CONNECTED PARENTS

A Tech-driven Approach for Empowering Parents to Prevent Adolescent Dating Violence

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THE PROJECT TO END
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

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Past and current funders

Financial contribution from

Public Health Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé publique du Canada

Alberta Government

CALGARY FOUNDATION
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Today's Objectives

1 Understand the ConnectED Parents initiative.

2 Explore key research findings.

3 Identify practical strategies for implementing and scaling tech-based approaches for supporting parents in violence prevention.

About Shift

https://preventdomesticviolence.ca/

REBUILDING LIVES
Long-term supports

CRISIS INTERVENTION
Intervention after violence has occurs

EARLY INTERVENTION
Intervention targeted at the early signs of violence

PRIMARY PREVENTION
Preventing violence before it occurs

Academic / Research

Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence

Government/ Policy

Community/ Practitioner
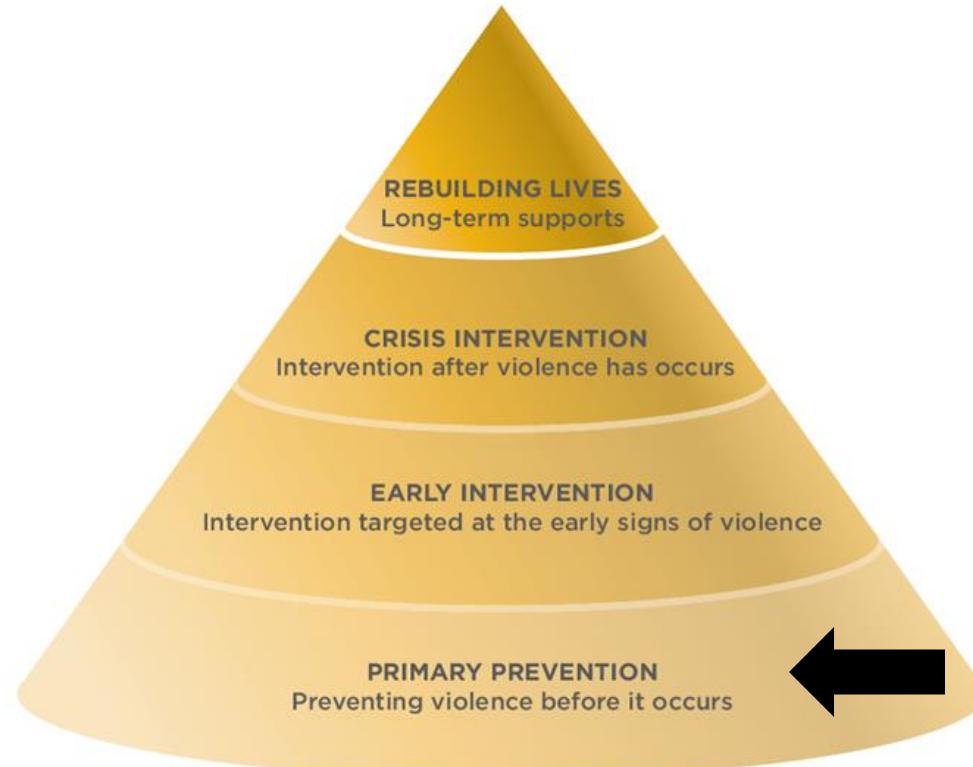
What is Adolescent Dating Violence (ADV)?

Aggressive, threatening, and/or manipulative behaviour occurring in adolescent romantic and sexual relationships.

Dating violence experienced during adolescence significantly increases the odds of future victimization by a romantic partner.

Prevention is Key

Source: Exner-Cortens et al., 2017

Calls to action to create ConnectED Parents

1 Parents are generally not talking to their teens about ADV prevention

2 Parents are generally not participating in traditional prevention programs

3 Prevention is not top of mind for many parents

4 Need to catch up with the tech revolution – leverage tech for primary prevention

Sources: Glauber A. & Randel J. (2007); Black M.B. et al. (2015); Ingoldsby E. M. (2010); Whittaker, K. A. & Cowley, S. (2010).

