

# Webinar\_ Anxiety and drinking ...vent the anxiety-alcohol cycle

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

anxiety, alcohol, drinking, programme, teenagers, important, teens, conversations, young, parents, reasons, strategies, feel, helping, support, drink, aged, link, develop, inroads

## SPEAKERS

Katrina Prior, Laura Wade, Amelia Russell, Lexine Stapinski

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Amelia Russell 00:00

Good afternoon or good morning, everyone and welcome to the Positive Choices webinar series. My name is Amelia Russell and I work as a research assistant at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney on Positive Choices. So welcome, and thanks, everyone for joining us today. We're all coming together from different parts of the country today. And I'd like to start 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 Elder's past and present. I further acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which you are on and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. And I would also like to acknowledge any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us for the webinar today. So just starting with a few little housekeeping points. So as participants, you are on listen only mode, so we can't see or hear you. The webinar is being recorded, and we will get it up on the Positive Choices website in about 24 to 48 hours along with the slide handouts. At the end of this session, we're going to have a Q&A session. So please feel free to add your questions to the Q&A box you should be able to see on your screen. And for anyone who is new to Positive Choices, just a quick introduction. Positive Choices is a website that provides access to trustworthy up to date, evidence based alcohol and other drug information and educational resources suitable for parents, school staff and students. Positive Choices is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care and was developed by the Matilda Centre at the University of Sydney in consultation with teachers, parents and students. So some of the resources we have up include learning resources, factsheets, videos, webinars and games, in addition to classroom based drug prevention programmes that are proven to reduce drug related harms. But now on to today's webinar, which will focus on anxiety and drinking. We're very excited to have Dr. Katrina Prior Laura Wade and Associate Professor Lexine Stapinski from the Inroads anxiety and alcohol team presenting for us today. Dr. Katrina Prior is a Research Fellow within the Matilda Centre at the University of Sydney. Her research focuses on the Co-occurrence of anxiety, depression and alcohol and other drug use disorders. She aims to conduct high quality and high impact research to better understand these conditions prevent them when were possible, and improve treatment responses as well as translate

knowledge gained from research into clinical practice. Dr. Lexine Stapinski is a Clinical Psychologist, Associate Professor and lead in intervention and implementation at the Matilda Centre. Her research focuses on understanding how alcohol and substance use disorders develop and how we can intervene early to prevent escalation. And Ms Laura Wade is a research assistant at the Matilda Centre. And Laura works on the Inroads project, which is an online Early Intervention Programme for young adults who experienced both anxiety and drink above recommended Australian Health guidelines. So thank you all. And over to you, Laura.

 Laura Wade 03:29

Perfect, thank you, Amelia. And thanks to PC for having us today. I am just going to share my screen. Hopefully you can all see that. I'm gonna take that as a yes. Yep. So good. Thanks. Amazing. Thank you. So as Amelia just said, myself, Dr. Lexine Stapinski and Dr. Katrina Prior will be talking about the link between anxiety and drinking, and how you can support teens and prevent the anxiety alcohol cycle. So I would also like to begin by acknowledging and paying respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we are located, which is the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and it is upon their ancestral lands that the University of Sydney is built. I would also like to pay my respects to the traditional owners of lands across the country and from where everyone is joining us today. I am dialling in from the Dharawal People's land. So I also want to give a broad outline of what the webinar will entail. And I will quickly introduce some alcohol use patterns in teens and just some statistics, then Lexine will jump into talking about the link between anxiety and alcohol use and how to help when you're worried about a teenager. And then Katrina will jump in to finish up talking about how to prepare for the transition into adulthood and available support options. And then we will take questions at the end. So we thought it would be good, we'll start by giving a bit of background into alcohol use in Australian school students. And what the current data tells us is that about 22%, or one in five students aged between 12 and 17 drank alcohol in the past month. And this is concerning as drinking alcohol when underage is associated with a greater risk of harm. We know that the brain keeps developing until around age 25. So drinking alcohol as a teenager can negatively impact brain development, and can lead to a variety of health issues down the track. And this is why the National Health and Research Medical Council recommends that no alcohol at all to be consumed for anyone under the age of 18. We also know that almost half of the students who drank alcohol in the past month engaged in binge drinking, which is defined as drinking five or more standard drinks on a single occasion. But something positive to note is that there has been a significant decline in alcohol consumption and binge drinking in people aged 14 to 17 over the past few decades, and this just means that teenagers drinking less than they used to in fact, alcohol consumption has reached its lowest point since the early 1960s, which is fantastic. And while these are positive trends, we know that 22% of students are still drinking, and they may be experiencing harms from their drinking. And so while rates have declined, alcohol consumption during teenage years is still a significant concern. And we want to understand what leads teenagers into drinking. And the reasons that lead into alcohol use are varied and different for everyone. And it's not typically caused by one single factor, but by a combination of factors. And this could include genetics, the environment, family, personality, mental health and difficult life experiences. And so the focus of today's presentation is the link between mental health, specifically anxiety and how that contributes to alcohol use. So I'm now going to hand over to Lexine, who will provide you some tips about what you as parents and school staff can do to support young people and prevent harm from alcohol use.





