
The Choking Game: Risky Youth Behavior

taken from the Center for Disease Control and GASP



The “choking game” is not a game at all, but a dangerous activity that some older children and early adolescents sometimes “play” to get a brief high. They either choke each other or use something 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.

Since 1995, at least 82 children and adolescents have died as a result of playing "the choking game," according to a new study by CDC's Injury Center. Researchers analyzed media reports of deaths of children and adolescents from the choking game. Highlights from their findings address some common questions about this public health threat.

What is the choking game?

The choking game is a dangerous activity that older children and early adolescents sometimes do to get a brief high. This can affect people of all ages, however, adolescents tend to be at most risk for “playing this game”.

They either choke each other or use an item to choke themselves. There are many variations, but essentially, it is cutting off the flow of blood to the brain by choking, hyperventilating, compressing the chest, or hanging by a belt, towel, rope, etc. After just a short time, children can pass out, which may lead to serious injury or even death from hanging or strangulation.

What does it feel like?

The first feeling is light-headedness (a perceived "high") due to reduced blood flow, and, therefore reduced delivery of oxygen to the brain. The second part comes with the removal of pressure on the chest or neck releasing a powerful surge of dammed up blood through the carotid arteries into the brain (a perceived "rush"). Also at this time, brain cells are starting to die. As the cells die, there is a chemical release that gives a euphoric feeling. Adolescents need to realize that this feeling is actually **the brain dying**. Children may think that it is safer than using drugs, but **this is wrong**. It can be just as deadly and it also has an addictive quality to the adolescents doing this.

There are many ways that this activity can kill a person. It is not safe at all. Many times the person being choked faints from the lack of oxygen. Fainting is caused by the brain starving for oxygen. Brain cells die and will never regenerate. This can result in long

term brain damage; even a vegetative state. Also, when the blood is rushing back into the brain the surge can lead to a stroke (bleed in the brain) or seizures. Both of these can lead to severe brain damage and even death. Less serious injuries include: broken bones, concussions, major cuts, eye injuries, and even deaths from the fall.

Who is most at risk for death from playing the choking game?

- 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.

Why Are Children Dying?

- Within 3 minutes a child will suffer noticeable brain damage
- Between 4 and 5 minutes without oxygen to the brain, a child will die
- Some of those who have died were alone for as little as 15 minutes before someone found them and it was already too late.
- This activity can claim a child's life the first time it is “played”.

What are the warning signs that a person is playing the choking game?

Parents, educators, health-care providers, or peers may observe any of the following signs that can indicate a child has been involved in the choking game:

- 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)

What are some of the other names used for the choking game?

- Pass-out game
- Purple hazing
- Space monkey
- Suffocation roulette
- Scarf game
- The American dream
- Fainting game
- Something dreaming game
- Blacking out/blackout
- Dream game
- Flat liner
- California choke
- Space cowboy
- Airplaning
- Purple dragon
- Cloud nine

How quickly can someone die after playing the choking game?

Someone can become unconscious in a matter of seconds. Within three minutes of continued strangulation (i.e., hanging), basic functions such as memory, balance, and the central nervous system start to fail. Death occurs shortly after.

Are there non-fatal, long-term consequences of the choking game?

- 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 (including jaws) from falls associated with the choking game
- Hemorrhages of the eye

How can the choking game be prevented?

Research is not available on the best strategies to prevent the choking game. However, parents, educators, and health-care providers should be made aware of this public health threat and the warning signs that adolescents may be “playing the game”.

What can I do to help stop this?

- Be vigilant.
- Talk to the children in your life, as well as parents and others you know who works with children about this. Make sure they understand why “the choking game” is so dangerous: even if a person plays it and survives, they are permanently killing thousands of brain cells, and if there is a death or injury other children who are present may be indicted and prosecuted for their involvement.
- If you are suspicious that your child is involved in this dangerous activity, remove all items that could be used for this purpose.

- Alert school officials so they can monitor the situation; often other students may also be participating.
- Consider alerting the adolescent's friends' parents as well, since others may be doing this as well.
- If you feel strongly that your child may be doing this, supervise your child carefully and you may wish to seek professional support for your child and your family.

For more information check out:

- The Center for Disease Control
- www.GASPINFO.com