

## “What is the choking game?”

By SRO Andy Hall

Across the nation our students and children are playing a game that is very serious. You may have seen the headlines about kids dying from the “choking game” also called, “ghost” or the “pass out game”. While you may remember some form of this game from your days in school, today’s kids are taking it a step further by tying ropes, neck ties, cords or other items that are cutting off their air supply until they pass out. The problem is that kids are doing this alone at home and are unable to untie the rope and are suffocating to death. The primary goal of the child is to feel the “*high*” from a friend literally choking the child until he passes out or loses consciousness from a lack of air supply. While you may have thought this game is harmless the number of students national wide who are dying is very alarming.

### **What Is It**

The Choking Game, as it has come to be called, is a game children play by compressing a friend’s chest or squeezing their neck to cut off the flow of oxygen. In the first step, the person being choked will feel light-headed due to the reduced blood flow, and lack of oxygen to the brain, causing a perceived “high”. Once the pressure to the chest or neck has been lifted the surge of blood back into the brain creates a perceived “rush”.

The recent deaths and brain damage cases in the media are the result of the “game” gone awry. According to experts, a child playing this game could lose consciousness within a minute and die in as little as 2-4 minutes as the weight of their body further constricts blood and oxygen to the brain.

Deaths or brain damage can occur when children try to induce the high by themselves. In many of these cases, children are constricting themselves with ties or belts. When the flow of oxygen is cut off they unintentionally pass out leaving no one to loosen the “noose” they have created and save them. The risk of brain damage or death is compounded when there is no one to relieve pressure, reintroduce the flow of oxygen and restore a child to consciousness. When first discovered these cases are often marked a suicide when in fact these children had no intention of killing themselves and were just “playing a game”.

Even children who play the game among friends are still at risk for permanent brain damage, harm to the retina, accidental fall from passing out, and death. In addition, if the child’s partner accidentally squeezes a small group of nerve cells in the neck, the heart can come to a complete stop.

### **Whose Doing It**

The age range of kids who most often participate in this behavior is 9-14 years. Many pre-teens and teens participate in this lethal game out of curiosity -- not rebellion, depression or anger.

The game may be played by kids who are not outwardly at-risk --students who may do well in school, and are close with their families. To many kids, the Choking Game seems like a harmless way to get a rush.

## **Sign and Symptoms**

Parents and counselors should be on the look-out for:

- Reports of severe headaches;
- Marks on the neck;
- Bloodshot or red eyes;
- Raspy breath; and
- (For parents) Belts, bags, ties found around the house and closed doors or an unusual need for privacy.

Parents should also pay attention to the web sites their child may be visiting. Look out for sites that include the words "Pass out," "Blackout," "Space Monkey," "Space Cowboy," "Knockout," "Gasp," or "Rising Sun." Also check web blogs or chat rooms where children may be discussing the game.

## **What You Can Do**

1. Teach students that this is not a game and that it's extremely dangerous. Kids are fascinated by the fact that they can self-induce this type of high without using drugs. They know that it's risky and dangerous -- that's part of the allure of the game -- but few know that it can be deadly.
2. Educate parents of the warning signs to look for.
3. Monitor school bathrooms, playgrounds, closets or closed classrooms, and other opportunities where students have to be alone together and could play the game
4. Understand that risk taking is a safe and natural part of growing up. Just like adults, for many kids and teens, risk taking is one way of relieving stress. Provide students with alternatives for safer risk taking. There are many activities like, skateboarding or rock climbing, which produce a safe natural endorphin or "high" for kids.

Parents are encouraged to speak to their kids about the dangers of the choking game and the dangers drug abuse. If a parent has a question about this or any other drug abuse matter, please contact SRO Andy Hall at Augusta High School or at [ahall@usd402.com](mailto:ahall@usd402.com) .