Lexine Stapinski 07:05

Okay, thank you so much, Laura, I'm assuming you can still hear me. And so as Laura mentioned, we're going to be focusing on practical strategies today. And in particular, we'll focus on strategies that have a really strong evidence basis in the literature in terms of helping to prevent harm from teenage alcohol use. And now the good news is that despite what it might seem, sometimes, saying this as a parent myself, we know that parents and schools actually do have a significant influence on young people's behaviour. So first of all, a really important component of preventing harm is education and communication. So making sure that teenagers are equipped with knowledge and skills is really important. We know that communicating clear expectations and rules for alcohol use is a factor in terms of preventing us. But what's also really important is giving clear reasons behind those rules. So for example, you might say, look, it's really important to me that you avoid drinking completely until you're an adult. And the reason for this is that we know that it's a really important period of brain development during adolescence, right up until the mid 20s. And there's strong evidence that drinking alcohol at this time can have long term negative impacts on brain development and function. So you're clearly communicating your expectation, but you're also communicating the reasons, and they're logical and reasonable reasons. Another thing that's important is giving accurate information and statistics. Sorry, Laura, not yet. Because we want to correct common myths. So there's popular myths that teenagers might have about alcohol use. Now one that's really common is the idea that everyone else is doing it. Partly this might be because teenagers tend to exaggerate some of their risk behaviours. So teenagers can have this idea that everyone around them is drinking a lot, drinking every weekend, etc. So it's important to give teenagers really accurate statistics that send the message that, no in actual fact, most teenagers are choosing to stay healthy and to protect their brains by not using alcohol. And we saw in Laura's earlier slides that we can say more and more young people are choosing not to drink alcohol these days. So that's a really positive message to be sending to our teens. And honest and open communication using a calm non-judgmental tone is the most effective way of communicating these messages with teenagers. And you really wanting to leave the door open for future conversations, which provides the opportunity to hear about any risky situations that are coming up and discuss ways to minimise those risks. And we'll talk a little bit more about these conversations, later on. Okay, now's the next one. So research also shows that role modelling is really important. So the attitudes and the behaviour of adults that are surrounding teenagers is really important. And so in your own behaviour, and this is, for all of us around teenagers, it's important to not inadvertently send the message that excessive drinking is either normal, or funny, or a rite of passage. So those kinds of adult conversations that people could be having about oh, yeah, that time at that party that X, Y and Z happened, these conversations might be inadvertently telling teens that getting really drunk is funny or fun. So on the flip side, what is really important is modelling safe alcohol consumption in your own behaviour. And this is sending the message to young people that it's not necessary to drink to have fun, or to socialise with others. And now, the next one supply and monitoring. This is again, another myth that's important to talk about, because there was a really popular belief among parents that allowing teenagers to drink at home, so giving them alcohol in a safe environment was a good way to introduce teenagers to alcohol safely. And I guess, get them used to it, you know, get them accustomed to how to drink alcohol safely. But we've now shown time and time again in research that that is a myth. So it's important that we correct this myth. And let people know that that's not the case. So there's been good long term studies that have shown that even supplying small amounts of alcohol to teenagers has negative effects in terms of increasing later use, and increasing use away from parents and harmful consequences down the track. So sending the message, I expect that you won't use alcohol, and I'm not going to give you alcohol at home not even a sip, really communicates that clearly and is the most effective strategy. Another part of that is staying connected to our teenagers and knowing

