that this is a global problem. It's a problem that parents all over the world are struggling with and looking for solutions to. And the aim of what we really want to do is to help teens develop regulation by themselves with their screen use, through things like healthy routine. Also, I want to touch on the social media ban really quickly. In December, Australia will be banning social media for people under the age of 16. It's a little bit unclear how this legislation will sort of work and whether it will be effective, but importantly, it has sparked debate internationally about digital safety and the impacts of social media on teen health, and even when that ban does come into place, parents should aim to understand the risks and benefits of social media for teens. Keep having open and ongoing conversations with your teen about social media use, and keep those lines of communication open so even if the rules are broken. Teens do feel safe to come to you and speak to you about what they need, when they need help.

Katrina Champion 21:10

Okay, so now I'm going to talk to you about sleep. What do we know about teenage sleep? In Australia, one in four don't get the recommended amount of sleep on school nights. So for 14 to 17 year olds, the national guidelines say that they should be sleeping between 8 to 10 hours. And for younger children, 5 to 13, they should be getting 9 to 11 hours. But we also know that sleep needs differ from person to person. So another way of thinking about it is that young people should aim to get enough sleep to be able to function well each day. Why is sleep so important for young people? There's a whole range of reasons. It impacts their ability to learn and to focus at school, and has direct impacts on their academic performance. It also influences their relationships and their social aspects, and sleep is also really closely linked to mental health. I think many of us would know that the impact having a poor night's sleep can have on our mood the next day. So mental health is a really big one there. What can cause poor sleep in teenagers? One of the biggest factors is biology. So we know that during adolescence, the body clock naturally shifts gradually, very slowly, such that teens go to bed later and later. But of course, they still have to wake up early to go to school. Other factors are alcohol, nicotine, substances and caffeine to a lesser extent, for young people, but certainly for adults. In terms of some strategies that parents can use to help improve their child's sleep. One of the biggest and perhaps most simple ones is setting and monitoring bedtimes, particularly on school nights. Research shows that parents often stop doing this around that 12 to 13 year mark, but a study that we conducted recently and other research shows that maintaining these parents at bedtimes, even into these later adolescent or middle adolescent years, can be really beneficial and can be possible. And this is associated with young people going to bed earlier, sleeping for longer, and having better quality sleep and better mood. Another thing that parents can do is look out for the delayed body clock that I spoke about earlier, so signs of this might be that a young person is having difficulty to fall asleep at a normal bedtime, you know, so around 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock for a young person, if they're really alert late at night, struggling to wake up in the morning, and if they're sleeping in on weekends that are much longer than their weekday sleep, what parents can do to help to try to counteract this is encourage the young people to have a good morning routine. So get, encourage them to get up, move, get some fresh air, get some exercise, have a nice breakfast, go outside. All those kind of things. If it's more severe, so if they're kind of waking up one to two hours later than their usual weekday wake up time on the weekends, it could be, and this is a consistent pattern, it could be time to seek help from a GP and a specialist, where there are some different treatments and techniques that they can use to help to reset that body clock. We also know the importance of nighttime routine, so it's important to try to reduce stimulation at night. So think about light, noise, movement, and minimising that, relax with passive activities, so watching TV might be okay, but not that really active screen use that Lily spoke about. And there's also benefits of mindfulness and body scans, such that some research has shown that in young people, they fell asleep in half the time when they were practicing this technique. And, of course, and this is going to be a common theme that comes up for each of the behaviours, where possible, try to

model those good sleep habits yourself as a parent, try to focus on setting up a healthy family environment, again, with reduced stimulation, have a good wind down routine yourself at night. Try to avoid alcohol, and consider things like putting Do Not Disturb or flight mode on your phone to reduce disruptions in the night. And in one study in the UK, they found that this actually led to 45 minutes of extra sleep per night, when, if you add that up, that actually results into quite a lot of extra hours of sleep over the course of a week. So now hand back to Lily for physical activity.

