



County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

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To: All DCFS Staff

From: Philip L. Browning
Interim Director

CHOKING GAME

There are currently over 33,000 suicides annually in the USA. It is estimated that for every death by suicide there are at least six suicide survivors.

Often misclassified or mistaken for suicide are deaths resulting from an increasingly popular fad game called "choking game." Participants in the choking game - typically adolescents - attempt to trigger a **high** by **temporarily depriving the brain of oxygen** through strangulation. A recent report from the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** shows that the full extent of the injuries and deaths caused by the choking game is likely underrepresented, because many of the cases are **never reported** or may be **misclassified as suicides**.

I. Warning Signs of Choking Game:

- > **Talking about the game**
- > **Physical symptoms:**
 - Bloodshot eyes
 - Frequent and severe headaches
 - Unexplained marks on the neck
 - Pinpoint bleeding spots under the skin of the face, the eyelids, or the lining of the eyelids and eyes
- > **Personality and behavior changes:**
 - Disorientation after spending time alone
 - Increased and uncharacteristic irritability or hostility
 - Wearing high-necked shirts, even in warm weather
- > **The presence of ropes, scarves, and/or belts** tied to bedroom furniture or doorknobs
- > **The unexplained presence of items** like dog leashes, choke collars or bungee cords

II. Prevention/Intervention:

If a child is actively participating:

- > **Increase supervision** - be aware of your child's activities and whereabouts.
- > **Remove any paraphernalia** that could be used as a ligature.

- > **Alert school personnel** - the principal, nurse, school counselor, school police, teachers, etc.
- > **Alert the parents** of your children's friends.
- > **Consult with a physician** to address any health needs resulting from this activity.
- > **If an older teen is involved**, younger children in the same family may be at risk.

It is essential to **talk to children** about the dangers of choking themselves or others - keep in mind they feel it's 'just passing out.' Tell them that **EVERY time** they play this kind of game they are risking **death**.

III. Referral

DCFS workers should work closely with foster caregivers/relatives and school administrators to address and prevent adolescent choking games on campus as well as in the community and at home. When choking games are suspected, an immediate referral for a consultation with the child's medical doctor is critical to explore any health or mental health needs as a result of his/her participation in this activity, and to further refer for other needed services as indicated.

Online Resources

- **Dylan Blake Foundation for Adolescent Behavior:** www.chokinggame.net
- **GASP (Games Adolescents Shouldn't Play):** www.stop-the-choking-game.com
- **Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD):** www.sadd.org

Please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Charles Sophy, (213) 351-5614, if you have any questions. Have a Safe and Healthy New Year!