

CPYU Trend Alert: **"Choking Game"** by Chris Wagner

Over the last several months, local and national news sources have been reporting on a disturbing trend popular among teenagers. A "choking game" has resulted in serious injury and even death among a growing number of kids. At least nine states have reported recent cases and several deaths have been attributed to this practice in Canada as well. In an attempt to achieve a type of "high" usually attained through drugs, students are voluntarily choking and suffocating themselves. The high they feel is due to the restriction of blood flow to the brain. A Sheriff from Idaho says "When they strangle themselves and then release the pressure, it creates a tingling sensation in their upper body, especially their arms and head. And they think that's cool." What teens fail to realize is the immense danger and possible fatal effects this "game" can have.

Teens have several different names for this "game" including "suffocation roulette," "blackout," "pass-out game," "fainting game," "funky chicken," and "something dreaming." Authorities have discovered several ways in which kids participate. Some cause asphyxiation with belts, their hands, ropes, or plastic bags. Sadly, some youth have accidentally hung themselves to death, with no intention of suicide at all. Other teens play this dangerous "game" in groups. School video cameras have caught students voluntarily choking one another in hallways. The action is often repeated over and over to continue the sensation.

Experts believe that self-asphyxiation has been around for a long time, but only recently has become more popular among teens and pre-teens. The resulting buzz lures younger children and girls who may be looking for a non-drug related high. Older students have been known to practice what is known as autoerotic asphyxiation, or "scarfing," to increase sexual pleasure (for more information on "scarfing" visit www.cpyu.org).

Regardless of method and reason, as care-givers to today's emerging generation we need to address this issue with the teens and pre-teens in our lives. Discussion is the first place to begin. Teens who understand the danger and risks involved will be less likely to see choking one another as a "game." Explain to them how this activity can lead to permanent brain damage or even death. Encourage positive risk-taking instead. Studies have shown that students who participate in positive risk-taking activities such as sports, clubs, and volunteer services are less likely to get involved with dangerous behaviors.

Look for possible signs that your teen is participating in the "choking game" so that you can intervene before it becomes too late. Obvious signs include frequent and/or severe headaches, bruises or marks around the neck, and red eyes. Familiarize yourself with the many different nicknames the "choking game" has and keep your ears open. Make others in your community aware of this trend. Inform other parents, adults, school administrators, teachers, and youth workers so that they can also play preventative roles.

The "choking game" is just one of the many tough challenges and temptations that face our teens today. They need us and they need our prayers. Pray that our teens would see that "suffocation roulette" is in fact, not a game at all.

**For more information on today's youth culture, visit the website of the
Center for Parent/Youth Understanding at
www.cpyu.org.**