Lily Davidson 25:51

Thanks, Katrina. So getting into physical activity, another one of our Big 6. What do we know about teens physical activity? Well, we know that five out of every six Australian teens do not meet the suggested Physical Activity Guidelines, which is at least one hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. And by that we mean basically exercise that makes you huff and puff and gets your heart rate going. We also know that this rate, sorry, meeting these rates declines during high school. So from about the end of primary school, there's a 10% decline in this type of physical activity every year, until by the end of high school, it's around only 10% of adolescents are meeting this recommended amount of physical activity, and that's due to things like competing demands from school work and paid employment, screen time, displacing their ability to partake in sports and also what their friendship group is up to as well. And this is a little bit concerning when we know how great the benefits of physical activity are for teenagers. So for example, there are social benefits of bringing teens together and providing that social support, which is great for their mental health. There are psychological benefits of doing physical activity. It reduces depression and anxiety symptoms, which is super important when we know that 50% of common mental disorders begin during the teenage years. Physical activity helps them to manage stressful life events. Team sports in particular, prevent mental health problems. They lower rates of depression and loneliness. There are physical benefits of doing physical activity, such as improving their bone health and preventing osteoporosis in the future and preventing chronic diseases by reducing the likelihood of obesity, type two diabetes and conditions into the future that are related, such as heart conditions or cancer. There are also academic benefits, so active kids have better school attendance and tend to achieve their academic goals more often. And we also know that physically active kids have healthier brain growth and development, so it impacts positively their prefrontal cortex, which is involved in things like decision making and judgment, and ultimately, what their personality is like, and hippocampal volume, which is associated with their memory and learning. So what can parents do to help their teens become more physically active or stay physically active? Firstly, it's really important to create a supportive environment for physical activity. So explain to your teen the importance and all those factors that I just touched upon, support and encourage your teen when you can, such as watching them participate when they do sports, facilitate that participation. So help them to figure out those logistics, like transport, costs and helping them find physical activity that they enjoy and will continually do. You can set some household rules around physical activity. For example, screen free afternoons. Ideally, kids shouldn't be getting onto screens or even engaging in homework as soon as they get home from school, that's a great time to set some rules around that being an active part of the day, whether that's just kind of general activity or an organised sport, and include them in shaping those rules so that they'll be more likely to enjoy them and stick to them. Role model an active lifestyle, so active parents have more active teams. It's great to lead by example, and that can be things like team sports or classes in person or online, but it can also be kind of lower level activity, if it's something that will be able for you to maintain regularly, like walking daily, and having active parts of your weekend and co-participating in physical activity is also a great way to do this. So do physical activity with your team, and it can be as simple as walking the dog, being active at the beach together, shooting hoops in the park at the end of the day. It helps to build your relationship with your teen, which is really supportive of physical and mental health for the both of you. Also it's important to address what to do if a teen is lacking motivation or confidence with physical activity. We know that forcing physical activity can be counterproductive, so it's really important to give teens choice. For example, do they want to be physically active at the beach or in the park? Is it bike

riding that they enjoy? Do it together and help them, help them to establish those routines, and help them to identify things that they enjoy, support and encourage them to find those things. And it's important to teach them that physical activity takes many forms. So while it can be a structured sport or group activity, and we know that it's that vigorous or moderate physical activity that has the most benefits to their health, any physical activity is good. So if it's going to be rollerblading or dancing or, you know, walking in the park at the end of the day, any form of physical activity is better than none, and will have positive benefits for their health. And as a final tip, staying positive, calm and supportive rather than getting frustrated, is going to be more effective in the long run, and helping them to remove those barriers to physical activity whenever you can. And important to remember that little changes really matter, and this applies to physical activity, but to all of the Big 6, the cumulative effects of going from a teen who's not exercising at all to exercising one hour a week is going to have benefits.