where they are. This is another parent behaviour that reduces harm. And so part of this can be getting to know your teenagers, friends, keeping them and the parents connected to you. And this means that you can also be on the same page about the rules and expectations that you have for alcohol use. So knowing that when your friend, your teen goes to a party, that the parents at that party will also be on board with the idea that there's not going to be alcohol at the party. And finally, another way that we can prevent harm from alcohol use is to really understand and address some of the reasons for use. And this is where we'll focus the rest of the presentation on today in terms of understanding that link that there can be between mental health and alcohol use. So next slide, please. Great. So what we know in terms of the individual factors that contribute to alcohol use is that mental health factors are really important. So on this slide, we can see a few of the different mental health factors that contribute. So externalising symptoms such as ADHD problems with impulse control and behavioural problems can be associated with teenage alcohol use. But in addition, in the green, other problems, such as having stress related to a trauma, feeling depressed, and also anxiety, can be factors that are important to consider in terms of preventing risk of alcohol use. So is there a link? Well, what you might have noticed earlier in adolescence is that anxiety can actually be protective for alcohol use at that time. So you know, when you're talking young adolescents, you can see that anxious teens and maybe more shy, maybe more withdrawn, they may be more worried about authority figures and doing the right thing. So earlier on in adolescence, we do see this pattern in research where anxiety can be protective. But what tends to happen in the later years and particularly in adulthood is that there's a flip that happens, where anxiety later on is associated with more alcohol use, so youth with anxiety are more likely to progress from using occasionally to using more regularly, and then they're at greater risk of that becoming an alcohol use disorder later on. And we know that one of the reasons for this is that while the reasons for alcohol use are quite varied, people with anxiety often report that they're drinking to they're drinking alcohol to cope with their emotional symptoms. So you might have heard the term self medicate. So, you know, really drinking to cope with that nervousness to reduce it to get to, to manage it effectively. And in the research, we see this link. So one in three people with anxiety say that they drink alcohol due to its real, or its perceived anxiety reducing effects. So that's important, it doesn't have to actually reduce anxiety, they just, people just have to believe that it's that it's that it reduces anxiety. And what we also see is that relying on alcohol to manage anxiety is not an effective strategy. So while they might, it might feel like it helps reduce nervousness make you feel more confident, comfortable, make you feel more like socialising, it's actually having a rebound effect on anxiety. So we say that anxiety puts young people at six times the risk of developing an alcohol use disorder later in life. So what this means for us is that understanding that link between anxiety and alcohol use is really important. And that one of the ways that we can help to prevent alcohol use problems is by helping teens to develop healthy coping strategies to manage their anxiety before they run into trouble. And before we say that link with alcohol. So, let's talk, let's hone in a little bit on anxiety now. So we know that everyone, all of us here have experienced anxiety, or worry or stress from time to time, I'm experiencing a little bit of it right now. And anxiety can be a motivating and a helpful response. It helps you to get things done, such as writing your presentation you need to write, studying for a test or protecting you from danger. But in some people anxious feelings don't go away, they're there all the time, and then out of proportion to the situation. And when anxiety starts to go into overdrive, it can start to cause problems or stop people from getting the most out of life. And I guess that's the warning signs that we want to look out for. In terms of anxiety, we wanting to notice when it's starting to get in the way of everyday life when it's affecting people's capacity to go to work or function, function at school, or when it's stopping them from doing the things that they want to do impacting on their relationships with their friends, or their family members. And in Australia, we know that almost one in six Australians experience anxiety at that level. So it's a level where it's causing

problems with functioning. But we know that this is even higher among young people. So you see here, this alarming figure, really that one in three people aged 16 to 24 years has had an anxiety disorder, experienced an anxiety disorder in the last 12 months. So that's the most recent data that's coming out of our national survey of well being. So 2021-22. So yeah, quite a bit telling us that anxiety is really something that we that we need to be thinking about. And I imagine that's why we have so many of you at this webinar. So the common, we know that anxiety presents differently for different people. And even within the same person, it can present differently over time. So I just wanted to talk through some of the common anxieties that you might be seeing. So for some people, anxiety might be mostly about meeting new people or being in any situations where they're around new people, or anytime where they might worry about other, so in case of teenagers, whether it worry about what what other their friends or other teenagers might be thinking or how they might be judging them. But for others, anxiety can be more about doing, getting things wrong, making a mistake or not doing well at a test. So there can be a lot of time really concerned about that or potentially a lot of checking, checking behaviours to make sure they're not making a mistake. In other cases, anxiety is very dominated by physical symptoms. So for example, feeling a racing heart or shortness of breath, and sometimes this can be at the level of intensity that young people can actually worry that there might be something physically wrong with them so that they might be worried about having a heart attack or they might be worried that they're going crazy, they're losing their mind. So the anxiety feels so strong, that you then become concerned about it being abnormal. And finally, we saw particularly after COVID concerns about health and concerns about health risks are on the rise at the moment. So people might still have anxieties related to worrying about potential health risks, or worrying about germs or the spread of germs as well. So these are some of the common anxieties that you might see. But in terms of bringing it all together, sorry, Laura, I'm making her, I'm giving her a hard time with the slide progression, she's doing great. So in terms of the signs and symptoms, what all these different anxieties have in common is that we know that they all interact with each other, sorry that they all have three core components that are interact with each other. So what we're looking to recognise when we're looking out for anxiety are the physical symptoms, the thoughts and the behaviours, these three components, these three parts of anxiety, that contribute to the problem, and that also interact with each other. So the kind of worrying thoughts that people have contribute to how they're feeling physically and likewise contribute to to their behaviour. So because these three components of anxiety are all interlinked, the good news is that by applying strategies, looking at identifying symptoms, and each of these components, and applying strategies to target the different areas, we can affect the whole system. So working at the three different areas helps us to be more effective in helping people manage anxiety. So what I'm going to do now is talk through these different components in a bit more detail talk about some of the signs and symptoms to look out for and then also some of the strategies that you might be able to encourage young people to implement. So first of all, in terms of the physical symptoms of anxiety, so this is things like, could be pounding heart, it could be trembling or shaking, sometimes it's muscle tension, headaches, sometimes it's feeling restless, having problems concentrating. So some people they get lack of appetite, or feeling the butterflies and sometimes feeling very, very irritable. Also important to note that problems going to sleep or even early morning waking can be the physical symptoms of anxiety. As I mentioned before, sometimes these symptoms are so intense that the young person might worry that there's something seriously wrong with them physically. So they might be concerned about about health issues related to those. And secondly, the second component, the thoughts that really drive anxiety now this one might be a tricky one for our audience, because the thoughts underlying teenagers' anxiety might not always be obvious, they might not vocalise these thoughts. So these signs might be less obvious than, say, the physical or the behavioural components, but by exploring what might be driving the young person's anxiety, so asking

