



Welcome to the **Positive Choices Webinar Series**

positivechoices.org.au



@pos_choices



@positivechoices1



Australian Government

Department of Health,
Disability and Ageing



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Matilda Centre



Acknowledgement of country

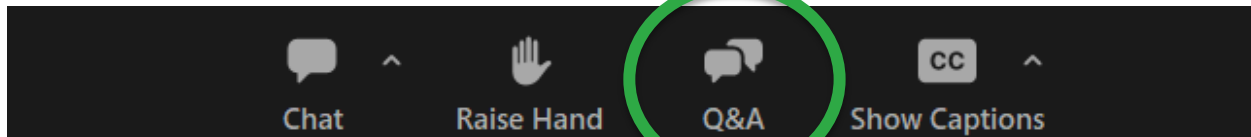
I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, water and community. I am currently on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and pay my respects to Elders, past and present. I further acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which you are and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

I would also like to acknowledge any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us for the webinar today.



Housekeeping

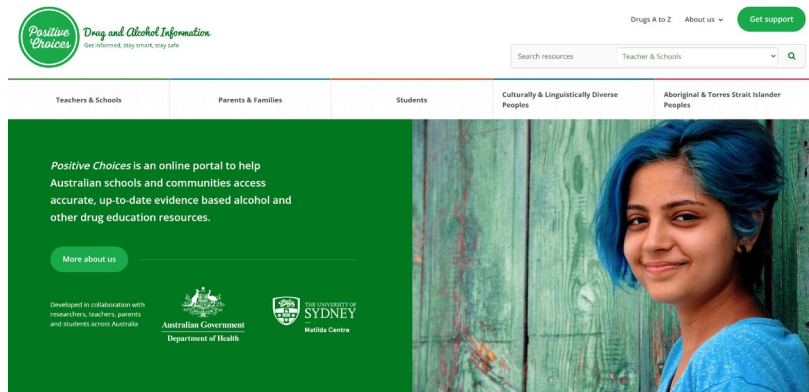
- 1 Listen only mode.
- 2 This webinar is being recorded and will be made available on the Positive Choices website.
- 3 We will have a Q&A session at the end of the webinar. Please add questions to the Q&A box available.





What is Positive Choices?

positivechoices.org.au



Teachers & Schools

Evidence-based teaching programs and activities, webinars for teachers, and resources for your students



Parents & Families

Parenting advice and information to help you talk to your children about drugs and alcohol



Students

Facts, advice and interactive tools to help you find out information about drugs and alcohol and make positive choices



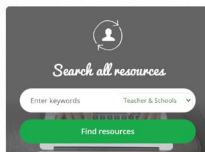
Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Peoples

Evidence-based drug education resources for individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse communities



Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples

A collection of culturally appropriate resources based on research and consultation with people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities



- Central access point for trusted, evidence based drug and alcohol information and educational resources.
- Developed by the Matilda Centre in consultation with teachers, parents and students. Funded by Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.
- Learning resources, factsheets, videos, webinars and games to engage young people with drug education.
- Access to classroom-based drug prevention programs that are proven to reduced drug-related harms.



positivechoices.org.au

Parenting strategies to promote health and address lifestyle risk factors among teenagers

Dr Lily Davidson & Dr Katrina Champion

The Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, the University of Sydney

24th September 2025

Parenting strategies to promote health and address lifestyle risk factors among teenagers



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and extend that respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today.

Adolescent Risk Behaviours & Mental Health Team



Webinar Overview

1. Young people & the "Big 6" risk behaviours
2. The role of parents in teenage health
3. The Health4Life Parents & Teens Program
4. Practical tips/strategies for parents
5. Q&A

What is it like being a teenager today?

There are more adolescents in the world today than ever before.

But their health is under pressure. Globally:

- 1 in 5 are obese
- >1 in 10 have a mental disorder (depression/anxiety)

In Australia:

- ~40% of youth have a mental disorder each year – 50% increase in past 14yrs
- Vaping has tripled among 14-17yr olds since 2019.



**The kids are not alright:
why are a billion teens at
risk of poor health?**

We want to create a better world for the children of tomorrow, so why are a billion teens at risk of going 'backwards' and what can we do to stop it?