Katrina Champion 31:30

Okay, we're moving through these quite quickly, but we'll continue in interest of time. So healthy eating. What do we know about food and nutrition in teens? About 90% of Australian teenagers don't get enough fruit and vegetables each day. So many of you might have heard of the two and five, so it's recommended that we eat two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetable each day. But only 10% of young people are actually meeting that National Guideline. We also know that many young people eat too many foods that are high in sugar and salt and too much of the processed foods. In terms of why a healthy diet or healthy nutrition is important for young people, like the other behaviors, eating habits that begin in the teenage years do persist into adulthood, so it's a really good time to start setting a good foundation for future health. Having a good diet leads to better concentration, can improve grades at school and, of course, better mental health and mood, as well as improving or reducing the risk of those longer term health outcomes such as cancer, diabetes and chronic disease. How can parents ensure that what you buy is actually healthy? And this is hard, even as a parent myself, it's really hard to navigate the supermarket and to know which snacks or which products are healthy. So it's important to be aware of misleading marketing and misinformation. Go back to basics where possible. So avoid those highly processed, processed and packaged foods. A tip that dieticians often say is shop around the perimeter, around the edges of the supermarket where the fresh food is stocked, and avoid all the packaged things in the middle. In terms of other things that parents can do, again, role modeling. So try to role model healthy eating yourself. It doesn't have to be perfect, but aim to eat a varied diet, including natural foods from five food groups, and an important one is to use positive talk when we're talking about food, the body and how people look, including how you talk about yourself, especially in front of your children. Research shows that fostering a healthy eating environment is really important, so try to make healthy foods readily available at home, of course, with the cost of living crisis, this is harder than ever before, so just trying to look out for things that are on sale and prioritise the healthy options where you can within your needs, and again, trying to limit those unhealthy foods and snacks. Another strategy is getting young people involved in choosing foods and actually preparing the food themselves. So involve them in the food shopping, getting them to pick out healthy foods they like gives them a sense of control and a little bit of autonomy over what they're eating, and also consider involving them in actually cooking the meals, and this could be just once per week, once a fortnight, once a month, whatever is reasonable and is going to work within your family. Another tip is to encourage mindful eating. So this means trying to eat dinner together as a family, which has benefits for well being and other skills, avoiding screens while eating, so not watching TV, making sure everyone's present and off their phones, not eating where when you're bored, when possible, and also. Taking the pressure off teenagers to finish a meal, so encouraging them that it's okay if they're full, that's fine, and perhaps you just save the leftovers for lunch tomorrow. And again, reiterating the final point that small changes can add up over time, so any change is good. I know that it can feel overwhelming, but research that we conducted recently in a big study of over 4000 young people, found that even just adding an extra serve of fruit or vegetables per day lowered psychological distress in young people. So it doesn't have to be all or nothing.