questions, to understand why they're nervous about a particular thing, you might come to understand the types of thoughts that are there in the background. So it could be things like in social settings, they'll think I'm boring, I think I have nothing interesting to say, I think I'm lame, I'm gonna get this wrong. Increasingly lately, young people can be worried about ecological concerns. So we hear a bit like, you know, the world is headed for destruction, and like, there's nothing it's all kind of pointless and futile. I'm not good enough, and something is wrong with me. So these are just some example thoughts, but there's so many different thoughts that they might be and what their thoughts have in common is that they tend to focus on the worst possible scenario. And that's what happens with anxiety it's focusing on not necessarily things that are probable, but things that are possible, and getting stuck in that imagining all of those worst case scenarios. And then finally, in terms of the behaviours, avoidance is really the hallmark that we're talking about with anxiety so avoiding particular people, situations, places, avoiding school or separating from adults could be present as well, but you also might see behavioural outbursts. And this might be because of the intense anxiety the person has about particular situations or places. Or it might be in an attempt to avoid particular things. Other behaviours you might see compliance, people pleasing, avoiding being the focus of attention. Now in terms of supporting teens to cope with anxiety, what we can do is encourage them to put in place strategies in each of these domains to help them manage their anxiety. And as I said, the good news is because the three domains are interrelated, by applying strategies that target one area, we can affect this, the whole system. But what is also important is that strategies, everyone really differs in terms of what strategies work for them, and what's most effective. And so it's important to guide the young person to try some different strategies to find out what's work, what's best for them, what works for them, and keep applying those strategies. So in terms of physical symptoms, some of the things that can help young people are guided relaxation, yoga, mindfulness, but also nutrition and exercise is really important. There's really good evidence now about the link between exercise and nutrition and mental well being. So even putting in place some simple strategies like this can make a big difference. And I've linked some relaxation and mindfulness apps or recordings, on the slides that we'll be sending out to you, that might be useful starting points. In terms of strategies for thoughts, what we really need to encourage young people to do is to notice the difference between productive thinking, productive problem solving, and worry. And really, when, when it's worry, what you, what they might be noticing is that worries are just snowballing. So it's just jumping from one catastrophe to another catastrophe, and it's no longer, it's no longer problem solving, it's no longer thinking what's best, it's just a cascade of worry. And what can be really useful here is to first of all, just notice that happening, and to notice and acknowledge that just because we think something doesn't mean it's a fact, I have all sorts of strange thoughts all the time, and definitely not all facts. So even just kind of creating that insight can be really helpful. But then another thing that we can do is encourage young people to consider alternative ways to view the situation. And this is something that talking things over with someone can help with, it can help you to see different perspectives and potentially take a more balanced view, a less catastrophic view of this of the situation and what's happening in it. And finally, talking about behaviours. Now, one of the most important things that we can do when we're talking about anxiety is helping them to notice the way that their behavioural patterns, and in particular, the way that avoidance contributes to anxiety. And what we've shown time and time again, in research and in clinical settings, is that the more that people avoid things, the more difficult they become. It makes sense that people avoid things they are anxious about but it really does just reinforce the anxiety. So gradually encouraging young people to reduce their avoidance to in a kind of manageable step by step way start to reintroduce themselves to situations that they worried about, you know, in combination with the other steps, the other strategies for for their thoughts and for their physical sensations is something that can be really effective in helping to manage anxiety. Okay, and what we're going to move on to now is,

