



ERIK'S CAUSE

*Kids like Erik are dying every week –
YOU CAN HELP!*

Help Stop the Choking Game

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RE-PHRASING STUDENT RISK

ASSESSMENT SURVEY QUESTIONS CAN YIELD MORE RESPONSES

Pass-out activities (commonly known in the media as “The Choking Game”) have been around for generations. Studies indicate that kids experiment with this for non-sexual reasons (e.g., curiosity, peer pressure, the mistaken belief that it is safer than drugs) because they are unaware of the dangers. Easy access to hundreds of thousands of “how to play” videos on YouTube and other sites allow this activity to flourish, letting kids believe it is safe, without adequate education of its dangers.

Kids have Many Names for this “Game” Including but Not Limited to

| | | |
|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Airplaning | Knockout Challenge | Pass-Out Challenge |
| Blackout | Fainting Game | Tap Out |
| Choking Game | Scarf Game | Space Monkey |

This list continues to grow as kids come up with new names!

Ways Kids “Play”

The physical goal of this activity is to restrict cerebral blood flow to the point of nearly or actually passing out for a variety of reasons including curiosity, competition, dare, and/or to experience an altered state. This is accomplished by a variety of methods, the most popular being:

- compression of the carotid arteries using hands or a ligature;
- compression to the chest after hyperventilation;
- competition or dare to see who can resist passing out the longest under a choke hold (e.g., tap-out or submission holds typically used in mixed martial arts).

The Choking Game Differs from Other Risk Activities

- Is not illegal and has no deterrent or legal consequence
- Does not require acquisition of a product
- Can be “played” alone
- It is hard to know when the damage occurs since it interrupts basic brain function.

Data is Limited

- No public health databases currently monitor pass-out activities.
- Youth are rarely forthcoming about the activity when injured. Thus practitioners may not be aware that pass out games are a possible cause for unexplained falls and other injuries.
- Injuries are rarely attributed correctly and *many deaths are misclassified as suicide*.

Known Student Risk Assessment Surveys Hint at the Scope of the Problem:

Currently only three student risk assessment surveys are known to ask questions about pass-out activities. However, a close look at the wording of these questions (below) reveals that they limit the full potential for data collection because they either:

- refer to only one method of how this is played, thus eliminating potential positive responses from those who play via the other popular methods; and/or

- use only one name (the “choking game”) which is common in the media, but not necessarily the name(s) kids use. Since kids tend to answer questions literally, this tends to underestimate the extent of the problem by limiting possible positive responses. Additionally, some of the questions unintentionally provide instruction on how to “play.”

A close look at the questions demonstrates these limitations:

1. Maine’s Integrated Youth Health Survey Question:

Have you ever participated in the Choking Game or assisted another person to do so?

Limitations of this Question: Since kids tend to answer questions literally, offering only one name for this activity unintentionally limits the potential for positive responses. Additionally, since it is a compound question, it is not clear which part of the question a respondent is answering.

2. Oregon Healthy Teens Survey Question:

Oregon began collecting data in 2008. The question asked in 2008 was: *The next question refers to the “Choking Game,” also called Knock Out, Space Monkey, Flat-lining, or The Fainting Game. This is an activity that some youth participate in to get a high by cutting off blood and oxygen to the brain with a belt, towel, rope, or other item. Which of the following is true for you? (Please mark all that apply.)*

a. I have never heard of the Choking Game; b. I’ve heard of someone participating in the Choking Game; c. I have helped someone else participate in the Choking Game; d. I have participated in the Choking Game myself.

Limitations of this Question: This question discusses only one way students play this game (via ligature), thus limiting responses by students who play via the other two popular methods. Further, it unintentionally tells students how to play.

Over time, Oregon updated the wording and expanded to three questions. The 2015 questions read:

1. *This is an activity that some youth participate in to get a high by cutting off blood and oxygen to the brain using a variety of methods. Which of the following is true for you?*
2. *How many times in your life have you participated in the Choking Game?*
3. *Thinking back to the last time you yourself participated in the ‘Choking Game’, were you alone or with other people?*

Limitations of these Questions: As with the Maine survey question, using only one name for this activity unintentionally limits potential for affirmative positive responses by students. Further, while this updated survey removed direct language about ligatures and other devices, it still describes enough about the activity for kids to figure out how to play it.

3. The CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) Optional Question:

The CDC offers users of the YRBS an optional question which reads:

Have you ever been choked by someone or tried to choke yourself on purpose, such as with a belt, towel, or rope, for the feeling or experience it caused? (This is also called the choking game, knock out, space monkey, flat-lining, or the fainting game.)

Limitations of this Question: As with the 2008 Oregon survey, this question asks about playing via ligature, omitting possible responses by students who play via either of the two other popular methods. Further, as with the 2008 Oregon question, it unintentionally tells students how to play.

Critical Findings: Despite the limitations of the current survey questions, the data these questions have collected yields definitive admission of student knowledge of, and participation in, pass-out activities.

Erik's Cause Proposes a Question that May Gather Additional Responses

Erik's Cause has drafted a single question that we believe is less limiting than the above questions and with a single reply gathers considerable data:

What one response best describes your involvement with a pass out challenge called the Choking Game, also called other names including the Fainting Game, Pass Out, Black Out, Knock Out and Tap Out?

- I have never heard of this.
- I have heard of it but don't know anyone who has played.
- I have heard of it and know others who have played.
- I have heard of it and was asked to play but said "No."
- I have heard of it and played once.
- I have heard of it and have played more than once.

However, if the survey style requires yes/no responses, the above question could be parsed into multiple questions. Depending on the information the survey wants to glean, below are examples of how to re-phrase:

1. Have you ever heard of a pass out challenge called the Choking Game, also called other names including the Fainting Game, Pass Out, Black Out, Knock Out and Tap Out?
2. Have you ever participated in a pass out challenge called Choking Game, also called other names including the Fainting Game, Pass Out, Black Out, Knock Out and Tap Out?

Key Question: What more might the data show if the questions were re-phrased to encompass additional names of this risky behavior and all the ways it is "played" without unintentionally telling them how to play?

Even Smart, strong kids can make dumb choices with deadly consequences ...



Some kids tried it only once. They didn't know they were gambling with their lives ...

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