Lily Davidson 35:40

Moving on to alcohol services, five out of six of the Big 6. What do we know about adolescents and alcohol use? Well, it's actually a little bit of a good news story when it comes to alcohol. So the age of first drinking is getting older in Australia, which is fantastic. So around 20 years ago, we knew that the average age of teens first trying alcohol was 14 to 15 years old. Now that's 16 years old, and Australians are drinking less than in prior generations. So in 2001 33% or one in three teens said that they had never had a full serve of alcohol. But in 2022 just a few years ago, actually almost seven out of 10 teens said, I've never had a full drink of alcohol, and that was teens aged 14 to 17. There are still substantial harms though associated with alcohol use among teens. So one in 10 deaths of Australians aged 14 to 17 is caused by alcohol related injury and disease, and we know that mental health and substance use is one of, are the top causes of disease burden in this age group. So why might adolescents now be starting to drink later and abstaining at higher rates than prior generations? Well, we think adolescents are avoiding alcohol for risk averse reasons. So these days, so much is recorded on phones, and teens are aware of that, and sort of don't want bad videos of themselves getting around and things like this. And they're also a more health conscious and health aware generation. So potentially, some of the public health messaging around the harms of alcohol have sort of gotten through and young people are aware of these. And why is it important to prevent adolescent drinking? We know that starting alcohol use earlier is related to problems and harms with alcohol in later adolescence and young adulthood, and alcohol affects the developing brain of an adolescent, so the brain is still developing until we are 24 years old, approximately, and adolescence is one of those critical periods for brain development, just like early childhood and being a toddler is. So we know that consuming alcohol, particularly at high rates during adolescence, is associated with changes in development of the frontal lobe, which is associated with things like planning, judgment, decision making, and ultimately, what a person's personality is like, as well as hippocampus, which is the part of your brain, responsible for things like memory and learning, and the cerebellum at the back of your brain, which is associated with things like balance and coordination. So what can parents do to try to prevent their teen from starting to drink alcohol and reduce the risks associated? An interesting one that kind of goes against what can be quite commonly believed in the community is that it's really quite detrimental to supply adolescents with alcohol. So there is a sort of common conception that it can be helpful to sort of let teens try alcohol in the safe environment of the home, but actually one of the strongest studies on this subject was conducted with Australian teenagers. So over 2000 Australian teens were followed from the age of 12 all the way through to their mid 20s, and they found that when parents provided alcohol, and we're talking a sip, a glass or a six pack that they can take to a party. Parental provision of alcohol was actually associated with many increased risks around alcohol use. So those increased risks included things like using alcohol earlier binge drinking and related harms from binge drinking, meeting the criteria for an alcohol use disorder in later adolescence and accessing alcohol via other sources, such as peers or maybe siblings. So that idea that providing alcohol stops them from getting it from somewhere else is not supported by research. It's important to educate ourselves and talk to teens about alcohol. For example, it can be extremely powerful for a teen to know that they're actually in the vast majority if they're not drinking alcohol between the age of 14 to 17 years old. Help them to learn some of those short term consequences for their health. Now, we know that teens are more interested in short term consequences such as the impact on their sport or maybe their school performance, rather than those longer term harms, but it's still helpful for them to know, for example, the impact on their brain, and talk to them about alcohol and help them practice refusal strategies. So what would they say to kind of get out of drinking if they were in a party situation and they didn't want to? And also, of course, to model healthy drinking behaviors. It's really important that parents who do drink alcohol are really mindful of what their teen is seeing. So we want to do things like avoid getting drunk in front of them, show them that not all occasions need alcohol. So have family occasions and social occasions where alcohol is not part of the picture, and be aware of how we talk about alcohol. So for example, coming home after a stressful day, we want to avoid talking about

having a wine or a beer to wind down and maybe sort of say something along the lines of having a bath or taking the dog for a walk, because they do hear and they do take on board what they see and what they hear related to alcohol. And also, we know that making plans and rules together around alcohol is important for delaying the onset of use, reducing how frequently they binge drink and related harm. So you can involve your teen in rule setting and explain why the rules are existing to protect their health and their safety. So that can be things like curfews or times that you expect them home when they go out to social events, the level of communication that you expect between the two of you when they're going out to events, and which friends they're going to be with, knowing who they're going to be with and what they're going to be getting up to that night. You can try to set up shared rules among parents so your teen doesn't feel left out, and make sure that those rules are fair and age appropriate, such as the time that you expect them home that night. And on a final point, just to kind of note that some parents, I suppose, feel that as their teen gains independence, that they kind of have less control and less impact on their teens behavior. But the research really clearly shows that these conversations, these setting rules and expectations, has a very clear impact on their alcohol use and coming from a place of concern, and continuing to communicate with your team is really important and impacts their future alcohol use.