obviously, these are some kind of simple, common-sense strategies that you can put in place to help guide your team. But we want to just touch now on what to do when you're really worried either about a teenager's anxiety or worried about their alcohol use, how to kind of get started, if that's the situation. And whether you're a friend or a parent or a school staff member, there might be times that you have had conversations with teens, about their anxiety or about the alcohol, the amount or the way that they're using alcohol that make you really concerned. And one of the most important things that you can do in these cases is to really connect in open the communication channels and let you know that you're there for them and that you're listening to what is going on for them. It can be difficult to approach these conversations for young people who aren't necessarily keen to talk about the issues. So instead of launching in immediately, laying some groundwork by discussing other topics of interest to the person, you know, what's going on with their football team, for example, is a good kind of way to get in to the conversation. Over time, though it's good to or it's okay to discuss the concerns directly. But the most effective conversations are those that avoid confrontation, avoid accusations and avoid lecturing. So for example, you can kind of lean into your concerns with a more soft approach, saying something like, you know, I'm wondering if things are really tough for you at the moment, I've noticed that you haven't been seeing your friends as much or or whatever it is in the behaviour that you've noticed. And we've linked here, a Positive Choices fact sheet that provides some additional advice about starting and navigating those conversations that you might have with the young person. Okay, so the good really good thing about these conversations, having open conversations and listening to the person is that it helps you to understand the reasons behind the alcohol use. So as we've talked about today, the young person might be using alcohol to help them feel less nervous at parties, or to help them fit in or in some cases, it might be the way that they get to sleep. And so understanding the reasons behind alcohol use can then open up the door to a useful conversation about coping strategies that they may be able to put in place instead of alcohol use. So for example, learning some of the anxiety management strategies that we've talked about. And open conversations are also useful for identifying some of the negative aspects of alcohol use. So it's likely that there are some things that the young person doesn't like about drinking, it might be that sometimes they're embarrassed about things that they've said or done when they've been drinking. Or it might be that they're worried about the impact it's having on their, on their sports team performance or in their academic performance. So by exploring and just understanding, letting them talk, you can kind of get a handle on some of these reasons that might underlie their alcohol use. And giving this space to discuss alcohol use and open up to some of the negative aspects is a good way to ensure that the conversation is going to be a motivating conversation that encourages change. So the evidence suggests that the most effective conversations are the conversations where you're allowing the young person to express and explore their own reasons for wanting to change. And I've linked another, another link, another little bit of homework for you, but a link called the Making the Link video series. And this actually provides some video demonstrations, which is really helpful about how to have motivating conversations and also things to avoid. Because, you know, what we need to remember is that there's, it is common for people to have mixed feelings about whether they want help and whether they want to want to change. So really allowing them to express the goals that they do have, the things that they would want to change, but just kind of riding out the fact that there might be some other some other reasons that they really liked drinking or things that they're really getting out of drinking. And you know, the topic of today, they might be really getting out that it's helping them to manage their anxiety. So it's important to see our conversations as just a starting point, and probably the first of multiple conversations. So communicating to the young person that it would, you know, that you're there if they need to talk again, but also that you are going to check in with them again, to see how things are going to see if they've been able to make any changes, or to see if they're wanting to link in with some professional health help.

Which brings us to the next aspect. It's a really important message to send to people, young people that there is support and effective treatment available for both anxiety and alcohol use. There's a large literature there that tells us that there's effective support available. And so what we want to do is encourage the young person to share their concerns with a trusted adult or parent and assist them with linking in with that effective support. And just a note, of course, I know some school staff might be joining us that individual schools will have policies around the appropriate, the appropriate action you should take here in a case where you're concerned about a young person and wanting to link them in with support. Just some, I just wanted to give you some options. Obviously there's a lot out there and it depends on your area and where you are. But I just wanted to mention some of the options for linking a young person in with professional support for anxiety or alcohol use issues. So school counsellor, of course, is a great first port of call. Headspace services if you're not aware of these services, national services that are available for people aged 12 to 25. So their whole remit is really about understanding how to help young people. And this can be for both anxiety or alcohol issues. They have counselling support, chat, but also face to face treatment available. And it's low cost or free treatment. There is also the option of seeing a psychologist privately in the community. And this can be done with a Mental Health Care Plan. So by consulting with your GP, by the young person talking through some of the issues that are going on for them, they may be eligible for a mental health care plan, which provides for some rebated sessions. I've linked here a helpful fact sheet, it just goes through the steps for getting your mental health care plan, because I know some people aren't always aware of those steps. But you can also see a psychologist without a referral or a mental health care plan, you don't need, you don't need to have those things. Just you won't receive the rebate if you don't. And we've also put some links here of some good resources that could help you to find a psychologist in your area. And what's tends to happen at the the first psychologist session is when you will have the opportunity to kind of get to know that psychologist, you don't have to continue if you find that it's the wrong match for you, that's perfectly fine. But the first session is around getting to know you, your issues and coming up together with a treatment plan that that the psychologist will work with the young person on. I've also put a link here for alcohol counselling 24/7 services available that can be via phone, chat, or text. And then of course, there's always for crisis support Lifeline available by phone or chat support as well. So what I might do there is to hand over now to Katrina, who's now going to talk more specifically around the prep, the transition to adulthood and how we can help prepare teens for that time.

