



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
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"Choking Game Is Playing With Death"

Researchers at the Crime Victims' Institute at Sam Houston State University have reported on a dangerous so-called game (also called the "fainting game," "pass out" or "space monkey"), which has led to several suffocation deaths in Texas and around the country. This "choking game" has been played by nearly one in seven students who were surveyed at a Texas university. It is played individually or in groups and involves deliberately and temporarily cutting off blood flow (oxygen) to the brain in order to achieve a high. This is done by choking oneself or others, by applying a ligature around the neck, placing a plastic bag over the head, placing heavy objects on the chest, squeezing the chest or hyperventilating and then shutting off oxygen to the brain. Sixteen percent reported having played the choking game and 72 percent of those students said they had done so more than once. The average age when students first participated in the choking game was 14, and 90 percent of those who had played the game first heard about it from peers. Most of those who engage in this activity do not understand that the practice can be just as deadly as the illegal substances youth have been warned against. Before we begin to criticize today's kids, please be aware that this "game" has been around for centuries and a bizarre version is practiced by some adults, which is called autoerotic asphyxiation (AEA). Deaths from this practice are always unintentional and it results from anoxia or the total blockage of oxygen from entering the brain. According to Medicine Net, "autoerotic asphyxiation is one of the few sexual practices that remain hush-hush, mainly because forensic scientists and psychologists won't talk about it outside their professional circles. Self-gratification, in itself, is a deeply personal subject rarely discussed and when one adds self-asphyxiation to the mix the subject becomes even more taboo." Many believe "the choking game" is a precursor to autoerotic practices in adulthood. It is believed that many teen suicides are not suicides at all but an unintentional death resulting from the choking game. Thai authorities speculate this was the cause of death for the 72-year-old actor, David Carradine.

In the America that I love, we must inform our kids that this game can go fatally awry. Inform them that this is not going to be a euphoric high but instead, a death trip, like seen in the old movie, Flat Liners. Participating in this choking game is an incredibly stupid, dangerous and irresponsible thing to do and it can have deadly consequences. Please treat yourself, and especially your brain, with utmost respect, because it is the only one you are ever going to get.

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