

Child Fatality Review #08-48
Region 3
Snohomish County

This 15-year-old Caucasian male died by hanging.

Case Overview

On August 23, 2008, the deceased youth was found hanging by a belt tied around his neck in his bedroom closet. This 15-year-old adopted youth was airlifted to Skagit Hospital then transferred to Children's Hospital where he was declared dead. It appeared that the youth was playing "the choking game." The choking game is an activity that involves intentional asphyxiation with a sort of noose to achieve a euphoric state.

This youth was adopted into this family at four years of age. He was doing well in the home prior to this incident. His adoptive parents reported he was alone in his room for no more than ten minutes before he was discovered by his sister, unconscious in his closet. The family just returned from a camping trip and the youth seemed happy. The parents do not believe their son's death by asphyxiation was purposeful (suicide). There was no specific information found during the investigation to determine that the youth intended to harm himself. Consequently, the manner of death was classified as undetermined. Grief counseling for the family was arranged through Children's Hospital.

Referral History

On December 14, 2002, a report was made to Child Protective Services (CPS) intake alleging the deceased youth's mother attempted to find an adoptive home for a 21-month-old child placed in her home without the consent of the child's social worker. The parents of the deceased youth are licensed foster parents. A licensing complaint investigation was conducted and no evidence was found that this occurred. The licensing complaint was closed with a not valid finding.

On April 15, 2002, a report was made to CPS intake regarding bruising seen on two foster children in the home of the deceased youth's parents. The five-month-old foster children had visible marks on their lower back and buttocks. The children's doctor confirmed the marks are Mongolian spots. This referral was screened out as a licensing referral and closed with a not valid finding.

On August 23, 2008, the King County Coroner reported to CPS intake the death of the deceased youth. The coroner reported this 15-year-old youth was found by his sister hanging from a closet rod. The youth was airlifted to Children's Hospital, where he was pronounced dead. The coroner speculated the youth was playing "the choking game." There is no indication the death was an intentional suicide. The referral was screened in for investigation by CPS and closed with an unfounded finding for negligent treatment or maltreatment.

Issues and Recommendations

Issue: None identified

Recommendation: None