What are the biggest issues on the minds of young Australians?

(Mission Australian Youth Survey, 2024)

**Cost of
living**



**Climate change
and the environment**



**Violence, safety
and crime**



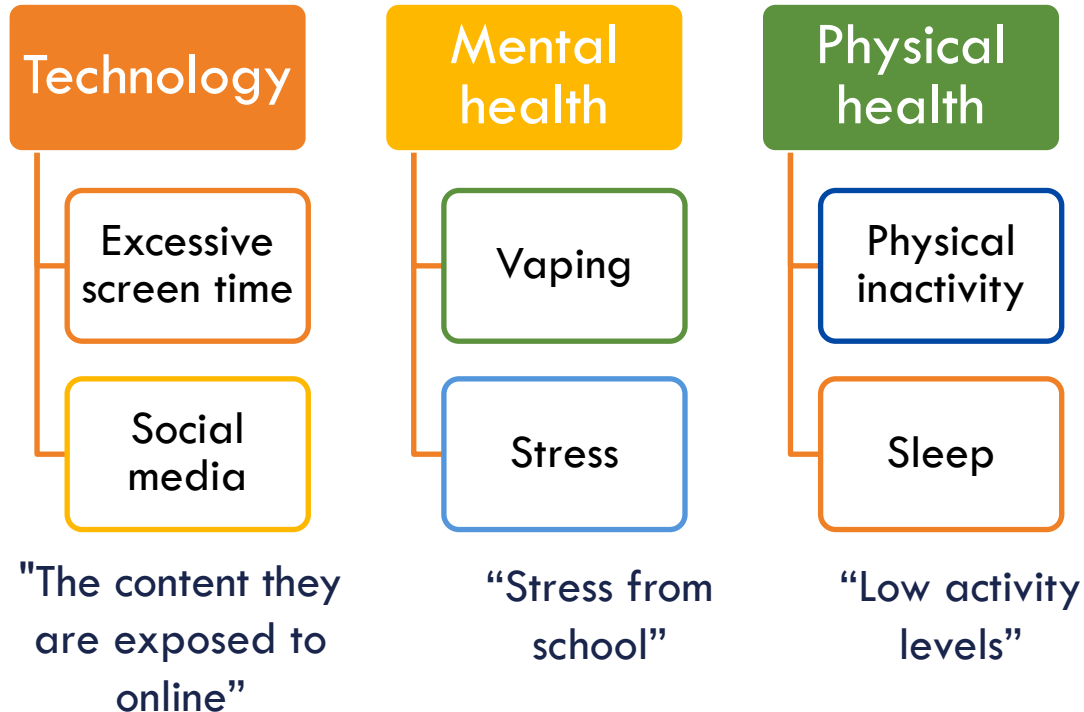
**Mental
health**



Young people today are growing up in a world that's faster, more complex, and more uncertain.... And this shapes their health and wellbeing.

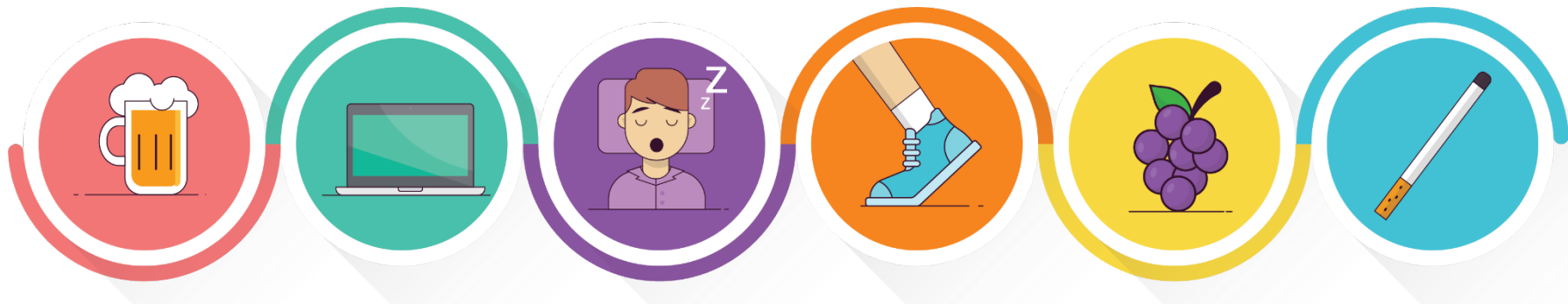
What Do Parents See as the Biggest Issues for Teens?

