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NewsWest 9 Special Report: Local Kids Caught Playing With Their Lives

By **Cierra Putman**
NewsWest 9

Earlier this year NewsWest 9 showed you how Midland ISD stepped up to teach parents about the dangerous activity known as the choking game.

It's a national problem where kids choke other kids for a high, and it turns out some local kids have been playing it right under our noses.

When a local mother heard her child talking about a new game she didn't know what it was, but after asking him a few questions and doing some research she quickly learned her son and some of his friends were playing with their lives.

"He was telling me that they were playing this game and that they were choking each other," Cheri, a Midland mother, said. "And I said, 'you know y'all are cutting off each other's air. That sounds like it would cause brain damage.' And I said 'Just don't do it.'"

Cheri learned her son Levi was talking about the choking game.

"My friends told me about it," Levi said. "That it makes you feel weird like you're in a different place."

Cheri saw cell phone video of her son playing the choking game which broke her heart.

"I just got tears in my eyes like golly," she said. "And this one kid, he was on there and he got scared from it. You could tell that after he'd come to, he teared up."

Levi says all types of kids play - boys, girls, jocks, band kids, honor rollees - it doesn't matter.

But probably the scariest part is that kids play it just about anywhere they can - at home, on the playground and even at school.

In the video Levi had on his phone, he and his friends are playing in an empty classroom at a Midland school.

The 15-year-old says they didn't know they were playing a game of life or death.

But it is, and ER Doctor Sudip Bose has seen the gruesome results first hand.

"They can have strokes, they can have seizures and any manifestation of brain injuries can occur from this," Bose said. "The saddest cases are when someone comes in dead or if they're in a vegetative state. But even if that doesn't happen, every time you do this you're killing brain cells."

The Dangerous Behaviors Foundation's Web site shows there are only about 530 documented choking game cases in the US.

More than 90 percent were fatal, but they say hundreds are mislabeled suicide, especially if a kid tries to play alone, and Texas has the highest number of cases.

"It's not a new phenomenon," Bose said. "It's been played, but it's becoming

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more and more popular, and the reason is that kids are seeking that rush, that exhilarating feeling. Many people have the misconception that because you're not smoking a drug or you're not injecting something into your veins that this is a safe alternative. When it fact it can be more dangerous."

The 15-year-old admits he and his friends did get scared a few times.

"I didn't know what would really happen," Levi said. "It makes you pass out and you don't know what you're doing or anything. It made you feel like light headed and you didn't know where you were or anything, and made a ringing noise in your head."

Levi said he and his friends don't play anymore, but not because they learned they could die.

"It just got old," Levi said. "Started getting boring."

This means, if we don't talk to our kids about it, they may learn how deadly it can be first-hand.

"I just hope that you know these children understand that we don't want to live without them," Cheri said. "We want to protect our children and we need their help to do it."

Thursday night at 10, we'll introduce you to a West Texas mother who lost her daughter to the game.



Unrated

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