

Discussing The Dangers of Choking With Young Adults Suggestions & Talking Points

By Dan Baldwin, Parent

Disclaimer: *This information is not medical advice. Please seek additional information from qualified health care providers. Minors are strongly urged to discuss all matters with their parents and/or trusted adult. I am not a health care provider. I am a father of two teenagers. The following information summarizes information I shared with my own children. Do not use or share this information without heeding this disclaimer.*

Solicit Help From Other Adults

Before speaking with my own sons I discussed the matter at length with my wife. I needed to make sure that I wasn't "going off the deep end" with my concerns regarding this choking behavior. While I don't recommend delaying speaking with teens several days or weeks while you confer with other adults, it does seem prudent to have at least one other trusted adult in the room with you when you speak with any minor about any sensitive subject - especially if they aren't your own kids. In attempting any outreach to kids it seems prudent to attempt a simultaneous outreach to their parents. If possible, have a doctor speak with you to the kids. At the very least try to speak with your own doctor to get talking points from him or her.

Have Printed Talking Points

If the kids start asking questions it's easy to get sidetracked and not deliver all the information you need to before you lose their interest. Consider the following talking points and edit them for your own audience.

A. "I have something serious I need to discuss with you"

Make sure your audience of teens knows that you're setting aside your normal joking around self to discuss something in a serious sober matter. This may necessitate moving the location of the discussion to a different room to minimize distractions. Do whatever is necessary to ensure you have their undivided attention to the degree that they understand that "this is something different" and that they need to pay attention to the information that follows.

B. Ask questions like, "Who can tell me what the 'Choking Game' is all about?"

What other names does it go by? Are there any health consequences? Has anybody ever died from it? Do you know anyone who has ever tried it? What questions do you

have about it?" and so on. By allowing them to answer questions and talk right away you are achieving two goals - you're keeping them from day dreaming off during a monologue delivered by you and you're measuring what they already know.

C. Give out objective facts as you have compiled them such as:

1. Dozens of middle school & high school students have died over the past months
2. None seemed to think there were any health consequences since no drugs were involved
3. Families and communities have been devastated by the loss of bright, non-drug using teens
4. Do not experiment with something that can kill you the first time you try it
5. If you have tried it you need to stop before your luck does & seek help if you can't stop
6. Acknowledge that risk taking is normal with teens as part of growing up but that risk taking activity should be channeled into positive risk taking activities like joining a club, asking someone out for a date or trying out for a sports team
7. State there is no allure in this activity as it's not a "secret drug free high" that parents don't want you to know about. Tell them that the behavior has been around for generations and is now working through the current generation and that unfortunately only those who are uninformed about the behavior are dying.
8. Tell them that's why you're sharing the information with them so that they won't be uninformed about a very dangerous behavior so they'll be able to recognize it for the deadly activity that it really is when someone else who is still uninformed about it suggests that they "try the drug free high".

D. Make sure they know that they can talk to someone 24/7 about this after your meeting

Don't save a life during your talk only to lose it later. As all parents know, anything worth saying to a teen needs to be repeated about 10,000 times so they know you think it's still valid. Let them know that you care about them and that if they ever have a question about this or any other issue that you or someone is available to them. Tell them how to contact you or whomever would be there for them. Let them know that a life-ring to them is always within arm's reach.

3. Incorporate the Information Into Regular Content

While the choking game seems to have sprung up from nowhere it's likely that the Internet has just made it easier to distribute information about this old behavior. For long term learning about the choking game to happen the choking game needs to be desensationalized just as teen smoking and teen drinking has been desensationalized. Whenever we counsel teens against any dangerous risk taking activity we need to include information about choking behaviors - just like real drugs it's dangerous and can kill you the first time you try it. It seems that even rebellious teens only want to bug their parents with behaviors that shock and scare the parents. If parents and counselors have already talked the choking game into the ground with teens then at least the allure of the unknown has certainly been removed as a possible source of attraction.

4. Special Note When Speaking With Males

In researching the choking game I ran across many suggestions that the choking behavior has been around for quite some time and is included in the clinical diagnosis of "autoerotic asphyxiation" or "AeA". In one recent incident reported as the "choking game" the newspaper report stated that the medical examiner determined that the cause of death was "asphyxia due to hanging due to autoerotic activity". Plainly stated, AeA is where a male chokes himself while masturbating to enhance his sexual sensation.

Research seems to suggest that the only difference between AeA and the choking game is that the choking game lacks the masturbating component but that it is the same in all other aspects. In interviewing parents of teens that have died of AeA, the parents suggest that many medical examiners don't report death by AeA to save a family possible embarrassment. There are also many who believe that the choking game itself is under reported as many cases are decided to be suicide. I discussed this choking game & AeA information with a pediatrician and she clearly stated that the choking behavior with or without masturbation is dangerous. She strongly suggested that parents openly and plainly discuss with teens the dangerous nature of any type of choking behavior so as to remove any allure that may surround a behavior thought to be secretive or unknown.

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