- Survey of 150 Australian parents:



What are the "Big 6" risk factors?

- The “Big 6” are some of the strongest risk factors for chronic disease & poor health:



- Often emerge during teenage years and commonly co-occur. *(Champion et al, MJA, 2022)*
 - In >6000 Australian 12-yr-olds: **63%** engaged in 3+ of the Big 6
- Persist into adulthood e.g. teen who is inactive more likely to be inactive as an adult

Parents Matter – Even in the Teen Years

- **Parents remain a key influence** on adolescent health, even as teens seek more independence.
- But... many feel ill-equipped to respond to teenage health issues. Some parents feel a loss of control as children become teenagers.

“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”.

“Even though we'll stick to a strict sleeping routine, eating routine, exercising, etc, it only takes one person to disrupt that whole thing and I've got no control of it.”

What else gets in the way?

Time management and scheduling (household chaos)

Role modelling: Finding time to sleep and exercise well as a parent

Juggling different needs of different kids

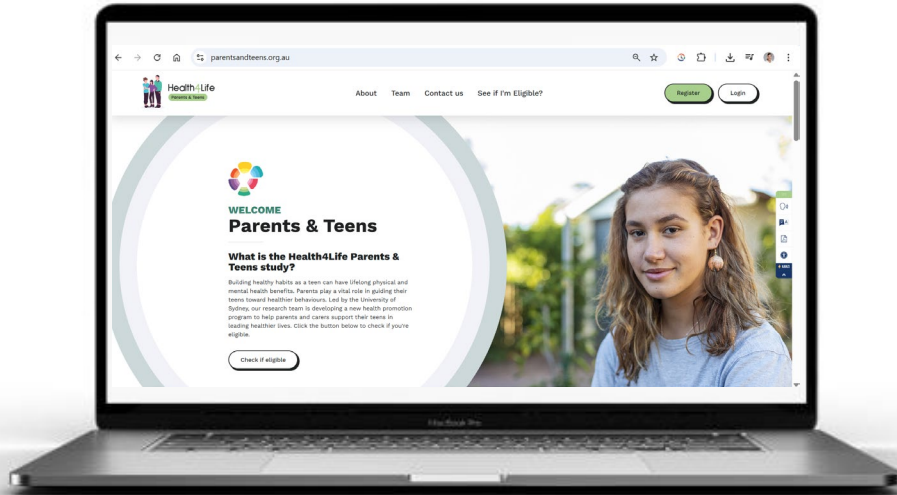
Financial constraints

Single parenthood and/or being on the same page as your partner

Too many sources of advice/information – don't know what to follow

The Health4Life Parents & Teens Program

www.parentsandteens.org.au





health and wellbeing, both now and in the future?

Experts in 'Health4Life Parents and Teens' Modules



Prof David Lubans



Prof Michael Gradisar



Prof Tracy Burrows



Prof Cath Chapman



A/Prof Emily Stockings

+ many more!

Teens, Screens & Social Media

What is it?

- Non-active, not for educational purposes
- 90% of teens spend more time on screens than recommended
 - >2 hours per day (outside of school/homework)
 - Survey 10,000 high school students, 10% met guideline

Not all screen time is bad:

- Positive: education, relationships, skills for future
- Passive screen use (e.g., family movie)

When is screentime bad for teens?

- Displaces other things (physical activity, social, education, sleep)
- Use of screens into the night (active not passive screen time)
- Exposure to harmful content (fake, sexualised, violent, bullying)
- Social media for girls (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat)
- Violent Gaming and pornography for boys



Screen use & Social Media – What can parents do?

