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The role of parental alcohol-specific communication in early adolescents' alcohol use

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Abstract

Many alcohol prevention programs advocate conversations about alcohol between parents and children because verbal communication is the most direct way for parents to express their thoughts, rules, and concerns about alcohol to their children, so called alcohol-specific communication. Nevertheless, research on the effects of alcohol-specific communication has produced inconsistent findings. This study examined the bidirectional links between frequency of alcohol-specific communication and early adolescents' alcohol use, and the moderating effects on these links of gender and experience with alcohol. The longitudinal sample consisted of 428 Dutch early adolescents who were followed over 3 years. Results of structural equation models indicated that more frequent alcohol-specific communication at time two predicted more adolescent alcohol use at time three. Follow-up multiple-group analyses clearly

show that prospective links between alcohol-specific communication and adolescent alcohol use were limited to adolescent males reporting the highest levels of drinking. For this group of drinking males, alcohol use predicted less parent-child communication, and more frequency of alcohol-specific communication predicted an increase in drinking. Alcohol-specific communication and adolescent alcohol use were not prospectively linked for males reporting lower levels of alcohol use or for adolescent females. These findings highlight the need for future research that examines both quantitative and qualitative aspects of how parents communicate with their adolescent children about alcohol. Advocation of specific parent-child communication skills meant to reduce youth alcohol use may be somewhat premature until additional studies refine our understanding of how specific parenting strategies are linked to different patterns of adolescent alcohol use.



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Keywords

Alcohol; Communication; Adolescence; Parents; Gender

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