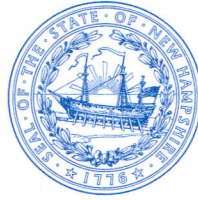


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February 5, 2008

Dear parents and educators:

Information is power. The information in this package has the power to save young lives. Today's youth are bombarded by challenges to seek new thrills and extreme experiences. You may have your own memories of adolescent risk-taking involving breath-holding or other methods of temporarily robbing the brain of oxygen. Today's version of these generations old "games" may have deadly consequences if the child is using ligatures about the neck and, more importantly, playing alone. The line between the lightheadedness produced by this activity and unconsciousness is razor thin. When a child loses consciousness with a ligature about his or her neck, their own body weight will be enough to ultimately strangle them. Fatal suspension can occur at levels far less than standing height, including from bedposts and even doorknobs. The time window in which this kind of catastrophe can occur can be amazingly narrow. It is no exaggeration to say the dangerousness of this activity simply cannot be overstated.

My experience as a forensic pathologist in dealing with these tragedies, both directly and as a consultant, has yielded another nugget of information that I fervently hope will be of value to you. The myth that this kind of behavior is engaged in by only troubled youth must be dispelled. There is little need for me to remind parents and educators that the adolescent brain does not process information in the same manner as an adult brain. Important brain development research indicates adolescents, even those "good kids," are hardwired for risk-taking behavior. In fact, the big lie promulgated to high achieving, action oriented children is that this behavior is a way to get a "drug-free high." Ironically, the group of children most likely to shun tobacco and alcohol may well be the more likely candidates to be playing this game.

Please do not look upon this message as defeatist but as an unambiguous and energetic call to action. Public health initiatives directed at teens involving tobacco, drugs and alcohol have had measurable impact over the years, as statistics regarding these behaviors will easily reveal. The reason they work is that armed with information that is real, is calmly presented and respects the dignity of the adolescent yearning to be treated as an emerging adult, parents and other mentoring adults can counter the plethora of myths the child will be tempted by on the internet or from peers. The absolute worst you can do is nothing. Get informed, use the tools you have been given and be proactive. The impact you may have cannot be measured; save by the depth of feeling you experience attending the funeral of a child who dies in this most needless, maddening fashion. This package represents your first steps toward never letting that happen. Take it to the next level.

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