1. Set Rules and Limits

- No screens at mealtimes
- Limit daily social media to 30 mins (use apps to limit).
- Reduce active screen time 1 hour before bed (podcast, relaxing music).
- No phones in bedroom at night (charge in living room).
- Phone on do not disturb at night

2. Be a Good Role Model

- Practice what we preach
- Times when screens are put away or left at home

3. Set goals and monitor use

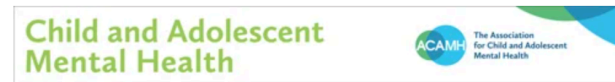
- Involve teens in goals and rules (e.g., daily limit on social media or TV)
- Reward good behaviour
- Consequences for not following household rules (e.g., lose phone or screentime privileges)
- Encourage alternative activities and structure (physically active, school, extra curriculars, or part time jobs etc).

Final Point: This is a global problem. The aim is to help teens develop self-regulation through routine.



What about the social media ban?

- In December, Australia will **ban under-16s from accessing social media**
- Whether the legislation will work is uncertain... but it has sparked important conversations about **digital safety**.
- Even with the ban in place, parents should aim to:
 - Understand the risks and benefits of social media.
 - Have open, ongoing conversations with your child.
 - Keep communication open, even if rules are broken, so teens feel safe seeking help when they need it.



Debate | [Open Access](#) | [CC](#) [i](#)

Debate: Social media in children and young people – time for a ban? Beyond the ban – empowering parents and schools to keep adolescents safe on social media

Katrina E. Champion [✉](#) Louise Birrell, Scarlett Smout, Maree Teesson, Tim Slade

Teens and Sleep

What do we know about teen's sleep?

- **1 in 4** Aussie teens don't get recommended amount of sleep on school nights (8-10hrs for 14-17yr olds)
- Sleep needs differ - aim to get enough to function well enough each day

Why is sleep so important for young people?

- Learning/academic performance
- Social: friendships, family and romantic relationships
- Mental health: depression & sleep uniquely linked

What can cause poor sleep among teens?

- Biology - body clock naturally shifts later during adolescence - teens go to bed later and later and still have to wake up early
- Alcohol, nicotine, caffeine



Teens and Sleep - What can parents do?

Set and monitor bedtime on school nights

- Parents often stop around 12-13 yrs
- Maintaining or re-introducing a parent-set bedtime is possible and beneficial.
- Associated with sleeping earlier, for longer and better quality + better mood

Lookout for the Delayed Body Clock

- Signs: difficulty falling asleep at a normal bedtime, alert late at night, struggling to wake up, weekend sleep-ins that are much longer than weekday sleep
- Encourage good morning routine - get up, move around, get dressed, eat, go outside.
- Seek help from GP (>1-2 hrs than usual wake up time)



Teens and Sleep - What can parents do?

Nighttime Routine

- Reduce stimulation at night (light, noise, movement, etc.)
- Relax with passive activities (TV, non-active screen use)
- Mindfulness body scan (fall asleep in half the time)

Model Good Sleep Habits Yourself

- Family environment – reduce stimulation, noise, lighting
- Winddown routine e.g. tea, bath, read
- Avoid alcohol
- Put 'do not disturb' or flight mode on phone to reduce disruptions during the night
 - UK Research: led to 45 mins extra sleep per night (5.25 hours/week)



Teens and Physical Activity

What do we know about teen's PA?

- 5 in 6 AUS teens do not meet PA guidelines (60+ mins MVPA every day)
- 10% decline in PA rates each year during adolescence (starts late primary school; less than 10% by end high school).
 - Competing demands (schoolwork, paid employment)
 - Screen time (displacement)
 - Friendship groups

Benefits of PA for teens?

Social: brings teens together (supports mental health in this way)

Psychological:

- Reduces depression and anxiety symptoms (50% CMDs begin during teenage years)
- Manage stressful life events
- Team sports prevent MH problems: lower rates of depression and loneliness

Physical:

- Foundations of good bone health (osteoporosis preventions)
- Prevent chronic disease (obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart conditions, cancer etc).

Academic:

- Better school attendance and achieve academic goals
- Supportive of brain health and growth (prefrontal cortex - decision making, personality; hippocampal volume - memory).



Physical Activity - What can parents do?

