

# The “Choking Game” is deadly

A life-threatening game is circulating through teen and pre-teen culture. It goes by various names including: *the choking game*, *space cowboy*, *black hole*, *knockout*, and *fainting game*.

In this game participants use their hands, arms, ropes, leashes, chains, ties, or belts to cut off oxygen. Players get a “high” when the pressure is released and blood rushes back to the brain.

Three young teens have become victims of this game in Washington State in recent months; two died and one was seriously injured. The cause of death was asphyxiation.

“Victims are often high-achieving, sports- and action-oriented kids,” said New Hampshire’s Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Thomas Andrew, who has consulted on more than twenty of these cases. In fact, participants may believe that this is a safe way to get high without using drugs.

This activity impacts preteens and young teens between the ages of 9 to 14. They may find the sensations habit-forming. It is most dangerous when done alone, but is also played in groups. Telltale warning signs include unexplained marks around the neck, bloodshot eyes, frequent headaches, unexplained bungee cords, ties and leashes, and unusual demands for privacy.

## Talk to your children about this practice and its dangers

- Kids need to know that they can die from this activity.
- Monitor your children’s whereabouts and activities.
- Be aware of warning signs.
- If you suspect your child is involved, alert the school counselor, your pediatrician, and other adults in your child’s life. *Work together to take action.*

## Web resources:

**Tacoma Public Schools:** *Information and resources on the “Choking Game”*  
<http://www.tacoma.k12.wa.us/newsroom/News/news.asp?action=detail&article=347>

**Guidance Channel Online:** *Choking Game: Information and Tips for Parents*  
<http://www.guidancechannel.com/default.aspx?index=1878&cat=13>

**ConnectWithKids.com:** *The Choking Game- What Parents Need to Know*  
[http://www.connectwithkids.com/tipsheet/2005/235\\_jun29/choke.html](http://www.connectwithkids.com/tipsheet/2005/235_jun29/choke.html)

**Montana Department of Health and Public Safety:** *Fainting Game Can Have Deadly Consequences*  
<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/newsevents/newsreleases/july/faintinggame.shtml>

For more information contact Barbara Smithson, Kitsap County Health District Injury Prevention at 360-337-5250. Material compiled by Sharon Goodman, Central Kitsap Junior High; the Washington State Department of Health; and Kitsap County Health Department’s Injury Prevention Program.