

THE CHOKING GAME

October 2005

In July 2005, ABC News aired a piece on the deadly child's play often called the "pass out" game. This "game" isn't something new; it has been around for years. It is a popular game with kids around the world and it goes by a lot of names, including: space monkey, space cowboy, knockout, gasp, and rising sun. In Ireland it is known as the American dream game, according to Dr. Thomas Andrew, an expert on the dangers of this high-risk game.

Andrew says children play it by squeezing a friend's chest or neck to cut off the flow of oxygen. This produces a sensation of light-headedness, perhaps numbness and tingling. When the pressure is released, blood floods up the carotid arteries and it goes into the brain, and the result is a big rush.

That rush is what children seem to crave. Some want it so much they're now often playing this game alone, using shoelaces, ropes, dog leashes, bed sheets and belts. The result can be fatal and easily confused with suicide.

Children playing the game have only moments to undo the choke-hold around their neck before passing out. If the child fails to unloosen himself, the result can be deadly. Andrew says, "If the child is not able to reach it, and loses consciousness and falls forward, the pressure on his neck is now even tighter. This deprives the blood flow, or deprives the brain of blood flow nearly completely, leading to a fatal result." An autopsy examination will not distinguish an intentionally, self-destructive act of suicide from an unintentional catastrophe of playing this game.

Some cases:

Chelsea Dunn, a 13-year old from Idaho, discovered hanging from a belt in her bedroom closet by her twin brother. She died the night before, minutes after saying her last goodnight. She had written a note to a friend saying, "I love doing that pass out thing. You wake up and you forget what happened. It comes back though you're all tingly."

Eleven-year-old Thomas Fortin's death appeared to be suicide. But his mother found him kneeling up against the wall, facing the wall, with a dog leash around his neck. It was determined in the investigation that kids had been playing the suffocation game to get a quick high. The Fortins lived in New Hampshire.

Jennifer Cerneckee from Wisconsin also died under similar circumstance in 2001.

Recently, a 13-year-old California boy and a 10-year-old boy in eastern Idaho were likely victims of the game.

WARNING SIGNS AND TIPS for PARENTS

- Severe headaches
- Marks on the neck
- Bloodshot eyes
- Closed doors

PARENTS NEED TO TALK TO THEIR CHILDREN ABOUT RISKY BEHAVIOR!