Create a supportive environment for PA

- Explain the importance
- Support/encourage your teen
 - Watch them participate
 - Facilitate participation (logistics: transport, costs, find PA they enjoy)

Household rules that support PA

- Screen free afternoons (active or organised sport; not even homework)
- Include them in shaping rules - more likely to stick

Role model an active lifestyle

- Active parents have more active teens – lead by example.
- Team sports, classes, walking daily, active weekends.

Co-participating in PA (Do it together)

- Walk the dog, beach, shoot hoops in the park
- Build your relationship – healthy for both



Physical Activity - What can parents do?

If my teen is lacking motivation or confidence?

- Forcing is counterproductive
- Give them choice (beach? park? bike ride?)
- Do it together
- Help them identify things they enjoy
Support/encourage them
- Teach them that PA takes many forms
 - MVPA has most benefits, but any PA is good

Final tip:

- Staying positive, calm and supportive & remove barriers – wins in the long run.
- Little changes matter.



Teens and Healthy Eating

What do we know about food/nutrition in teens?

- ~90% of Aus teens do not eat enough fruit/veg each day
- Many eat too many foods that are high in sugar and salt (~3x daily recommended limit)

Why is it important to help teenagers to eat healthily?

- Teenage eating habits persist into adulthood (set good foundation)
- Better concentration, grades at school, mental health, mood.

How can parents ensure what they buy is actually healthy?

- Beware of marketing and misinformation
- Back to basics – avoid highly processed/packaged foods
- Shop around the perimeter of the supermarket (avoid packaged stuff in the centre)



Healthy Eating - What can parents do?

Role Modelling

- Try to role model healthy eating yourself
- Aim to eat varied, natural foods from the five food groups
- Use 'positive talk' about diet, body and how people look (incl. yourself!).

Foster a Healthy Eating Environment

- Make healthy foods readily available at home/school
- Limit unhealthy food, snacks and drinks, esp. in the home

Get Teens Involved in Choosing & Making Food

- Involve them in food shopping (choose healthy foods they like)
- Involve them in cooking meals (e.g., 1 x per week)



Healthy Eating - What can parents do?

Encourage Mindful Eating:

- Try to eat dinner together as a family (benefits for wellbeing, eating, interpersonal skills).
- Avoid screens while eating and eating when bored
- Don't force teens to finish a meal – it's good to encourage them to recognise when they're full (save leftovers)

Final Tip: Small changes can add up over time – any change is good!



E.g. recent study in >4000 teens found that each added daily serve of fruit or vegetables was linked to 4% lower psychological distress (Smout et al., 2024).



Teens and Alcohol

What do we know about adolescents and alcohol use?

- Age of first drink is going up (14-15 years old vs 16 years old now)
- Australian teens drinking less than prior generations
 - In 2001 33% never had a full serve; in 2022 = 69%
- Still substantial harms:
 - 1 in 10 deaths of Australians aged 14 to 17 caused by alcohol related injury and disease
 - Mental health and substance use top causes of burden in this age group

Why might adolescents now be starting later and abstaining?

- Avoiding alcohol due to being risk averse (everything is recorded).
- Health-conscious generation

Why is it so important to prevent adolescents drinking?

- Earlier use related to later problems and harms
- Brain development:
 - Critical time for brain development, like early childhood.
 - Brain developing until 24 years old
 - Frontal lobe (planning, judgment, decision-making), hippocampus (memory, learning), cerebellum (balance, coordination)



Alcohol - What can parents do?

Don't supply (not sips, glass, or more)

- Australian study followed ≥ 2000 teens (12 to 23 to 24 y/o).
- Parental provision associated with increased risk of:
 - Earlier use, binge drinking & harms
 - Meeting criteria for AUD in later adolescence
 - Accessing alcohol via other sources (e.g., peers, siblings)

Educate yourself, and talk your teen:

- e.g., Powerful to know they are in majority if not drinking at 14-17
- Help them learn short-term consequences (e.g., sport performance)
- Talk/practice refusal strategies

Model healthy drinking behaviours:

- Avoid getting drunk
- Have family occasions with no alcohol
- Be aware of how we talk about alcohol



Alcohol - What can parents do?

