

Incorporating Parents in the Anti-Doping Fight: A Test of the Viability of a Parent-Based Prevention Program

Summary

One of the most important environmental factors in the life of adolescents are their parents. Despite the overwhelmingly important role that parents play in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of their adolescent, there have been almost no studies that have examined the role of parents in adolescents' decisions to use doping agents.

One way that parents exert influence on their adolescents is by communicating with their son or daughter. The present study tests a theoretical model of parent-adolescent communication about the use of doping agents. Over the past decade, there has been a growing recognition of the benefits of including parents in prevention programs aimed at reducing adolescent risk behaviors (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Dittus & Bouris, 2006; Jaccard, Dodge & Dittus, 2002). This line of research has focused on understanding the process of parent-adolescent communication and identifying ways to strengthen parent-adolescent communication about risky behaviors.

For anti-doping interventions to have strongest and longest lasting impact, they must transcend changes in coaches and teams and allow adolescents to receive content relevant to him/her. Parents are in a good position to send consistent messages that transcend changes in team affiliation and to recognize the changing needs of their son or daughter. Thus, a parent based intervention program to improve parent-adolescent communication about doping agents may address some of the shortcomings of existing anti-doping prevention programs.

The current study incorporates two classes of variables that social science research has shown are critical for developing effective communications: message content and message source (Cialdini, 1993). Message content refers to information that is conveyed during parentadolescent discussions. Parent-adolescent discussions that reduce B-O expectancies, include information about alternatives, about how to refuse offers and discuss the ethical/social consequences should result in lower intentions to use AS and legal nutritional supplements on the part of the adolescent.

There are two characteristics of the source of a message that influence the effectiveness of a communication: expertise and trustworthiness. Sources that are most effective at communicating are those sources that the recipient perceives as expert and trustworthy (Cialdini, 1993). Expertise refers to whether or not the source is knowledgeable about the topic. Trustworthiness refers to whether or not the source has the best interests of the recipient at heart. With respect to information about doping agents, information conveyed by a source that is knowledgeable about the topic and that is trustworthy will be more influential than when the information is conveyed by a source that is not perceived as knowledgeable and trustworthy. The present study tests a theoretical model of parent-adolescent communication that incorporates information about the message and the source aimed at reducing adolescents' intentions to use AS and legal nutritional supplements. This model of parent-adolescent communication can be used to help guide parent-based anti-doping efforts.