Learn more about the research and theories guiding the ConnectED Parents approach:

https://preventdomesticviolence.ca/our-work/children-youth-parents/connected-parents-project/

Individual knowledge, attitudes, skills

Parent behaviour

Social networks, norms, and role models

Physical, digital, and social environments
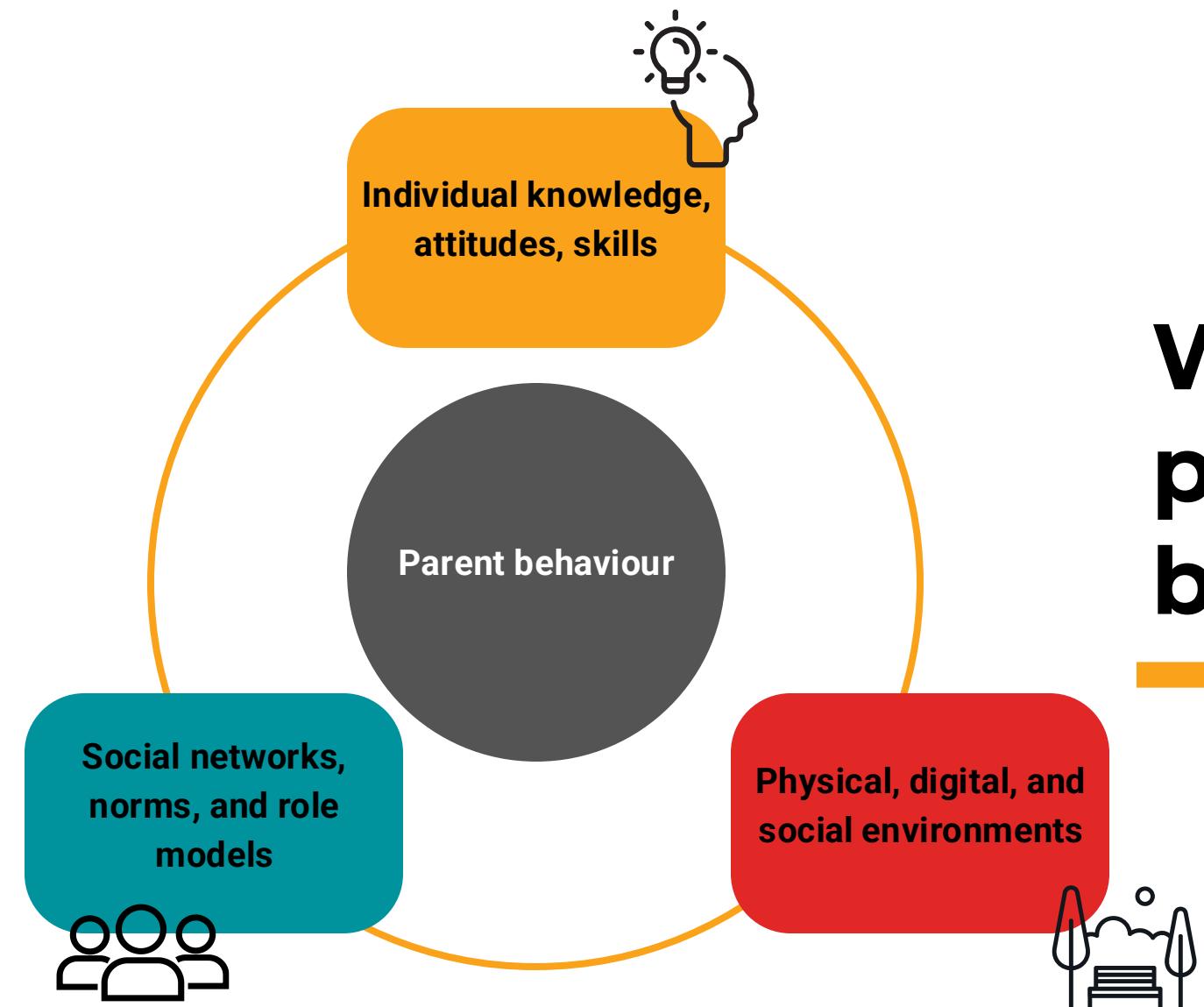
What drives a parent's behaviour?

