

Schools warn parents – and students – about the choking game

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Senior Writer

When a 12-year-old student at Wappingers Falls Junior High School appeared to have rope burns around his neck, a secretary called school psychologist Diana Sucich.

Sucich, who traveled between school buildings until her retirement a year ago, arrived at the school and immediately had the boy taken to the hospital and admitted. She knew him because she had seen him in her office on occasion. In the hospital, she asked him how he got the rope burns around his neck.

He was playing a game, he said. He was on his skateboard and tying knots in a rope and the rope just happened to slip over his head and onto his neck, he told her.

That was about six years ago. At that time, Sucich and her colleagues had never heard of the choking game, in which children asphyxiate themselves in a quest for a pleasant sensation. The “game” can be played alone or with a partner.

Recently, the death and near-death of youngsters from the choking game has prompted some school districts to send home fliers alerting parents to signs their children may be participating in this deadly form of recreation.

Not a game

Choking can give youngsters a brief high by stopping the flow of oxygen to their brains. Sometimes they choke each other until the person being choked passes out. The pressure on the arteries is then released and the sudden blood flow to the brain causes a “rush” as consciousness returns, according to the Choking Game Association, a volunteer organization made up of families whose children have died playing the game.

There are variations of the choking game that involve hyperventilating until the participant loses consciousness. While permanent damage can result, the biggest fear involves youngsters playing the game alone, using a rope or a belt to cut off the oxygen to their brains. If they lose consciousness, they can hang themselves.

A group called the Dylan Blake Foundation, founded by a parent who lost an 11-year-old son in 2005, estimates there were at least 40 deaths and five serious injuries from the game in the United States last year. Experts believe that deaths from the game have been deemed suicides by adults who were unaware or unsure of what the child’s intention was at the time of death.

Other estimates indicate that between 100 and 500 teenage deaths per year can be attributed to the choking game, according to an *Education Week* article.



A deadly game with many names

Names for asphyxiation games teens play:

Airplaning
Blackout

California Choke
Choking Game

Dream Game
Fainting Game
Flatliner
Pass-out Game

Purple Dragon
Space Cowboy
Space Monkey
Suffocation Roulette

Source: www.stop-the-choking-game.com

The single best weapon against the activity is information, according to the Choking Game Association. Following the death of one Erie County boy who was playing the choking game, the local school district sent home fliers alerting parents to the warning signs (see sidebar, below).

Drug enhancement

In Steuben County, the Campbell-Savona school district is considering putting an article about the choking game in its school newsletter since the recent death of a student in that district. “It’s not clear whether he intended to take his own life or was engaging in the choking game,” said Bridget Reagan, a school

psychologist for Campbell-Savona.

Reagan has heard of two “strains” of choking from students in her district. The first is what is commonly known as autoerotic asphyxiation. That involves restricting oxygen flow while masturbating or engaging in sexual activity with someone else, then breathing normally and experiencing a more intense rush upon climax, she said.

The second form of the choking game is known as chicken or blackout. “Students have competitions – either with each other simultaneously or trying to best each other’s times – to see how long they can deprive themselves of oxygen,” Reagan said.

The experience can be heightened by

the addition of drugs, Reagan said. “Most popular around me right now are Oxycontin, Vicodin and Robitussin, all taken in large doses,” she said.

Campbell-Savona school district educators have discussed the problem in student support meetings and faculty meetings, making other adults in the building aware of what some students are doing, Reagan said. They’ve also incorporated a unit on the dangers of the choking game into the health curriculum at the middle and high school levels.

A new twist on an old game

Depriving oneself of oxygen to get a head rush is not a new practice. In almost any group of adults, it’s common to find someone who experimented with oxygen deprivation in one form or another in childhood.

A few confessed to the practice on a blog created by a Buffalo television news station following the death of the 12-year-old Erie County student. A father of two named Dave recalled playing a similar game as a youngster and getting a scare when one of his friends didn’t regain consciousness for five minutes.








Linda from Lackawanna said it wasn’t called the choking game but she and her friends played it in 1960 during recess at a parochial school in Buffalo. She once passed out, went down and cracked her head open on the street curb. She spent five days in a local hospital.

What’s different today, according to the Choking Game Association, is that youngsters are using ropes and belts to create the same effect when they’re alone and accidentally hang themselves.

The “Games Adolescents Shouldn’t Play” organization sends trained police officers into classrooms to educate students on the dangers of asphyxiation games. For more information, go to www.gaspinfo.com.

For more information on the choking game go to: www.stop-the-choking-game.com or www.deadlygameschildren-play.com.

What’s with the scarf? Choking game warning signs

-  Any suspicious mark on the side of the neck, sometimes hidden by means of a turtleneck, a scarf or a permanently turned-up collar.
-  A thud in the bedroom or against a wall (could be caused by a fall during solitary practice of the choking game).
-  Any kind of strap, a rope or a belt near the child with no apparent purpose; questions about such objects are often answered vaguely.
-  Headaches, sometimes excruciatingly bad ones, loss of concentration, a flushed face.
-  Bloodshot eyes or any other noticeable signs of stress on the eyes.
-  Changes in personality, such as being overly aggressive or agitated.
-  Any questions about the effects, sensations or dangers of strangulation.

Source: www.stop-the-choking-game.com