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Katrina Prior 37:36

Thanks Lexine, and thank you everyone for joining us to talk today. So as Lexine alluded to, we know that the transition from adolescence to young adulthood is a critical time when anxiety and alcohol-use problems really peak. So this period of life is characterised by a whole heap of different personal and social changes. So things like starting a new job and moving out of home, changing living arrangements and different relationships. And we also know that people have increased independence and autonomy and responsibilities during this time. So there's a whole heap of different things happening all at once. And so navigating these changes, while they can be exciting for some people can also be really challenging and anxiety provoking for other people, particularly for people who already are showing signs of anxiety. So we know that this time as well, the transition from high school is also a time where there's increased availability and exposure to alcohol. For people who are aged over 18 evidence shows that there are higher rates of binge drinking and high risk drinking because of this. Around one in three people will experience high risk drinking because of the availability. And as a result, we then see an increase in the harms that come from drinking during this time. So

things like violent behaviour or accidents, drink driving, a whole range of different things that come I guess as a result of impaired judgement or poor decision making while people are under the influence. So, Lexine also touched on this before, we find that during this transitional time drinking to cope with anxiety or trying to escape from it becomes even more pronounced. And there are also a range of different other reasons that people, young people start drinking during the transitional period, which Lexine touched on, but the social context becomes really, really important at this time. So along with drinking to cope, there are social motives to drinking so some people drink to be more sociable or confident or outgoing in social setting. So when they're in parties, you know they might drink before going to a party, for instance. And they use alcohol as a means of bonding or connecting with other people. or enhancing their social interactions. Another reason people might drink is to conform with with their peers or what they think their peers are doing. So drinking to fit in with their peers has a really powerful influence on young people's drinking during this time. So people, people often think that everyone else is doing it. I know I did that as a teenager, not necessarily to do with alcohol use. But I would say at the my mum, I know everyone's doing it. So you know, when that when that's related to drinking, and you think everyone else is doing it, you don't want to be the uncool one as the teenager who's not drinking, so drinking to fit in. And then also peer pressure becomes really important at this time. And if people don't know how to say, no, they often succumb to that peer pressure. Another reason people drink is for enhancement reasons. So drinking to celebrate or excitement or enjoyment is really, really prominent at this time. So we know that a lot of things we do these days, you know, alcohol is associated with celebrations and sporting events and recreational activities. So young people might perceive that alcohol is, is a catalyst for fun and adventure and enjoyment. So I guess, I guess it's really important that while the individual reasons that drive young people to drink, differ, they all the reliance on alcohol, for those reasons can really have harmful effects, both in the long term and the short term. So it's important to be aware of those as well. So looking now, I guess, other reasons people drink, young people drink because they have unrealistic expectations about the benefits of alcohol. So people might believe that alcohol will make them more attractive or sociable or adventurous, but the reality is actually far more complex. So while alcohol might temporarily lower inhibitions or enhance mood, or increase confidence, the perceived benefits need to be sort of weighed up with the risks and consequences. So we know that evidence shows that the consequences like poor decision making Lexine mentioned before, doing things that you later regret, that's a big thing for teens is doing something while they're under the influence, and then the shame and guilt the next day over what they did, because they made a fool of themselves becomes really important. So I guess understanding, the reality of alcohol use is really critical in navigating it's effects responsibly. So during this transitional period out of school, it's essential to recognise that while alcohol might temporarily offer relief or enjoyment, if it's not used in moderation, then it also carries significant risks and consequences. So in terms of preparing things for life out outside of high school, all of the strategies like Lexine mentioned earlier for managing anxiety can really help. But I've also put here some other practical tips that might be useful to be aware of. So one of those is, I guess, education doing more of what you're all doing today. So educating yourself about how to identify signs and symptoms of anxiety or problem drinking, particularly in those later teenage years is really important. And also helping to develop independence in young people so that the tasks that might otherwise be quite anxiety provoking, feel less stressful for the teenager. So having, I think, one one that really stands out to me at the moment with a particular climate that we're in, is having conversations around finances and budgeting. This has been identified as one of the biggest stresses in young people at the moment because of cost of living. So helping them think through those things and how they live in an independent way is really important. Also developing alternate coping activities. So we touched on this before, but helping helping teens identify, I guess, age appropriate alternative. So healthy activities they enjoy that will help