Source: Petit, V. (2019)

What is ConnectED Parents?

Parents develop skills through text message learning modules

Parents learn about ADV prevention and teach their children

Parent leaders offer peer support on healthy youth relationships
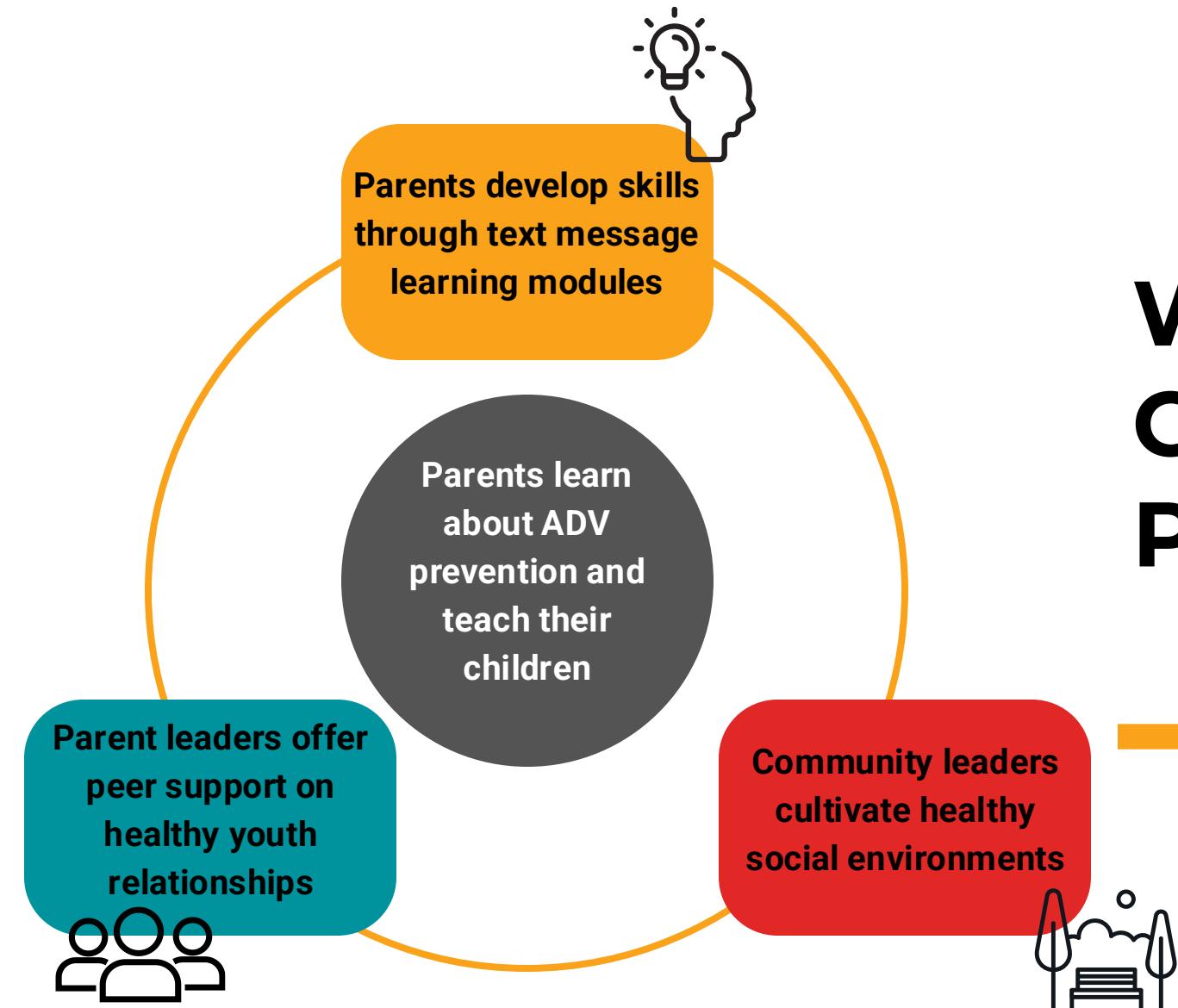
Community leaders cultivate healthy social environments

