



The Choking "Game"

Fact Sheet

Have you heard of The Choking "Game"?

Recent reports indicate that some of our youth are engaging in this dangerous activity which can lead to accidental death. The intent of this Fact Sheet is to increase your awareness about "The Choking Game", so you can be informed and feel more prepared in speaking with the children or youth in your life, about this very risky stunt.

What is the Choking Game?

The choking game is not a game at all. It is the act of self-suffocating to achieve a few seconds of a "high" feeling. Young people use various means to strangulate themselves, in order to cut off the oxygen supply to their brain. When the pressure is released, a brief feeling of euphoria or a "high" is experienced as the oxygen rushes back to the brain. The youth inevitably loses consciousness and often seizures are generated. In addition, the loss of oxygen can cause permanent brain damage or death. Anytime someone cuts off oxygen to their brain, brain cells die.

Other names for the Choking "Game" are:

The Pass Out Game, The Fainting Game, Blackout, Airplaning, Space Monkey, Dream Game, Flatliner

Who is Playing the Choking Game?

Children and adolescents, both male and female, usually between the ages of 9-16 years old have been known to participate in this stunt. About five percent of Ontario students reported engaging in the choking game to get high at least once (2009 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey report from CAMH). These youth often do not seem to be experiencing any problems and do not seem like the type of child to be at risk. Generally, these adolescents tend to be high-achievers in academics or extra-curricular activities, such as music or sports. They view this activity as a harmless way to get a rush without engaging in the use of drugs or alcohol. (Neumann-Potash, 2006).

How is the Choking Game Played?

This activity is learned via word of mouth and through the internet. Sometimes youth will engage in this stunt alone, with a partner or in a group. If played in a group, one youth willingly agrees to being choked by another. Ropes, scarves, belts, bags, dog leashes, and bare hands are all examples of items that can be used as the choking weapon. Others may simply hold their breath or hyperventilate until they pass out. If the Choking Game is played alone the risk of death is greater, as often times, when the youth loses consciousness they are unable to release the rope, etc. resulting in their premature death. Death caused by such suffocation activities can mistakenly be branded as a suicide, but in actuality, the youth did not mean to cause their own death.

Why are Youth Playing the Choking Game?

There are several different reasons why youth might participate in the Choking Game. Some do it for a thrill, because it's "cool" and risky. Others engage in this activity for a cheap high, often as an alternative to illegal substances. The few seconds of a euphoric state that is achieved, can become addictive. Youth have also reported "playing" as a response to peer pressure or simply out of curiosity.

(Dylan Blake Foundation for Adolescent Behaviours)

"Regardless of the motivation for self-suffocation, potential harms are the same."

(Dr. Cantor)

What are the WARNING SIGNS of the Choking Game?

- ◆ Blood shot eyes
- ◆ Hoarseness
- ◆ Frequent Headaches
- ◆ Locked doors
- ◆ Excessive need for privacy
- ◆ Foggy or Disorientation after being alone
- ◆ Increased agitation or irritability
- ◆ Unusual marks (redness, cuts, bruises) on the neck
- ◆ Unexplained presence of belts, scarves, bungee cords or plastic bags
- ◆ Any of the above items tied to bedroom furniture, in closets, etc.
- ◆ Bleeding spots under the skin on the face, especially under the eyelids

(Neumann-Potash, 2006)

What Can I do to Prevent Youth from Playing the Choking Game?

Talk to the youth in your life. It is important to make them aware of the facts and dangers of suffocation games and other risky behaviours. It is important for youth to be informed so they know the risks of engaging in such an activity. Accidental death can occur and even if they survive, brain cells are being permanently damaged/killed. Participation could also lead to such things as heart attacks, stroke and brain bleeds. Adults play a crucial role in the lives of youth. Get involved. Ask questions. Find out what is going on in their lives. Take the time to openly and honestly communicate with your child. Know what your child is doing in their bedroom, what they are researching on the web, who they are hanging out with, and what activities they are engaging in. Remember to listen without judgement to their thoughts and opinions, and offer sound guidance and advice. Building a strong and caring relationship with the youth in your life is the key to providing them support and empowering them to make informed decisions. Research has found that youth who think their parents know a lot about what they are doing are more likely to interact with peers who have a positive influence on them and are less likely to take dangerous risks. (Smartrisk)

Sources: Neumann-Potash, 2006

About.com Parenting Tweens
Games Adolescents Shouldn't Play (GASP)
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)
National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)
Dylan Blake Foundation for Adolescent Behaviours

Smartrisk

If I Believe Someone is Playing the Choking Game,

What Can I do?

- ◆ Speak to someone who can help. Examples of People who can help include:
Teacher, Guidance Counsellor, Principal, School Psychometrist, Psychologist, Family Doctor, Social Worker, Child and Youth Worker, Community Mental Health Professional, Police Officer, Pediatrician, Coach, Clergy
- ◆ Warn the youth about the dangers of this activity.
- ◆ Supervise the youth very closely and get rid of items that could be used for strangulation.
- ◆ Alert school officials. The student will need to be monitored at school, and other students may also be participating.
- ◆ Encourage healthy alternative activities that get the youth's adrenaline flowing, such as snowboarding, rock climbing, theatre or dance.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Teen Mental Health

www.teenmentalhealth.org

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

www.camh.ca

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

www.nasponline.org/resources/self-injury-resources.aspx

Games Adolescents Shouldn't Play (G.A.S.P.)

www.gaspinfo.com

Kids Help Phone

www.kidshelpphone.ca

Local Mental Health Agencies

Chatham-Kent Children's Services

495 Grand Ave., W., Chatham, ON 519-352-0440

www.ckcs.on.ca

St. Clair Child and Youth Services

129 Kendall, Point Edward, ON 519-337-3701

www.stclairchild.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association

519-436-6100

Crisis Line—available 24/7—1-866-299-7447

Family Service Kent

519-354-6221

Family Counselling Centre

519-336-0120

Distress Line (24 hrs) - 519-336-3000 or 1-888-347-8737