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Dear Parents and Educators:

**"...Chance only favours those minds which have been prepared." Louis Pasteur.**

This great scientist knew that having knowledge was essential if we are to see our path clearly and make the right decisions. Pasteur was writing in the context of research, but his wisdom applies more widely and is a reminder that in order for young people to make the right decisions, they have to be "informed". This is why the material you have available to educate teens on the danger of asphyxial games is so valuable and so important.

As a medical researcher and children's doctor I am constantly reminded of the wisdom of Pasteur's words. I strongly believe that the vast majority of young people do make sensible decisions if they have acquired the necessary knowledge to do so from information presented clearly, non-judgmentally and in an acceptable manner. In this context my research brings a number of clear messages to us adults as to why it is so important to share information on asphyxial games with teens and how best we can go about doing this.

It is now apparent that far more children know about the "choking game" than the majority of parents and educators realize; also, that a considerable number take the risk and play them. Most worryingly, some of these children choose to do so alone, which means that they are putting their lives in jeopardy if things go wrong. Asphyxial games certainly are a form of risk taking behavior, and it shocks adults to learn that 40% of children see them as a behavior which carries no risk. All young people challenge themselves and push their boundaries in the process of becoming adults, but many of them have difficulty identifying where fun becomes excitement, excitement changes to risk, and risk actually puts them in danger. The educational materials you have available can help teens to make these distinctions. Research also shows that the way in which such information and education are provided does influence how well the message is heard, and whether or not the knowledge gained leads to more sensible decisions and modified behavior. Older children and young teens indicate a willingness to learn from parents and teachers, whereas older teens tell us they are more likely to respond to informed peers or experiences shared by the victims' families.

As a children's doctor I have been involved in many instances where children have died unnecessarily because of ignorance or an unwise decision. The feeling of futility that all involved experience when this happens, and the enormity of the pain and sense of loss on each occasion, are difficult to comprehend. The loss of even one child under such circumstances is tragic, and knowing that every year a number of young people lose their lives needlessly because of asphyxial games is a call to action for all of us.

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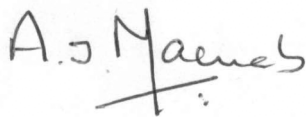
Teens often wonder what to tell their parents and how to say things. I always wonder how to tell parents and what to say when a child dies in this situation. I can tell them it was an accident, that it was avoidable, a mistake, and that their son or daughter didn't know what might happen. But the truth is that in some cases their child did know, went ahead, risked his or her life, and actually lost it unnecessarily.

Consequently, because "...chance only favours those minds which have been prepared", let us take every chance to fully inform our children so each of them is as well prepared as they can be when faced with decisions in the context of risk taking behaviour. As a doctor caring for children I have had the privilege of helping to save many children's lives, and if you as parents and educators are proactive about asphyxial games, the probability is that you will save lives too.

The phrase "Here today, gone tomorrow" is very familiar. Life is short, but every child is entitled to their life being as long and as fulfilling as possible. In the context of asphyxial games "Here today, gone tomorrow" is a stark reality facing those who are either uninformed about the risk or choose in spite of knowing to continue this risk-taking behavior regardless. We have the chance to enable at least some of these children to be here today and alive tomorrow.

One last word from my research: the emails I have received have added an important social comment that underscores the importance of us acting to educate today's youth. Many people, most of whom are now parents or grandparents, have written to share memories of their childhood relating to asphyxial games. Interestingly, virtually all of them did so with others rather than as a solitary activity, and the vast majority now say 'I can't understand why I took the risk'. But a great many are also astute enough to realize that the way some teens nowadays generate asphyxia alone with their neck constricted by a belt or ligature is both different and far more dangerous, and add that these individuals must learn about the enormous risk involved.

Therefore, knowing that more children than we realized are aware of the "choking game", knowing that some will die as a result, and knowing that having the right information influences choice and behavior, I would urge you to use these materials and every opportunity to give children the knowledge and ability to make informed choices.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "A. Macnab". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'M'.

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