them to express themselves or distract their mind, or promote relaxation. So a couple of different ones I thought of were things like finding a new place to eat or seeing a new film or a band. So something alongside, you know, podcasts and meditation, but also age appropriate things for that transition that might be also quite novel and engaging for them. Then also setting realistic and achievable goals. So helping them break down larger, more daunting tasks into smaller, more manageable steps to reduce those feelings of overwhelm they might initially get a task that they need to do and then also developing time management skills. So helping teenagers learn to prioritise tasks and figure out what's most important to them is a really good strategy. And this helps them sort of manage their deadlines and balance work and leisure activities as well. And helping them establish a bit of a routine is really good too. So routines bring a bit of order and predictability. So that's really useful to be aware of as well. And then a couple of strategies for drinking specifically. One is to help them develop other strategies to drinking. So something we often encourage is switching drinks. So for a lot of people drinking is about the ritual of drinking. So perhaps putting a soft drink in a wineglass so that you still have the same action and ritual of drinking, but in a non alcoholic sense, or switching to a non alcoholic drink that that people might enjoy to. People can also, you can also help teens, I guess, identify the triggers for drinking, the people or places or events that tend to lead to risky drinking for them. And then also facilitate, I guess, them learning their limits for drinking, or they can set limits for drinking. So you might talk to a teenager and help them identify, for instance, how many drinks they might have, on a night they go out or how many drinks they want to aim for, on a particular week, or something we used to encourage a lot more to before, I guess pre COVID, now that everything's very much non cash based, but we used to really encourage people to leave their cards at home if they were going out to drink and just take a certain amount of cash, take \$20, so you can only afford two drinks, so helping them set limit through those sorts of strategies is really great. And then we also know that people drink more in group situations. So we want to be able to build young people's confidence and ability to refuse alcohol in group settings. And one way to do that is to help teach them the right communication skills and how to say no, and refuse alcohol. So having conversations with them about having direct eye contact when someone when when they're refusing alcohol, having direct eye contact and being really firm and clear, when they say no, people are less likely to question and bug them about it. And then also, it's really important not to make excuses that other people might then argue with. So teaching teens those sorts of skills can be really beneficial in helping them reduce their drinking. So I guess with all this in mind, given we know the transitional period is really important. The team presenting today, we're really aware that we wanted to intervene before problems escalate from, you know, low level drinking and lower levels of anxiety, perhaps and we wanted to prevent them from becoming more problematic over time. So getting in early and nipping things in the bud before they became too problematic. So we actually developed an online programme known as Inroads. And I just wanted to touch on this briefly today, just so that you, you're aware of some of the options that are out there. But we basically wanted to develop a programme that provided young people with appropriate skills for managing their anxiety and drinking. So the programme we developed uses cognitive behavioural therapy techniques, to equip people with, with skills to manage anxiety and, and life stresses that happen and not rely on alcohol as their way of coping. So the five programme, sorry, a five week programme delivered online, and it was supplemented by therapist support through weekly emails and two phone calls for the five week period. And we, after talking to young people we decided to use to deliver it via the internet. So we knew that not only would that make the programme more accessible for people to access across Australia, but it also reduced, would reduce barriers to face to face treatment seeking. Big, big issues related to that are cost, and then time constraints, you know, having to do go see someone within, you know, a nine to five period. So online interventions really helped with that. So we ran a trial of Inroads in 2018. And we wanted to evaluate how effective the

Inroads online programme was in reducing anxiety and drinking in young people. And we compared how effective that was to providing education around alcohol use and providing young people with safe drinking guidelines. So we recruited 123 people aged 17 to 24, from across Australia, and we allocated half of those to receive the Inroads programme and half to get the alcohol education. And what we found was that over a six month period, the Inroads programme which you can see is in the green there, if I'm looking at that right, the Inroads programme resulted in significantly greater reductions in anxiety as well as drinking behaviours compared to the control. So we were really pleased with that, not particularly surprised. But we were really pleased to see that the programme was beneficial. And we also received really positive feedback about the programme from young people, we asked them for their feedback in a sort of free text way to get the feedback on what they thought and they really found that the program's format was appealing. So that was really great to know. So a couple of takeaways from the trial were that we found out reinforced that addressing both anxiety and alcohol simultaneously is really worthwhile, that we know that both problems are interconnected. And the more we spoke with young people themselves, we realised that they became aware of the interconnection. So we were teaching them to identify how their anxiety and drinking was linked, and then they were able to, I guess, see that more and more and then were able to better manage the problems because of that. So yeah, I guess by building young people's skills to manage your anxiety and drinking, that really helped that transitional period from out of high school onwards. Okay, and just lastly, we just wanted to provide a couple of support options and online programmes for teens who are experiencing anxiety and drinking problems. So as I mentioned, so, Inroads was previously trialled as a therapist supported programme, which was effective, and we're currently - the team today who's talking - we're currently trialling a self guided version of the programme that's coupled with more lay support rather than psychologist support. And it's for young people aged 17 to 30, who are experiencing anxiety and drinking at risky level. So if you happen to know a later teen who might benefit from learning skills to manage anxiety and drinking this programme, and trial might be really, really useful for them. There's also the Preventure programme, which is a school based prevention programme that aims to reduce alcohol and other drug use in high risk teenagers, and it's based on different personality types. And the programme is implemented by school counsellors and teachers within the classroom, so it might be relevant to any teachers here today. And training is available to run the programme, so feel free to check out the website there. And we'll be providing these slides too. So they're all hyperlinked, so you should be able to click on those later if that's useful. We've also got there's also the Cool Kids programme. So Cool Kids is an online programme for children and teenagers experiencing anxiety. So the ages 7 to 17. And the programme is designed for parents to work through the programme with their child at home to help better manage anxiety. And then lastly, is the Brave programme. So this is an online programme for anxiety in both children and adolescents. So they're self directed programmes. There's one for children and one for teenagers separately. And then there's one for parents as well. So what you can either do the programme separately, both parent and child or teenager, or you can do them in combination with a child as well. So, I guess to sum up today's webinar, so we know that anxiety and alcohol use, they're heavily interconnected. And being aware of how they are linked can be really important for helping teens manage their anxiety and drinking. We also know that parents play a really important role in recognising and supporting teens with anxiety. So Lexine did a great job of summarising this, but you can do that through calm connecting and motivating conversation, and also by facilitating help seeking among teens when they need it. There are a range of different support options that are available that have strong evidence base behind them both for teens and parents. Inroads is one of those programmes and we are currently trialling that so I'm gonna give it a little plug just because that's my bread and butter at the moment. I'm sorry about that. But yeah, it can be really useful for helping with that transition to young adulthood I guess