How Does ConnectED Parents Work?

1. Partner with settings where parents naturally go

Examples:
- Workplaces
- Extracurricular settings for youth
- Online groups
- Faith settings
- Community organizations

Preconditions:
1. A setting where parents regularly go
2. Existing relationships among parents

2. Work with community leaders/staff to build healthy social environments

Identify key community leaders and service provider staff

Over 4 sessions, train community leaders and staff to cultivate healthy social environments in parent settings

Use Shift's healthy social environments framework to map their parent settings & make it healthier via changes to practices, policies, and infrastructure

3. Identify and work with parent leaders to offer peer support

Select parent leaders through peer nomination

Over 3 sessions, train parent leaders on motivational interviewing, self-reflection, and boundaries

Parent leaders lead one-on-one check-ins about healthy youth relationships with matched parent

4. Deliver text learning modules to parents on healthy youth relationships

Parents receive 2-3 skill-building texts per week for 6 months

Parents choose a learning pathway that fits their comfort with dating and parent-child connection

Topics covered over 7 texting modules include:
- What is dating?
- Healthy, unhealthy, abusive relationships
- Parent-child relationships
- Teaching healthy relationship skills
- Warning signs & helpful responses

Example text to parents
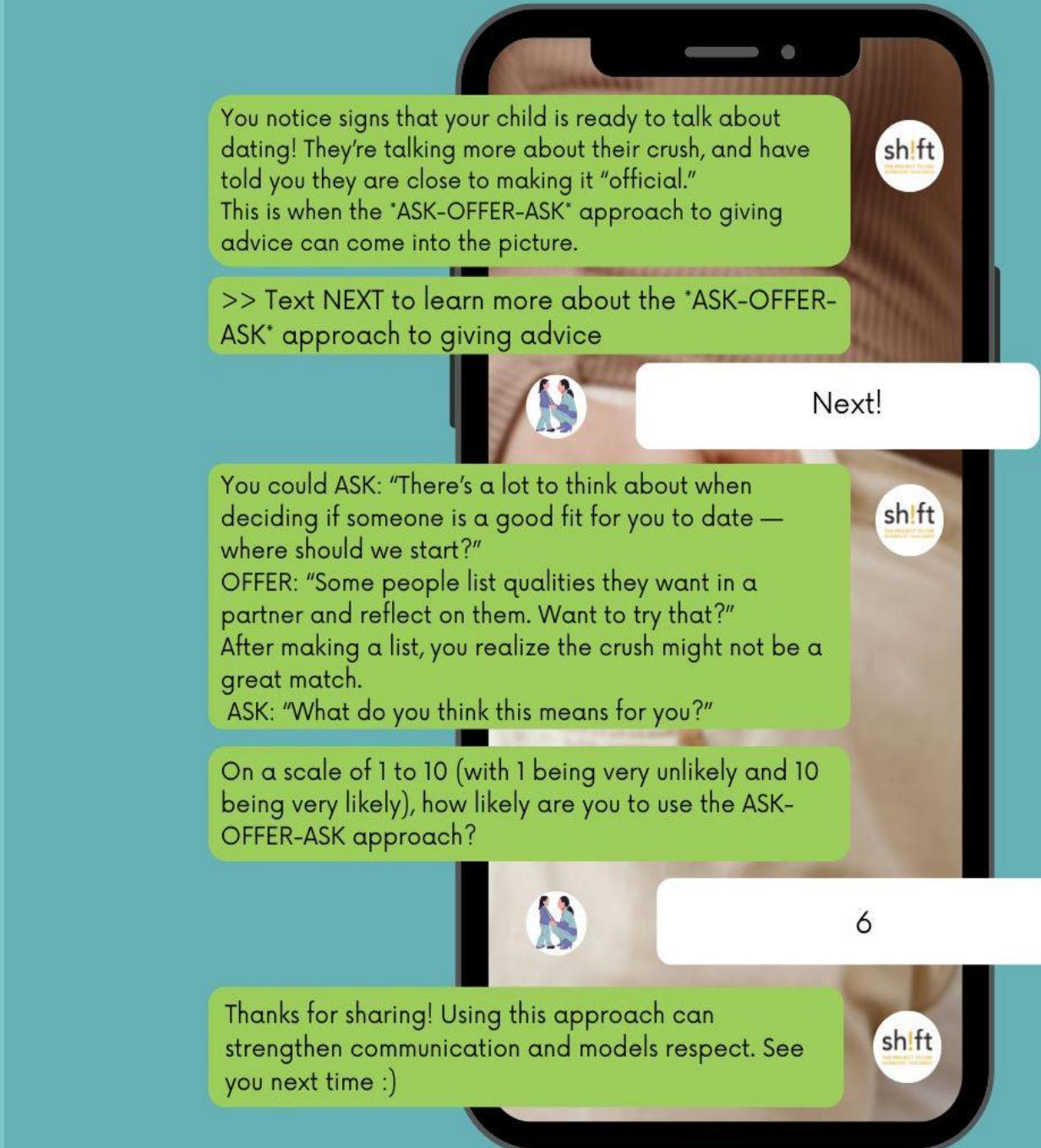
Research Questions

