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Investigating a Discrete and Deadly Behavior: “The Choking Game”

How is the "game" defined?

"The choking game is a dangerous activity that older children and early adolescents sometimes play to get a brief high. They either choke each other or use a noose to choke themselves. After just a short time, children can pass out, which may lead to serious injury or even death from hanging or strangulation. "

(Source: CDCP, 2008)

"The Choking Game has been luring, affecting, injuring and killing teens for generations. The object of the game is to stop blood flow to the brain until the player passes out in an attempt to get a 'high' or 'floaty' sensation. Some participate for this 'high', others as a pass time, out of curiosity or as a result of peer pressure. Many do not perceive a risk when engaging in this practice. "

(Source: The DB Foundation, 2011)

Statistics-CDCP

- CDCP data estimates 800 to 1,000 kids between the ages of 10 to 19 die of strangulation every year. Most of these are recorded as suicides and are not known if they were accidents resulting from the game.
- CDCP and the DB Foundation estimate that 10% of the deaths are the result of the choking game.

Statistics (G.A.S.P., 2011)

YEAR	INCIDENTS	AGE RANGE
2011	4(3 deaths,1 recovery)	13-17
2010	43(32 deaths, 11 recoveries)	9-21
2009	75 (56 deaths,19 recoveries)	6-21
2008	126 (118 deaths, 8 recoveries)	7-37
2007	147 (133 deaths,14 recoveries)	6-51
2006	151(137 deaths,14 recoveries)	6-27
2005	120 (112 deaths, 8 recoveries)	7-29
2004	50 (48 deaths, 2 recoveries)	10-33
2003	17 (17 deaths)	10-26
2002	23 (23 deaths)	8-20
2001	31 (28 deaths, 3 recoveries)	8-23
2000	30 (29 deaths, 1 recovery)	9-37
1934-1999	73 (64 deaths, 9 recoveries)	6-33

What is the game?

- Victims cut off the flow of blood to the brain, to feel lightheaded.
- Some use a belt, rope, scarf, bare hands or others push on their chest or hyperventilate.
- When the pressure is released, blood that was blocked floods the brain creating a warm and fuzzy feeling, this is the brain dying, thousands of cells at a time.
- The “high” can be addictive.
- Unlike AeA (auto erotic asphyxia), it does not involve a sexual component

What are the choking methods?

- Bear hug Chest compression
- Palms to Chest compression
- Choke Hold neck Compression
- Hyperventilation combined with any of the previously mentioned
- Palms to Carotid Neck Compression
- Hyperventilation with Thumb Blow
- Thumb Blow
- Ligature

What are the medical aspects?

- Hypoxia-a part or region of body is deprived of oxygen
- Anoxia-complete deprivation of oxygen
- Brain cells die after deprivation of oxygen.
- Diminishing oxygen to the brain produces a sensation or 'high' and the beginning of permanent cell death.
- When the victim is rendered unconscious, the pressure is released and the secondary 'high' of the oxygen/blood rushing to the brain is achieved.
- If the victim is alone - upon unconsciousness there is no one to release the pressure and the victims own body weight continues to tighten the ligature usually resulting in death.

Who is at risk?

- Boys and girls age 9-16 (majority of deaths occur in males)
- Reported in U.S., France, Britain, and Canada
- Model students who are high-achievers who do not want to experiment with drugs and alcohol highs
- Practice is spread on internet and among peers
- Begins as a “Social Activity” and then practiced alone. No support to rescue the individual.
- Mean age of participation is 13.5 years of age.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Discussion of the game or its aliases
- Bloodshot eyes
- Linear marks on the neck
- Questions about strangulation and hypoxia
- Loss of concentration and flushed face
- Wearing high-necked shirts, even in warm weather
- Frequent and severe headaches
- Disorientation after spending time alone
- A “thud” in the closet of bedroom

Signs and Symptoms-continued

- Locked or blocked bedroom or bathroom
- Increased and uncharacteristic irritability or hostility
- Ligatures-ropes, scarves, and belts tied to bedroom furniture or doorknobs or found knotted on the floor
- Wear marks on furniture
- Presence of dog leashes, choke collars, bungee cords, etc.
- Petechiae (pinpoint bleeding spots) under the skin of the face, eyelids, or the conjunctiva

What else is it called?

Blackout

Space Monkey

Suffocation

Pass-out

California High

Space Monkey

Funky Chicken

Gasp

Purple Dragon

Space Cowboy

Fainting Game

Dream Game

Roulette

Flat liner

Airplaning

American Dream

Tingling

Scarf Fame

Cloud Nine

What are the health consequences?

- Loss of consciousness and death of brain cells due to oxygen deprivation in the brain
- Coma and seizures may occur in severe cases
- Concussions or broken bones from falls
- Hemorrhages of the eye
- Petechiae (pinpoint bleeding spots) under the skin of the face, eyelids, or the conjunctiva

How to prevent the activity?

- Be aware of texting symbols: ;)/// ;;})))
- Talk to children about the “game” and the importance of breathing and body systems.
- Emphasize circulation, heart, lung, and brain functions in classes.
- Teach CPR to students.
- Include “Choking Game” information in middle, junior, and senior high orientation and health curriculum.
- Stay alert for websites, phone calls, social network sites dealing with the “game.”
- Share awareness information, pictures, and stories of victims.

How to intervene and help parents:

- Be cognizant of “game clusters.”
- Increase supervision and be aware of activities and whereabouts .
- Make an 'open door' rule.
- Remove any materials that could be used as a ligature.
- Alert the parents about the practice.
- Request physicians to address the risks.
- Alert younger age groups if the “game” is being played by older students.

Role of the Educator

- Write congressperson and request educational awareness through the CDCP-
(petition2congress)
- Conduct awareness presentations to parents, students, and community stakeholders
- Combine with CPR, anatomy, and biology course content
- Be aware of risky student activities
- Get involved, be assertive, save a life!

Where can we go for help and information?

- Center for Disease Control and Prevention
cdc.gov/ncipc/duip/research/choking_game
- Games Adolescents Shouldn't Play (G.A.S.P.)
GASPinfo.com
- The Dangerous Behaviors Foundation
TheDBFoundation.com
- DeadlyGamesChildrenPlay.com

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