Katrina Champion 42:51

Okay, we're on to our final behavior. So what are vapes or E cigarettes? So they are battery powered devices that heat liquid which is then transformed into an aerosol, which is inhaled, they can typically contain nicotine, flavorings and other chemicals. In terms of how many young people are using vapes in Australia, as I mentioned, the rates of use have increased in recent years, such that about one in four young people aged 14 to 17 have now vaped ever in their lifetime, and about one in 10 currently use. This is compared to much lower rates of smoking. So about 2% of young people smoke traditional cigarettes now, which is great, and thanks to our really effective public health campaigns over many years in terms of smoking. In terms of why young people might use vapes to begin with. If anyone has seen a vape or tried a vape themselves, you'll know that they are often colorful. They come in, you know, yummy flavours that are designed particularly to entice young people. So strawberry and fruity lolly type flavours. Of course, there's the issue of peer pressure, trying to fit in, trying to try something because they think it might be cool, influence of social media. So we often see social media, particularly, particularly in the earlier years of vaping, influencers portraying vaping as a popular or favourable activity online, as well as really targeted marketing by the vape companies towards young people, and also the fact that it is addictive, so it contains high levels of nicotine, so that the more people, more young people, do vape, the more they want to vape. In terms of why vapes might be problematic for young people, there's a whole range of possible effects, and we're still learning. This is quite still a new area of research, so we don't know the long term effects of these products on people, but there certainly are a range of physical, behavioral and mental health effects. These include respiratory harms, so irritation to the airways, which can then lead to later respiratory and lung diseases. It can also impact their sleep, their concentration, their ability to perform well at school. Being dependent or becoming addicted to the nicotine can lead to irritability. Can also have an impact on young people's mental health, so it has been associated with depression, anxiety, stress, low levels of well being, and it can also change the way that the adolescents brain pathways work, and it may actually change their pathways such that they want to try other substances in the future. In terms of what parents can do, setting rules becomes really important here. So establishing you know that our house is a vape free house. The rules are really personal, and it's going to be what, you know, works for your family and your child, but it's important to set clear rules and have some consequences for when the rules are broken again, role modeling is important, ideally not smoking or vaping yourself if you do smoke or vape, trying to seek help to quit, and talking about your quitting, quitting journey and why you want to quit, to your children, not doing it in front of your children, and modeling other ways to cope. If you are smoking or vaping because you're stressed, show other ways of coping with stress, such as exercise, going for a walk, listening to music, doing other things that you enjoy. Talking to your

teen. So having really open and honest conversations is really important when it comes to alcohol and other drug use. So educate yourselves about the harms of vapes, and talk to your child about them and help them to try to develop some refusal skills. So model them and help them to practice them, even if it means role playing. If your child has already smoked or vape or is currently vaping, some questions to ask them might be, do you smoke or vape when you're on your own? How soon after you wake up? Do you smoke or vape? Particularly looking out for if it's within that first five minutes of waking and do you wake up at night to smoke or vape, as these can really indicate that there might be signs of a more serious problem and that you should seek support from your GP. A final point in terms of parenting and vaping, try to understand and support your child. We know that punishment and judgment and shame is less effective. So try to come from a supportive approach, and try to come from a place of care for their health. So frame any conversations around you know, wanting to protect their health and help them to perform as well as they can. So I'm just going to hand back over to Lily now, just with a few final slides to wrap up, and then we'll have time for some questions.