1. Does ConnectED Parents increase service providers' ability to create healthy social environments with parents?

2. Does it increase parent leaders' ability to provide peer support on healthy youth relationships?

3. Does it increase parents' competencies to engage in quality conversations with their children about ADV prevention and healthy dating relationships?

4. Is ConnectED Parents Plus (full intervention) more effective than ConnectED Parents Text-Only?

Methodology

1 Convergent parallel mixed-methods design | Guided by critical ethnographic approach

2 **Study streams**

- In-person community setting
- Shift-led online parent setting (Facebook group)
- Text-only

3 **Target groups**

- Service providers that build healthy social environments (n = 3 – 5)
- Parent leaders that provide peer support (n = 3)
- Parents Plus, full intervention (n = 3 – 22)
- Parents Text-only (n = 17 – 46)

4 **Methods**

- Pre, post, follow-up surveys
- One-on-one interviews

- Post-text module surveys
- Observations

- Intervention Lead journal
- Text message platform tracking

Parent demographics

- **Gender:** 89% women, 9% men, 2% non-binary

- **Age:** Mostly 30 – 50 years old

- **Education:** 83% have post-secondary education

- **Income:** 15% making less than $30K and 25% making more than $100K

- **Indigeneity:** 7% of parents identify as Indigenous

- **Ethnicity:**
  - 72% of parents identify as white
  - 28% racialized (Black, Chinese, Filipino, Latin American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, West Asian)

- **Family structure:** 68% co-parent with live-in partner, while 15% are single parent/caregiver

- **Child age:**
  - 53% have at least one child 6 – 9 years old
  - 60% have at least one child 10-14 years old
  - 23% have at least one child 15 – 20 years old

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative:**
  - Descriptive statistics
  - Demographic analysis
  - Analysis of change in outcome variables using non-parametric tests (Wilcoxon Signed Rank)

- **Qualitative:**
  - Thematic analysis (inductive and deductive)
  - Post-critical ethnographic approach

- **Combining:**
  - Joint displays and narrative comparison

Limitations

- Partial implementation

- Sample diversity

- Small sample sizes, especially for service provider and parent leader groups

Key Findings: Service Providers & Healthy Social Environments

01   **Growth in knowledge, skills, and confidence:** 100% agreed that ConnectED training improved their understanding of how to build healthy social environments.

