



# The D B Foundation

*Dangerous Adolescent Behavior Education  
PO BOX 351787 Palm Coast, FL 32135*

Dear Health Care Professional,

I am writing regarding a dangerous sensation seeking activity popular among school aged teens and pre teens most often referred to by the media as the Choking Game. In most versions of the “game”, the goal is to restrict cerebral blood flow to the point of near syncope or syncope. This is done by compression of the carotid arteries or the chest, often after hyperventilation, using hands or a ligature. The symptoms associated with hypoxia and blood return are both experienced as pleasurable by many children. Some will experience dreaming and a brief sense of euphoria is common.

The perception of most children and teens is that pass out games are fun and harmless. Multiple news venues have reported students caught playing in school hallways, bathrooms and sports fields. Some kids engage in the behavior with their friends for hours, sometimes with unaware parents in the very next room. Teens often film these activities and upload them to sites such as You Tube and communicate about these activities on internet chat rooms and personal web pages.

Brief partial seizure activity as a child regains consciousness, often upper extremity jerking, seems funny and has earned asphyxia play one of its dozens of names-‘Funky Chicken’. Other names for oxygen deprivation activity include Pass Out, Choke Out, GASP, Space Monkey, California Dreaming, and Dream Game. However, kids may not use or recognize any of these names at all but refer to the activity as “passing each other out”. Pass out is the most common tag used on You Tube.

The true prevalence of choking game participation is not known at this time but mounting evidence indicates that it has wide appeal and it is clearly emerging as a significant public health problem. A few teen behavioral surveys in the US and in Canada have begun to include choking game questions and admitted participation has ranged from 6 to 19 percent. No injury or mortality data base currently tracks cases associated with asphyxia play and there are no specific ICD 9 or ICD 10 codes for it. Media reports and reports by parents to advocacy groups have provided the bulk of the mortality cases recently reported by the CDC.

Death and injury have occurred in children as young as 7 and as old as 21, but it is especially popular among middle school aged children. Survey data indicate boys and girls are equally likely to participate in groups but boys are more likely to attempt it alone. Deaths usually occur during solo play using a ligature and have occurred in 46 states as well as in several other countries. Injuries in survivors include hypoxic brain injury, seizures, headaches, facial and conjunctiva petechiae, retinal hemorrhages, vision loss, addiction to the activity, behavioral changes, and closed head and musculoskeletal injuries due to falls.

## Ways You Can Help:

- Providers who see children and teens in primary care clinics, neurology clinics, orthopedic clinics, urgent care centers, and emergency departments can intervene before death or disability occurs if they have knowledge of these activities.
- Oxygen deprivation activity can be screened for with other risk taking activities during HCM visits and should be on the differential for headaches, syncope, seizures, sudden vision loss, behavioral changes, and head injuries in older children and adolescents.
- Information about choking games can be included in parent and patient education materials that address risk taking.
- Health care systems can include information in preventative health care mailings to patients, educate their providers about the existence of this activity, and incorporate education regarding choking games into the curricula of existing programs such as Trauma Nurses Talk Tough.
- School nurses can screen children for pass out game activity in the case of unexplained fainting, falls, headaches etc. They can advocate for education of school counselors, teachers, playground attendants, parents, and students about choking games in their school districts.
- Practitioners can download and print brochures for parents from the DB Foundation web site (<http://www.thedbfoundation.com/ChokingGameEducationalMaterial.html>)

It can be difficult for health care professionals to have timely knowledge of current youth risk taking activities. The traditional data bases that are used for following risks such as teen drinking and drug use are very slow to add newer activities such as car surfing and strangulation activities. We are very focused on evidence these days, which is usually a good thing, but we can be overly dismissive of less traditional kinds of evidence and miss opportunities if we are not careful. The potential for harm due to strangulation and other oxygen deprivation activities is great and I hope you will be able to assist in reducing morbidity and mortality in youth who may be tempted to engage in it. A list of references and web links to additional information is attached below.

Sincerely,

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## References:

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## LINKS:

### **CDC**

<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/ChokingGame/>

### **DB Foundation**

<http://www.thedbfoundation.com/>

<http://www.thedbfoundation.com/handouts.html>

### **SAMSHA**

[http://family.samhsa.gov/monitor/choking\\_game.aspx](http://family.samhsa.gov/monitor/choking_game.aspx)

### **Akron Children’s Hospital**

<https://www.akronchildrens.org/cms/news/a5553645e71e9c68/>

### **Connecticut Dept of Mental Health and addiction services**

[http://www.ctprevention.org/necasa/tips\\_parents/ChokingGame020906.pdf](http://www.ctprevention.org/necasa/tips_parents/ChokingGame020906.pdf)

### ***Health Leader Newsletter (Texas)***

<http://publicaffairs.uth.tmc.edu/hleader/archive/Neurology/2006/passoutgame-0510.html>

### **Missouri (DSHS/AAP)**

[http://www.childrens-mercy.org/Content/uploadedFiles/May\\_June.Vol.8.pdf](http://www.childrens-mercy.org/Content/uploadedFiles/May_June.Vol.8.pdf)

### **Montana DPHHS**

<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/newsevents/newsreleases2005/july/faintinggame.shtml>

### **North Dakota Dept of Health**

<http://www.ndhan.gov/data/mrNews/Choking%20game.pdf>

### **Rhode Island Dept of Health**

<http://www.health.ri.gov/family/ofyss/teens/tips/Tip27.php>

### **The New York Times: Discovering Risky Teenagers Game Too Late**

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/25/health/25chen.html>