Lily Davidson 48:11

Thanks, Katrina. So just to sort of summarise the different strategies that we touched on for each of the Big 6 in terms of what parents can do to help their teens improve their health. The research shows that parenting practices and parenting styles are really important for adolescent health and development, and overarching across the many strategies that we touched upon were the importance of role modeling healthy behaviors that your teens will see and follow setting rules in the household around these Big 6 that you design with your teen and involve them in setting those rules so that they're more likely to stick to them. Open communication, so communication that comes from a place of care and concern for their health and helping them to understand why you're concerned, rather than sort of being judgmental or frustrated as much as possible, and also being supportive and involved showing them that you're around, that you're involved and invested in their health and where their well being for the future. And just kind of also a really important final point is that healthy lifestyle change doesn't have to be all or nothing. Even small changes can make a really big difference. And we know that these behaviors have flow on effects on one another as well. So if you are to make some changes in a couple of the Big 6, there is very likely to be positive flow on effects to other behaviors. On our website, we have access to a lot more information and support services to parents, and they're categorised by different things you might be interested like smoking and vaping or alcohol or mental health. So I'd encourage you to check those out if you feel that you're needing some more resources. And I'd also like to draw your attention to our current trial of the Health4Life Parents and Teens program. So all the information that we've presented over the past 50 minutes has been drawn from the program that we've been developing and trialling for the past two years. And there is a current trial ongoing. Now this trial is particularly for parents who have teenagers aged 11 to 15, and also who live in less advantaged suburbs of New South Wales. So if that sounds like you and you might be interested in seeing if you're eligible to trial the Health4Life Parents and Teens program, I'd really encourage you to scan the QR code on the screen and to visit www.parentsandteens.org.au. I'd also like to draw the attention of any teachers in the audience to a trial of this program that will be happening in New South Wales schools next year. So in term 3 2026 and possibly term 4 as well, we will be trialing this program in a school setting. So adolescents will be getting an adolescent suited version of the program. So it's a cartoon based program over six weeks that educates them about the Big 6 in a fun and interactive way, and we have done randomised control trials on this before. So it's a well established program, and their parent at home would be doing the Health4Life Parents and Teens program, as in the one that we've just described, that is addressing the Big 6 and parenting practices for parents. So if you're interested, if your school, if you are associated with a school in New South Wales that might be interested in this program, I'd encourage you to visit our website by scanning the QR code or following the link and expressing interest, and we will reach back out to you. I'd also like to acknowledge the vast team of investigators who are researchers and health professionals across Australia, but also internationally, who helped us to form this program and all of the research that goes behind it, as well as the New

South Wales Department of Education and Health, who've been very supportive. And finally, thank you very much for taking the time out of your day to come and listen, we will soon open the floor to questions. But on the screen, I've also made sure you can still see the sign on QR code if you would like to trial this program. And our emails are on the screen, as is our website name. Thank you very much.

Amelia Russell 52:42

Thank you so much, Katrina and Lily. That was very informative. It was great to hear all the practical tips as well. And we do have quite a lot of questions that have come through. And Katrina has also put her email address in the chat. So if you don't have, if we don't get a chance to answer your question, she's very kindly offered if you could email them to her and she'll be able to respond. I'll also put the Positive Choices email in there as well. So just starting with a couple of, I guess, questions about the parents and teens program you've been talking about. So it's currently, as you said, in New South Wales. Is it going to be outside of New South Wales in the future, or any elements of it, such as the podcast going to be available to share with community members?

Katrina Champion 52:42

Yeah, it's great to see the interest in the program coming through in the chat. So at the moment, we are still in a research phase of the study, so the current phase, as Lily mentioned, is just for New South Wales parents. And then next year, we do have another evaluation phase, again, just for New South Wales parents. Unfortunately, beyond that, absolutely, we would love to make the podcast and the program available nationwide. We have a not for profit organisation that we work with called the OurFutures Institute that helps us to roll out our programs once they have been evaluated in our research studies. I think the best way to stay across our progress would be to visit our website, and we've got a mailing list there, but lots to think about. I can see that there was interest in community groups for home schooling. So yeah, great to great to see that it's a sought after resource

Amelia Russell 54:13

Thank you. We also had a question about sort of when we're talking about healthy eating, and just how do we balance having those conversations about healthy eating and obesity, but also just being cautious of potential body image issues?