02   **Intent to apply learnings:** 100% developed plans to assess parents' experience of their setting.

03   **Interest in peer support and innovative text-messaging models for parent engagement:**
- 75% agreed that educational texts could help parents build skills to teach healthy relationship practices.
- "The text-based approach feels doable for families who are already overwhelmed with commitments."

🔍 Key Findings: Service Providers & Healthy Social Environments ✕

04

Valued collaborative partnership to prevent ADV:
- "Thank you very much for leading this project. This is incredibly valuable!"

05

Implementation challenges and considerations for equity:
- Service providers not able to implement healthy social environments and peer support components of ConnectED due to low parent participation.
- Future iterations can be adapted to include more targeted approaches customized for specific social groups.

Key Findings: Parent Leaders & Peer Support

01 Limited implementation and engagement

02 Potential barriers to parent leader uptake: Trust is essential for peer support

03 Informal supports still valued:

> "...I do have my match in terms of finding another parent who is totally unconnected to this group...So basically what I found in that friend is that she works as that matching parent basically, and our relationship is based on that, and that's very useful and it's a support that's important. So I think the whole idea globally idea is amazing."

# Key Findings: Parents and Text-based Learning
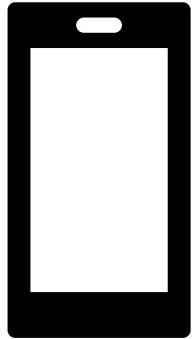
01 **Improved knowledge, skills, confidence, and comfort to teach healthy relationships skills**

- "The space to **think about power and how I understand power was very helpful**, especially the content that made me reflect how power is often presented as something to wield and not always explored as something to share, particularly with children/adolescents."

- Significant **increase in how often parents talked with children** about healthy relationships and dating violence at 3-month follow-up.

- **Conversation satisfaction increased** significantly: 90% satisfied/very satisfied after ConnectED, 39% before ConnectED.
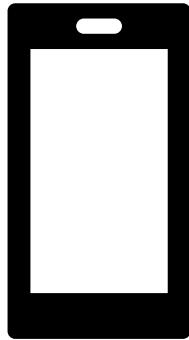
02 **Valued the convenience and usefulness of texting component**

- "I had previously been through dating violence with my daughter but had no idea how to handle everything. Between that experience and the resources you shared I'm now much better prepared for when my son starts dating."

- "...Those quick snippets on the go [were] really helpful and where it was...a program that built [my learning] and it wasn't [that] I need[ed] to find three hours to attend this seminar, or one hour a week, or whatever. So I really liked that."

- Post-intervention, 92% of parents agreed/strongly agreed that text messages were a useful tool, compared to 55% pre-intervention.

- At a 3-month follow-up, 96.8% of parents agreed/strongly agreed that text messages were a useful tool.

Key Findings: Parents and Text-based Learning
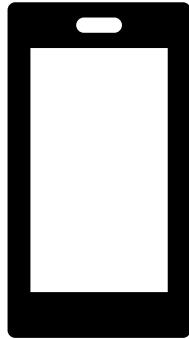
03 Participation enhanced broader positive changes in parenting

- "I am more collaborative and less strict."
- "I have more awareness of the foundation needed to be able to enter into those conversations – tending to positive connections first."

04 Child's developmental stage and unique parent experiences shaped engagement in ADV prevention content

- Some parents perceived their children were too young for the content or not yet dating.
- Some parents found their experiences were not always reflected in the scenarios, language, and content.

