

# The Dangerous 'Choking Game' That Killed Four Kids in One County

Beth Greenfield, Yahoo.com. November 12 2014



*Erik Robinson, who died in 2010 at age 12. Photo from Facebook/Erik's Cause.*

“The choking game.” “Five minutes in heaven.” “Blackout.” “The knockout challenge.” Those are just a few of the names for a dangerous adolescent pastime that’s been around for decades but is back with a vengeance: Asphyxiate your friend (or yourself)

just enough to cut off the airway, until he or she feels a quick, euphoric rush. The catch is that sometimes the person being choked will pass out or be left with irreversible brain damage — and sometimes will even die. That grim reality is the reason a Utah school district has become the first in the nation to agree to incorporate choking-game awareness into its health curriculum.

“We have had four of our young people die from the choking game in the last three years,” Jennifer Wood, director of secondary-education alternative programs for the [Iron County School District](#) in Utah, tells Yahoo Parenting. “That data is too compelling to ignore.” The half-hour lesson for grades five, seven, and 10 educates students about what happens to the brain when its oxygen supply is cut off, and also teaches refusal skills for dealing with peer pressure to partake in the risky game. “It’s amazing how many have played the game or know others who have,” adds Wood. “It goes back decades.”

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But why are kids so quick to try it? When it gets introduced in a group setting, explains [Dr. Barbara Greenberg](#), a Connecticut-based clinical psychologist and author of “[Teenage as a Second Language: A Parent’s Guide to Becoming Bilingual](#),” a “group-contagion thing” takes over. “When you get groups of teens together — or groups of anyone, for that matter — they’ll do things they won’t do when alone, particularly engage in high-risk behavior.” She adds that adolescents are often prone to throwing caution to the wind “not necessarily because they’re not aware of the risk, but because they just overvalue the excitement.”

But what used to be solely a group activity, notes Wood, “is becoming something kids now try to do on their own.”

Det. Mike Bleak of Cedar City, Utah, who introduced the Iron County School District to the prevention program, believes “it’s progressed because of social media,” he says. He notes that, though the challenge is nothing new — he even tried it when he was a teen — kids today “have taken it up a notch,” adding in ropes, nooses, or scarves to achieve that rush of asphyxiation, which then becomes physically addictive.

Bleak learned of the prevention program after a local mom whose son had died from the choking game introduced him to Judy Rogg, head of the national organization **Erik's Cause**. Rogg, whose son Erik Robinson was 12 when he accidentally died from the choking game in 2010, has made it her mission to educate the public on its dangers. But the restrictions of self-financing, plus resistance from school boards, have made it a challenge.



*Judy Rogg and her son Erik. Photo by Facebook/Erik's Cause.*