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Children accidentally choking themselves for a brief ‘high’

It’s been referred to as the “choking game,” but parents should not let the name fool them. It is no game. Children have died from choking or strangling themselves just so they can feel a brief high or lightheadedness as they almost faint.

The deadly strangulation activity that kids have been trying goes by many names, including Space Monkey, Flatliner, Breath Play, Space Cowboy, Funky Chicken, Suffocation Roulette, Fainting Game, Blackout, Passout and Sleep-erhold. In Spanish, the phrase *Intento Desmayo* is used.

Why are children doing it? Some think they can feel a buzz without using drugs. Children report these feelings right before they pass out and again when they wake up. Parents should be aware that the brief high can lead to bruises, memory loss, seizures, concussion, bleeding of the eyes, stroke, brain damage and brain death.

The idea is not a new one. Reports of deaths have been recorded as far back as 1934. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is aware of 82 deaths from the strangulation activity from 1995-2007. It is not known how many kids have tried it without dying.

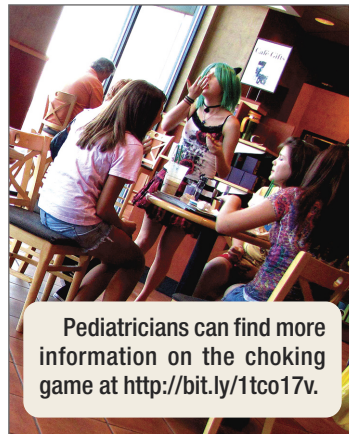
Surprisingly, thrill-seeking kids do not learn about the activity only from their friends at school. Millions have watched YouTube videos posted by kids demonstrating how to choke themselves or be choked and faint. They use a friend, their hands, a rope or clothes that are tied together. After trying the activity in groups, many will attempt to do it alone at home.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) suggests that parents look for signs that their child might be trying the choking game:

- bruising or red marks around the neck;
- belts, rope, ties or clothes that are found lying around the child’s bedroom;
- confused behavior after being alone;
- behavior changes; and
- bloodshot eyes.

Parents should talk to children about what can happen if they try the activity. The AAP also encourages parents to pay attention to what children are viewing on the Internet. Children who watch videos of others participating in the choking game might be tempted to join in.

— Trisha Koriath



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