Key Findings: Parents and Text-based Learning
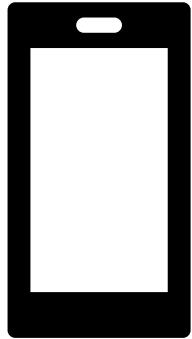
05   **Supportive online environments can support parent learning**

- 80% of parents reported that participating in a healthy social environment improved their ability to talk to their youth about healthy relationships.
- Passive participation in the Facebook group was still beneficial for their learning.

06   **Text component of ConnectED fully implemented with high retention**

- Only the texting component of intervention was fully implemented.
- 83% of parents stayed until the end of the initiative, with 100% of these receiving all texts.

Key Findings: Full Intervention Vs. Text-only

Both streams positively supported parents' knowledge, skills, and behaviours to lead healthy relationships conversations with their children

Parents in text-only stream had more positive perception of ConnectED Parents compared to parents in full intervention

No significant differences when quantitative data disaggregated by racialized background

Qualitative findings show ConnectED Parents supported diverse parents, but could better support dads, different family structures, and people with different values around dating

CONNECT**ED** PARENTS

Lessons & Reflections

Key Takeaway 1

Microlearning, texting, and parent-centered design can support parents in preventing ADV and promoting healthy youth relationships

Recommendations

PRACTICE
Design parent-centered, text-based microlearning for ADV prevention.

POLICY
Invest in digital ADV prevention infrastructure.

Key Takeaway 2

Healthy online environments support active and passive learning in parents...

And parents participate less when they see low participation from others.

Recommendations

PRACTICE
Draw on social norm and social network approaches to highlight positive participation and learning milestones in online parent settings – make learning explicit.

POLICY
Fund new ways to promote and measure visible and invisible online engagement in ADV prevention efforts.

Key Takeaway 3

Parent-child relationships are both a foundation and outcome of healthy relationships conversations...

And a potential pathway for broader relational change

Recommendations

PRACTICE
Make strengthening parent-child bonds core to all ADV prevention programs and embed opportunities for parents' own relational growth using text-based learning.

POLICY
Fund longitudinal research on family-level benefits of ADV prevention.

Key Takeaway 4

ADV content must feel relevant and resonate deeply with parents.

1. How can AI help?
2. How can a skills-first approach help?

Recommendations

PRACTICE
- Explore how AI can personalize learning.
- To target parents with younger children, focus on skills – then work towards broader and deeper attitude shifts.

POLICY
Allocate funding to create culturally, linguistically, and contextually adaptive ADV prevention content using emerging tech (i.e., AI).

Key Takeaway 5

Microlearning, tech-based nudges may bridge the intention-behaviour gap among service providers to advance ADV prevention

Recommendations

PRACTICE
Use behavioural science strategies – light-touch, low-commitment, tech-enabled nudges – to build service providers' capacities. Focus on micro-actions to help new habits take root.

POLICY
Fund behavioural nudge approaches to support service providers in adopting new practices.

Key Takeaway 6

ADV prevention for parents need targeted influencer and diffused peer support approaches.

What is the role of parent leaders, weavers, and diffusers?

Recommendations

PRACTICE
Equip a broad range of parents with peer support skills.

POLICY
Allocate funding to a spectrum of peer support models – including leader, weaver, and diffuser roles based on network structure.

Key Takeaway 7

ADV prevention efforts need to influence parents' broader communication environment
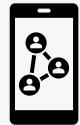
Recommendations

PRACTICE: Establish a strong, sustained presence in the digital and social spaces where parents frequently and naturally go.

POLICY: Fund saturation pilots targeting geographic and digital communities, with multi-channel, repeated ADV prevention messaging.

Considerations for the ADV Prevention Field

- Bite-sized, text-based learning is setting a new standard for parent engagement and ADV prevention education.

- Prioritize the development of healthy social environments in parents' online spaces and leverage passive learning.

- Support a spectrum of peer roles to adapt to the realities of modern parenting, where social networks are often fragmented and influence distributed.

- Explore and develop ways to saturate parents' communication environments.

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Questions & Discussion

THANK YOU

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