Making plans and rules together:

- Involve teens in rule setting (and explain why rules exist) – curfews, communication, friends
- Rules have been found to: delay onset, reduce frequency of binge drinking & harms
- Try to set up shared rules among parents
- Make them fair and age-appropriate

Do they have a plan for:

- Who they will be with and where?
- How/when to get to and from events?
- How to reach you? Expectations

Final Point?

- These conversations impact their future
- Come from a place of care and concern



Teens and Smoking/Vaping

What are vapes (e-cigarettes)?

- Battery powered devices that heat liquid which is transformed into an aerosol & inhaled.
- Typically contains nicotine, flavourings, and other chemicals.



How many Australian teens are using vapes?

- Recent study >4000 14-17yr olds: **1 in 4** had vaped and **1 in 10** currently used. Much fewer smoke (2%)

Why do teens use vapes?

- Curiosity (flavours, colourful), peer pressure, social media/marketing, addictive (high nicotine)

Why are vapes problematic for teens ?

- Physical, behavioural and mental effects.
 - Respiratory harms e.g. irritation of the airways, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
 - Poorer sleep, concentration, school performance, irritability (nicotine dependence)
 - Mental ill health: Depression, anxiety, high stress, low wellbeing
 - Changes developing brain's reward pathway - want other substances in future (e.g., cigarettes)

Teens and Smoking/Vaping - What can parents do?

1. Set rules

- E.g. vape free house
- Establish consequences

2. Role Modelling

- If you smoke or vape:
 - Seek out help to quit and talk about your quitting journey
 - Don't do in front of your children
 - Model effective ways of coping (exercise, wind down routines).

3. Talk to Your Teen

- Educate yourself and your child about the harms (physical, mental health, addiction)
- Help them develop refusal skills - Model them and help them practice



What do I do if my teen is smoking/vaping?

Questions To Ask Them:

- Do you smoke/vape when you are on your own?
- How soon after you wake up do you smoke/vape? (<5 mins?)
- Do you wake up at night to smoke/vape?

**If yes to any, seek support from GP*

Final Point?

- Try to understand and support your child. Punishment/judgement is less effective
- Try to come from a place of care for their health



Summary – What can parents do?

Research shows that parenting practices and parenting styles are important for adolescent health and development.

1. Role Modelling
2. Rule-Setting
3. Open Communication
4. Being supportive/involved

Healthy lifestyle change doesn't have to be all or nothing – even small changes can make a difference.

Information & Support Services for Parents



Raising Tweens and Teenagers

Tips for communicating effectively with teens, help them build confidence and self-esteem, how to deal with cyber bullying and practical ways to stay safe online.



Kids Helpline

A free, confidential counselling service for children and young people aged 5–25.

1800 55 1800



Parentline Resources

24 hour emergency contacts for immediate parenting help outside of Parentline Counselling Hours and links to parenting courses available for parents in Australia.



Positive Choices platform

The Positive Choices platform is an Australian online resource designed to support schools, parents, and young people in making informed decisions about alcohol and other drug use. It provides evidence-based resources, educational tools, and strategies to promote healthy choices, reduce risks, and encourage positive behaviours among youth.

Website

Website



raisingchildren.net.au

Raising Children Network

Ad-free parenting videos, articles and apps backed by Australian experts



eSafety for parents

The eSafety parents portal offers advice for parents and carers to keep children safe online. It provides information related to gaming, cyber parental controls, screen time and more.



Butterfly Foundation

A national organization supporting individuals experiencing eating disorders or body image concerns, providing resources, counselling, and advocacy.

Website



Lifeline

A 24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention hotline.

13 11 14



Katrina.champion@sydney.edu.au

lily.davidson@sydney.edu.au

@lilydavidson0

www.parentsandteens.org.au



What is Health4Life Parents & Teens?

- 6-7 week e-health program for parents of 11-15-year-olds from socio-economically disadvantaged suburbs in NSW
- Online intervention for upskilling parents regarding the '*Big 6' Lifestyle risk factors for chronic disease* (screen time, exercise, diet, alcohol, vaping/smoking and sleep).
- Co-designed with parents

Matilda Centre

Why Sign-Up?