more so than the earlier teenage years. And then finally, we know that as as teens and young adults become stressed, they might start to turn to alcohol as a way to alleviate their anxiety and, and for this reason, having effective management techniques for their anxiety can really help the progression of, or prevent the progression of alcohol use into more problematic behaviours. So that's about it for us today. But we would love for people to throw any questions in the Q&A box, and we hope you all learned something, something new or would like to discuss something with us. Thank you.

A

Amelia Russell 55:10

Thank you so much. That was really great presentation, so informative. And we do have a few minutes left for questions. And I can see that Lexine has answered some as well in the Q&A box. And then as well, if we don't get time to get to yours, please feel free to email us at [info@positivechoices.org.au](mailto:info@positivechoices.org.au). And we'll try and get to that. And so just a first question that's come through is if there's any data on where teens are getting alcohol from, or how many of them are getting it from parents?

L

Lexine Stapinski 55:47

Yeah, I can jump in on that one. So I love how I feel like you would like me to go X percent or getting it from parent X was and getting it from friends. And yeah, unfortunately, the data that we get isn't as clear cut as that. But what I can tell you is that there is we certainly know that some proportion of teenagers are getting it from parents. Both peers are also an influence, older siblings. So basically, there's a variety of different sources. But I guess I know, I talked earlier about parents and supply because I think it's just a really important one for us to target. Because we know now, first of all that I think when I talk to parents, a lot of parents still kind of have the Mediterranean kind of understanding of parents and alcohol supply where it's sort of like, yeah, the idea of giving kids have it get letting them have a glass of wine with you over dinner, civilised, you know, teaches them how to use alcohol responsibly. And like, I think it makes sense, intuitively, it makes sense. But the data is just telling us time and time again, no, the data really shows that if you do give you your children alcohol, parental supply of alcohol, it is actually going to be associated with greater risk later on. So I think it's one that we can really focus on. Obviously, we can't control what their friends do, but we can control what parents do. So I think it's a really important one to focus on.

A

Amelia Russell 57:20

Thanks Lexine, just another question we've had is what is considered early intervention really inroads programme? So is that based on how long people have been drinking, how much they've been drinking?

L

Lexine Stapinski 57:32

Did you want to take that one cap?

—

K

Katrina Prior 57:35

Yeah, I can take that but feel free to interject if you have other thoughts? So the way we define it is, I guess, more about intervening before problems necessarily, like when symptoms first start emerging, rather than it being sort of dependent drinking or anything more severe. So intervening early, both, both I guess in an age sense that intervening before while they're young. And, you know, in that period before things typically peak, but then also in a symptom, sort of level intervening before problems become too severe so that you have more room to improve and prevent progression into more severe problem. Do you have any other thoughts?

L

Lexine Stapinski 58:18

Yeah, I was just, I was distracted by all the other fascinating questions in the Q&A. Thank you to everyone putting in your questions. I'm very much enjoying the dialogue.

A

Amelia Russell 58:28

We are right at the end, I think we might have time for just one more. And then otherwise, we'll try to get back to you over email as well. So someone's just asked if there's a difference among young men and women regarding anxiety. And in terms of the interventions, the catalyst and how their experience interacts with alcohol.

L

Lexine Stapinski 58:47

Yes, we definitely know that young, that there is an effect where women are more likely to experience anxiety, so to have anxiety and anxiety disorders. But when we're talking about alcohol, we also know that typically men have a more at risk of alcohol use disorder. So when we're talking about both problems, we're probably you know, when we work, for example, the Inroads programme we tend to get pretty much a mixed sample because you know, there's both people that are going to be affected, both men and women that will be affected by this. In terms of the interventions and the catalysts, the data to this point is that it's fairly similar, so that drinking to cope relationship it'll probably present slightly differently. So for example, in male roles, there's often an expectation, like with dating, for example, that you're going to be the one who's, you know, maybe more prominent or, you know, talking, initiating conversations with someone etc, etc. And so they might be more reliant on alcohol to help them do that, like there might be slight differences in the in the way it presents, but in general, the link is still there. and also to interventions are the same. Yep.

A

Amelia Russell 1:00:04

Thanks, Lexine. I do think we've got to the end of this now. So I've just put up our email address here and please feel free to send in any more questions and we'll get you in touch with the Inroads team. Thanks, everyone for joining us today.