



ERIK'S CAUSE

*Kids like Erik are dying every week –
YOU CAN HELP!
“Help Stop the Choking Game”*

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SEVEN DANGEROUS GAMES PARENTS MUST KNOW ABOUT*

Many parents warn their children about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Fewer parents, though, know that they should also warn against so-called "games" that are so risky they can lead to injury or death. Teens frequently keep details about these games under wraps. Parents often don't hear about them until someone in the community is rushed to the emergency room or dies.

John Santelli, President of the American Society of Adolescent Health and a Columbia University pediatrics professor, says, "Adolescence is, developmentally, a time when young people experiment with cigarettes and other behaviors that aren't so smart for their health. Some of the consequences can be pretty tragic with these dangerous games."

Boys and girls both participate, to some degree. "Boys tend to take more risks, as do teens in middle school, although kids of any age may try," say many pediatricians. "They usually happen in groups where there is peer pressure." For the safety of your own kids, it's important to make yourself aware of the details of these games.

1. CHOKING GAME (PASS OUT ACTIVITIES)

This deadly "game" involves cutting off the oxygen supply to the brain through strangulation for a brief high. Some teens have done this using their hands or a noose either alone or in groups.

"There's no room for a learning curve," Alfred Sacchetti, Chief of Emergency Medicine at Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center in Camden, N.J., says, "because the very first time, you can die."

Sacchetti, a spokesperson for the American College of Emergency Physicians, says, "The real danger with this is actually getting it right the first time. Now your impression is, 'I'm smarter than those people who killed themselves. They aren't as good at it as me.' You think, 'I can push it farther; I can set my noose tighter or longer. I bet I can get even higher.'"

2. CINNAMON CHALLENGE

This unusual challenge has been shown in countless YouTube videos. It involves swallowing a spoonful of powdered cinnamon without taking a drink of water. The spice dries out the inside of your mouth, making it nearly impossible for anyone to succeed.

Most people immediately cough out a huge puff of cinnamon-colored powder. Some people vomit from the strong flavor. Others have coughing fits after breathing in the fine powder. In rare cases, people are hospitalized after inhaling powder into the lungs and need to be placed on ventilators.

But some teens can't wait to try it and upload videos of their own experiences.

"Kids have easy access to items such as cinnamon." "Kids often think it's fun and funny to try these games and may not think they're dangerous since the substances are not illegal."

3. HUFFING OR DUSTING

By the time they're in eighth grade, 20% of American children have intentionally inhaled common household products (such as glue or cans of compressed gas used to clean computer keyboards) to get high. Breathing these chemicals decreases the supply of oxygen to the brain, resulting in a brief, euphoric high. But doing it for too long can lead to

serious injury or death. "It can be very addictive or habit-forming, and it can cause really profound brain damage," Santelli says. "If you pick the wrong substance, it can be harmful or deadly."

4. CAR "SURFING"

Michael J. Fox's character danced atop the roof of a moving vehicle while the Beach Boys' "Surfin' USA" blasted from the radio in the 1985 movie *Teen Wolf*, giving a creative name to this dangerous game. The stunt hasn't lost its appeal among daredevil teens over the decades, even though standing on the roof of a moving car can be deadly. The CDC recently analyzed 99 cases of injuries and deaths from car surfing that were reported in U.S. newspapers over an 18-year period. The report found that more than 70% of the car surfers were male, and most participants were aged 15 to 19. Deaths were caused by head trauma in most cases, even at speeds as low as 5 miles per hour. "You don't have to go more than 5 miles an hour [to get hurt]," Sacchetti says. "Standing on a car, your head is at least 10 or 15 feet in the air. You've got the force of the car, and when it stops, it's going to transfer that acceleration to you."

THREE MORE QUESTIONABLE PARTY GAMES

Certain "games" are almost always played in groups so that players can impress their friends.

- **Mumblety Peg (the Knife Game)**, which has been around for generations, is one such game. In one form of this game, a player spreads his fingers on a table then stabs the spaces between them as quickly as possible with a pocket knife.
- **Chubby Bunny**, a newer game, requires someone to shove as many full-sized marshmallows into his mouth as possible and then enunciate the words "chubby bunny" to an audience.
- **The ABC Scratching Game** requires at least two people. One person must name words that begin with each letter of the alphabet for a given topic while the other person scratches the back of his hand to distract him. A variation of this gaining popularity is now called **The ABC Eraser Game** where kids rub an eraser on their hand or arm while reciting words beginning with each letter of the alphabet. But the time they get to "Z" they compare who has the worse wound to determine the winner.

These games aren't usually fatal. But they may require a visit to the doctor or hospital. For instance, a poorly played round of Mumblety Peg could require stitches, and a very raw sore created during the ABC Scratching Game could require medical attention. "I don't know that I'd want to open wounds on my hand with MRSA infections going around," Sacchetti says. Chubby Bunny may cause choking because marshmallows are difficult to cough out." This is a choking hazard -- technically suffocation from blocking the whole airway."

KEEP TALKING ABOUT IT

Keeping lines of communication open with your teen is essential to his or her safety. Ask open-ended questions, such as what your teen does at his/her friend's house after school, which kind of videos they've seen on YouTube, have they ever heard of kids their age getting hurt from trying activities and pranks that seem funny or silly. And talk to your teen's friends. Friends are often more likely to share information with an adult that isn't their own parent."

Experts agree that the best time to warn your children about the dangers of these risky games is as soon as you hear about them, whether you've received an email warning from the local PTA or you've read news reports of a teen that died in a neighboring town.

"Find safer, organized activities that still offer a thrill," Santelli says. "There's no magic bullet, but a lot of parents get kids involved in sports," he says. "It's a great way to channel sensation-seeking in a positive way."

Visit us at www.erikscouse.org for more information

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