



## ERIK'S CAUSE

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

*Help Stop the Choking Game*

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### SUICIDE OR CHOKING GAME? GETTING IT RIGHT!

By

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*"To the living we owe respect.  
To the dead we owe only the truth." ... Voltaire*

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 ...

#### ***What is the Choking Game?***

- Pass-out "games" (most commonly known as "The Choking Game") are activities in which participants cut off the oxygen supply to the brain, inducing tingling/mild, euphoric feeling that lasts several seconds just before the participant loses consciousness and when s/he wakes up
- These activities are most commonly played by boys and girls between the ages of 9-16
- It is generally non-sexual in nature and are thought to be "safe" by kids
- It may be "played" in groups or alone, using belts, hands, plastic bags, or ropes or they may simply hold their breath or hyperventilate until they pass out

#### ***Where are the Death and Injury Statistics?***

- Statistics are poor because there are no death or injury codes for these activities
- Many choking game deaths are misclassified as suicide because there is no uniform way for investigators or coroners to appropriately determine the choking game as the cause

#### ***Cause of Death vs Mode of Death?***

- Cause of death is the actual mechanism that caused the death, for example, exsanguination (bleed to death) due to gunshot wound, asphyxiation due to choking, etc. Cause of death is typically pretty straightforward and is usually determined with a physical autopsy of the body
- Mode (or manner) of death falls into one of four categories; homicide, suicide, natural causes, and accident. When the medical examiner or coroner cannot determine a final mode of death because of insufficient or conflicting information, a psychological autopsy is usually requested
- **WHAT MAY APPEAR SUICIDE BY WAY OF "CAUSE" OF DEATH MAY VERY WELL NOT BE SUICIDE BUT RATHER ACCIDENTAL DEATH WHEN "MODE" OF DEATH IS EXPLORED**
- Medical and coroner's records, and face-to-face interviews with families, friends, and others who had contact with the person before the death
- A psychological autopsy synthesizes the information from multiple informants and records and is invaluable to help determine whether a death is actually a suicide or unintentional/accident

### ***When Determining Choking Game vs Suicide:***

- Always keep an open mind
- The crime scene investigation may be a “rule out” if suicide is not obvious
- A psychological autopsy will be much more revealing than a physical post-mortem exam

### ***What is a Psychological Autopsy?***

A procedure for investigating a person's death by reconstructing what the person thought, felt, and did before death, based on information gathered from personal documents, police reports, etc.

### ***Look for a History of these Signs and Symptoms in the Recent Past:***

- Discussion of the choking game (or its aliases) with friends
- Internet history of searching the choking game (or its aliases)
- Bloodshot eyes
- Marks on the neck
- Wearing high-necked shirts, even in warm weather
- Frequent, severe headaches
- Disorientation after spending time alone
- Increases and uncharacteristic irritability or hostility
- Ropes, scarves or belts ties to bedroom furniture or doorknobs or found knotted on the floor (or rub marks on closet hanger bar, bunk bed, etc.)
- Unexplained presence of dog leashes, choke collars, bungee cords, etc.
- Petechiae (pinpoint bleeding spots) under the skin of the face, especially the eyelids, or the conjunctiva (the lining of the eyelids and eyes)
- ***Keep in Mind – There May be NO Warning Signs at all***

### ***The Malicious Insult of Calling a Choking Game Death a Suicide:***

- The stigma of a family member committing suicide still exists
- Grieving family members are burdened by asking themselves how is it possible that they didn't see the signs
- When someone dies in an accident we think of what THEY could have done differently
- But when someone dies of suicide we think about what WE could have done differently
- Cause of death does not necessarily equate to Mode of Death
- Whenever there is a choice between accident and suicide, a psychological autopsy should be considered to help make the determination

**ALWAYS KEEP AN OPEN MIND ENTERING EVERY INVESTIGATION  
WHAT SEEMS ROUTINE MAY COME BACK TO HAUNT YOU ...**

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