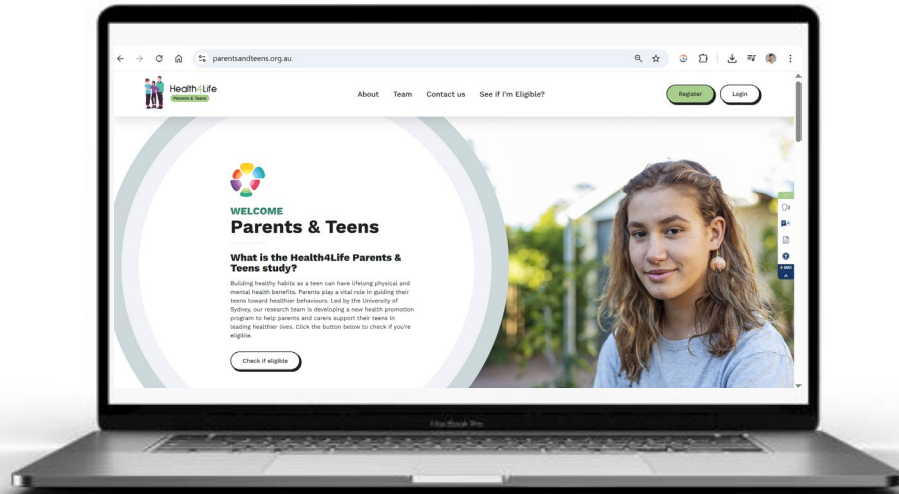
- Parents gain access to our program that was developed with health experts and parents
- Targets '*Big 6' Risk Factors* via parent-focussed brief online modules and/or telehealth coaching, stress management training, tailored feedback, SMS
- \$30 gift cards for completing the pre and post surveys

Where can parents check their eligibility?



**Teachers: Express interest in our school-based trial
for Term 3 next year (and spread the word)!**

www.parentsandteens.org.au/contact



Acknowledgements



MONASH
University



UNSW
SYDNEY



Northwestern
University



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY
Matilda Centre

Chief investigators

Dr Katrina Champion

Prof David Lubans

Prof Nicola Newton

Prof Louise Baur

Prof Maree Teesson

Prof Cathrine Mihalopoulos

Dr Lauren Gardner

Prof Bonnie Spring

Prof Tim Slade

Prof Cath Chapman

Prof Tracy Burrows

Dr Louise Thornton

Dr Stephanie Partridge

A/Prof Matthew Sunderland

A/Prof Belinda Parmenter

Associate Investigators

Prof Frances-Kay Lambkin

Prof Susan Woolfenden

Dr George Johnson

A/Prof Emily Stockings

Ms Lyra Egan

Research Team

Dr Lily Davidson, Postdoc

Emily Hunter, RA USYD

Alex Haidinger, RA USyd

Tara Finn, RA UoN

Funders

Australian Government

Medical Research Future Fund

Partners

NSW DoE



Education

Sydney Institute for
Women, Children &
their Families



Health
Sydney
Local Health District

Nepean Blue
Mountains LHD



Health
Nepean Blue Mountains
Local Health District

Netfront Pty Ltd



THANK YOU

Any Questions?

www.parentsandteens.org.au

Parents – scan below to see if you're eligible to participate



Email us or follow on LinkedIn!



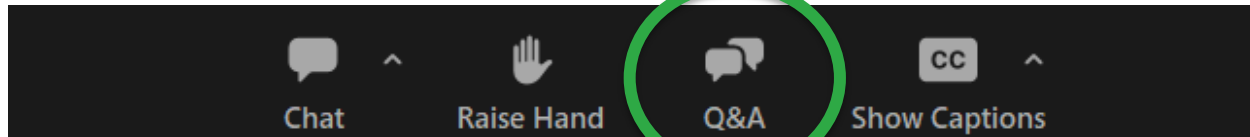
Katrina.champion@sydney.edu.au

lily.davidson@sydney.edu.au



positivechoices.org.au

Questions?





Thank You

info@positivechoices.org.au
positivechoices.org.au



@pos_choices



@positivechoices1



Australian Government

Department of Health,
Disability and Ageing



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Matilda Centre