



The Choking Game

By Laura S. Otte

The “Choking Game” doesn’t involve substances, but is a very dangerous method young people use to get high. The initial “high” is a result of brain cells beginning to die as the participant becomes unconscious. The secondary “high” is felt when the pressure is released and blood rushes back to the brain. Either they choke each other, or use a noose to choke themselves. In just a few moments, the person being choked can pass out, leaving them at serious risk of injury, permanent brain damage, and death from hanging or strangulation.

The tools youth use to play the choking game: bed sheets, blankets, ropes, scarves, bungee cords, dog leashes, and belts; can easily be found in the home. Youth may also use their own hands to play the choking game, which is also referred to as the Pass Out game, Space Monkey, Suffocation Roulette, Cloud Nine, and Flat Lining.

Unconsciousness occurs within a matter of seconds. Within just three minutes of continued strangulation, basic functions of the body begin to fail, including balance, memory and the central nervous system. Death occurs shortly thereafter. Non-fatal, but long-term consequences of the choking game are death of brain cells, coma, seizures, broken bones or concussions from falls after losing consciousness, and hemorrhaging of the eyes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Boys were much more likely to die from the choking game than girls; 87% of victims were boys.
- Most of the children that died were 11-16 years old (89%).
- Nearly all of the children who died were playing the game alone when they died.
- Deaths have occurred all over the United States; the choking game isn’t limited to one area of the country.

Because items used in the choking game themselves are not suspicious, it is important for parents, caregivers, educators, peers, and health care providers to know the warning signs. Signs a child is playing the choking game include:

- Discussion of the game or its aliases
- Bloodshot eyes
- Marks on the neck
- Wearing high-necked shirts, even in warm weather
- Frequent, severe headaches
- Disorientation after spending time alone
- Increased and uncharacteristic irritability or hostility
- Ropes, scarves, and belts tied to bedroom furniture or doorknobs or found knotted on the floor
- The unexplained presence of dog leashes, choke collars, bungee cords, etc.
- Petechiae (pinpoint bleeding spots) under the skin of the face, especially the eyelids, or the conjunctiva (the lining of the eyelids and eyes)