



Strangulation is dangerous.

Strangulation risks brain injury and death as well as other adverse outcomesⁱ. The neck contains vital structures including blood vessels, which lie close to the surface. These can be blocked by strangulation, affecting the brain's blood supply, resulting in brain damage. That damage can result in life-changing physical and psychological difficulties, and even death. This can happen in seconds, and does not require significant pressure – in fact, the pressure required is less than it takes to open the ring pull of a can of drink. Strangulation can damage blood vessels in the neck, leading to blood clots forming which may result in a stroke. The stroke can happen anything up to a year after the strangulation. The person who had been strangled would not necessarily know that they had this silent time bomb until the stroke happened. Evidence suggests strangulation is the second most common cause of stroke in young women.ⁱⁱ

There is increased awareness that even gentle pressure to the neck, for example during medical procedures, can have devastating consequences.ⁱⁱⁱ

There is simply no safe way to place your hands, or anything else, round someone's neck.

Can individuals *really* consent to being strangled?

Many would agree that adults should be able to engage in sexual activities of their choosing providing it is legal and done with consent. A key word here is consent. Consent is only consent if it is freely given, informed, and the person has the capacity to make the decision.

A person consenting to strangulation would need to truly appreciate the associated significant risks, including brain injury and death.

Consent is also an ongoing process and individuals have the right to withdraw consent at any point. However, the problem with strangulation is it affects the brain – the organ we need to make and act upon decisions. Experiments have shown that, during strangulation, people forget that they can stop it, or find themselves unable to speak or move^{iv}. The act of strangulation, resulting in decreased oxygen to the brain, will impact on brain function, so that the person no longer has the capacity to consent to it. This makes the concept of 'safe words' or actions redundant.



Finally, individuals cannot agree to serious harm, and this has been established in law^v, restated explicitly in the Domestic Abuse Act (2021)^{vi}. The law applies to all situations, not just those which might be deemed incidents on domestic abuse.

Where a person has been seriously harmed by strangulation, it will not be a sufficient defence to say that they had consented to it.

Individuals or organisations promoting strangulation as an activity as part of consensual sex, to add “excitement” or enhance pleasure are at best ill informed.

Our message is clear:

There is No Safe Way to Strangle.

The Institute for Addressing Strangulation (IFAS) was established in October 2022 to increase awareness of strangulation amongst the public and professionals, conduct and disseminate research into strangulation, and improve the response to victims, survivors, and their supporters.

References

ⁱ Helen Bichard, Christopher Byrne, Christopher W. N. Saville & Rudi Coetzer (2022) The neuropsychological outcomes of non-fatal strangulation in domestic and sexual violence: A systematic review, *Neuropsychological Rehabilitation*, 32:6, 1164-1192, DOI: [10.1080/09602011.2020.1868537](https://doi.org/10.1080/09602011.2020.1868537)

ⁱⁱ Smith, Y. (2009). Exploring psychosocial risk factors for stroke in young women exposed to domestic violence. Dissertation submitted to Queen Margaret University, UK. Retrieved from <http://europepmc.org/article/ETH/500505>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Berkman JM, Rosenthal JA, Saadi A. Carotid Physiology and Neck Restraints in Law Enforcement: Why Neurologists Need to Make Their Voices Heard. *JAMA Neurol.* 2021;78(3):267–268. doi:10.1001/jamaneurol.2020.4669

^{iv} Rossen R, Kabat H, Anderson JP. Acute arrest of cerebral circulation in man. *Arch Neurol Psychiatr.* 1943;50: 510-528.

^v R v Brown [1993] UKHL 19 <https://www.bailii.org/uk/cases/UKHL/1993/19.html>

^{vi} <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/non-fatal-strangulation-or-non-fatal-suffocation>