Lily Davidson 54:41

I can try this one, Katrina. That's a really good point. And yes, they do increasingly gain independence throughout those throughout the you know, as they sort of transition from teen to adult, it's very encouraging to see, particularly with alcohol, that the information does seem to be getting through, and we're seeing rates going down. So I think as parents, the best that parents can do is to kind of help them during those teenage years to understand what are the risks, and to help them sort of form their own ideas so that and sort of provide all that healthy modelling, that healthy home environment around substances, so that they kind of view that as the norm. View those healthy habits as the norm. And of course, they kind of at a certain point become free to sort of engage with substances, if they if they wish to, but if that foundation that's been provided throughout their teenage years is one that had a healthy home environment, healthy modelling of those behaviours, they're much less likely to go on to use substances or use them at risky levels.

Katrina Champion 54:45

Yes, that's a great question. I think it's a really delicate balance. I think that is where having the open communication also focusing on those family environments. So less focus on the specific food a young person is eating, and not labelling a food as good or bad, but really trying to promote that mindful eating, positive family meal times, not eating when you're bored, not eating on your screens. And then

a little bit of you know, trying to encourage them to eat the healthy options, but it's absolutely a fine line, and I think that has to be guided by your child and your relationship with them, but also, yeah, not putting too much pressure on them, I think is important.

Amelia Russell 55:31

Thanks, Katrina. And we've also had a question about sort of once a child is hitting 18, we know they're still developing, however, legally, they can now do all these risky behaviours that have lasting effects. And just if you have any sort of response to that? Thanks, Lily. We've also had a couple of questions about screen time, so just one saying this person has screen time limits in place, but their child will also be listening to music or having an audio book or a podcast. So just wondering if there should be limits on how much non interactive screen time young people have.

Katrina Champion 57:33

I think that is kind of the less harmful type of screen time, like when we're thinking about the most harmful screen time, it's more about that content on social media, exposure to harmful content, the potential for cyber bullying, all those types of risks. So I'd be less concerned about, you know, using it for music and those types of activities. I think I would still gently encourage them to think about, if they're spending that much time on screens, what is it taking away? You could be outside running around. You could be doing another activity that you enjoy. You could be interacting with your peers or friends face to face. So I think while it's not the worst possible outcome, it still would be important to try to encourage them to reduce that if possible.

Amelia Russell 58:27

Thanks, Katrina. I think we have time for final question. So I will just put our email in the chat again. If we haven't got a chance to get to your question, please feel free to send it through. Just the final question was about any contribution that teens made to the development of the content and sort of, what areas were they most enthusiastic about working together with their parents or carers for?

Lily Davidson 58:52

Yep, I can answer this one. So teens were quite involved in the development of this program. So we conducted two different focus groups with 18 students overall in two less advantaged school suburbs of New South Wales. And then we also brought on adolescents for adolescents into an advisory group who have continually advised us through several advisory board meetings, and they provided really wonderful insights that have helped us to shape the program. I struggle to think of one particular topic of the Big 6 that they were most interested in talking about, although they did recommend that in our school based program that we insert more about vaping, and they had some cool ideas for how we could do that, such as the football captain coming into the bathroom and seeing students vaping in the bathroom. So sort of some of that peer modelling. And they wanted us to address vaping in the modules was interesting, but also it was more about the information we got from them on parent and teen interactions, and sort of wanting us to make sure that the program kind of accurately reflected their relationships with respectful communication between parents and teens, and also communication that kind of conveyed that parents, that they understand that parents are on their own journey. So teens understand that parents are also figuring out the best way to handle the Big 6, and they wanted to see that reflected in the program. So I guess more of an equal relationship back and forth conversation between parents and teens is what they were hoping would be reflected in the program.

Amelia Russell 1:00:58

Great. Thank you, Lily. That's very interesting to hear all the different things from your consultations. So yeah, thanks again everyone for joining us today, and a big thank you to Lily and Katrina for taking the

time to present. We'll send around the recording with the slides within about 24 to 48 hours. So yeah, thanks again, and hope you enjoy the rest of your day.