

Pragmatic Sensual Rope

by [@tangram](#)

This document contains information for beginner and aspiring riggers and rope tops. It came to life as a collection of notes I wanted to publish after teaching the rope and suspension sessions at BDSM unConference 2016 & 2017. It is a work in progress that I update from time to time as I teach privately and at [events](#).

The purpose of this document is not to teach the details of how to approach rope and ties, or to address rope safety in detail, but to outline a simple path through the overwhelming amount of (often conflicting) information available on the Net. My approach is on purpose opinionated without pretending to be right.

Grammatically, “sensual rope” makes no sense but I like the phrase for its succinctness. Let’s all agree that the phrase means something like “rope tops using rope sensually to create feelings in rope bottoms.”

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Three Principles of Sensual Rope

1. **Rope is a medium.** More so than anything else in the BDSM toolbox, rope is an enabler of intent. It offers limitless uses, a vast palette of options to suit any occasion. Rope is a paradox, simultaneously offering infinite complexity and immediate applicability. Learning sensual rope is akin to learning to paint in a new medium or learning a new language: it’s a lifelong journey but the enjoyment can begin immediately.
2. **Sensual rope creates feelings.** Rope ties people and things up. Rope also creates art. Sensual rope first and foremost creates feelings. Sensual rope sacrifices beauty and function to achieve this goal. It is inwardly focused, channeling and amplifying the energy of the D/s relationship. Its goal is to create unforgettable memories, not audience ovation or Facebook/forum Likes.
3. **Process > outcome.** The traditional approach to learning rope focuses on knots and ties. As a result, it creates an implicit value system where the end goal--the thing to appreciate & praise--is a completed tie. This is how the BDSM community ends up full of rope tops and riggers tying mechanically, rushing to complete their ties so they can pat themselves on the back and snap a picture. Sensual rope artists reject this approach. They realize that every movement of the rope, every touch against the body is an opportunity to create feelings, to build connection and share something special with the rope bottoms.

Making a plan

If the purpose of sensual rope is to create feelings and if the process is greater than the outcome then a rope session cannot start by simply choosing a position to put the rope bottom in. Making a plan about a sensual rope session is thinking about the mood & feelings you want to create within the constraints of the environment, your capabilities and the rope bottom's mood and limits.

Once you have this in mind, it's time to decide which knots and ties to use and in what sequence. You don't have to do this all up front. You can flow and adjust as the play progresses. However, if you do not start by focusing on mood & feelings in your rope work from the very beginning, it is very likely that you'll end up tying mechanically.

More on this later but, as we get into some technical sections, do not lose the fact that technique is secondary to intent.

Safety equipment

Before you play with rope, get the tools to cut rope safely in an emergency. At minimum, you need [EMT shears](#). In addition, I strongly recommend getting a rescue hook: it's faster, safer, easier to work with with one hand and you can also cut blind, e.g., cut a rope behind someone's back while standing in front of them. The latter is quite important if you tie people to objects.

Tip: I often carry [this rescue hook](#) around my neck.

Choosing rope

Material

There are many, many different types of ropes available and there are many resources online to help you understand the choices. Cutting to the chase:

- If you are just starting and if you don't plan to do suspensions, I recommend synthetic rope, specifically, [solid braid nylon rope](#) (without a core) because it is strong, supple, consistent, soft, cheap and comes in many colors. The two negatives of nylon rope--that its knots are more slippery and that it can burn the skin when moving quickly--should not be a problem for you.
- Otherwise, choose hemp or jute rope from a high-quality BDSM-oriented supplier. Unless you want to deal with the not-so-simple aspects of making, washing + oiling your

own rope, make sure to get a ready-to-use rope. This is where the quality of the supplier will matter (and so will the cost). A few criteria that don't apply to sensual rope but are nevertheless worth mentioning:

- If you want to take a lot of pictures to post online, use jute (because it has a nice shine) or colored hemp (undyed hemp has a dull color).
- If you want to tie very quickly (usually for public performances) and don't mind additional rope maintenance, use jute because it is lighter and becomes more slippery (loses its grip) with use, allowing it to move faster.
- If you want buy & forget rope, use hemp. It is stronger than jute, requires less maintenance and does not lose its grip like jute does. The rope that I leave in Europe in-between visits is crimson hemp from [Twisted Monk](#).

Tip: Even if you use natural fiber rope by default, unless you want to wash it & oil it frequently, if you play a lot, it's a good idea to use synthetic rope for mouth, crotch and cock ties because of the "juices" that would otherwise dry on the rope.

Soapbox: Because I tie for feelings and not pictures, to keep rope clean and maintenance free I ask subs to remove makeup, perfume and any deodorant residue before play. In particular, makeup foundation is very difficult to remove from natural fiber rope and looks quite unattractive on dark colored rope.

Sizes

For general rope work, go with a rope between 6-8mm (1/4" - 5/16") in width. I prefer 6mm rope for most ties as it makes smaller knots. For tying hair, face nets and cock ties, go with 4mm rope (5/32").

Convenient rope lengths (and the number to have for a well-endowed rope kit) are:

- 15m (50') for full body harnesses: 1x
- 8-10m (25-30') for general bodywork + suspension lines: 5-10x
- 4-5m (15') for two column ties: 2-4x
- 3m (10') for one column ties: 2-4x
- 2m (7.5') as a short rope extension towards the end of a tie: 0-2x

All of the above are 6mm ropes. In addition, it's nice to have 1-2 3m (10') lengths of 4mm rope for hair or cock ties.

Tip: Get used to working with shorter rope. It's faster to use because it takes less time to run its length through while making a knot or weaving.

Other types of rope for your kit

- 550 Type III paracord is great for [CBT](#), hair, finger, toe and face ties.
 - I buy a long length and cut smaller lengths when I travel.
 - **Tip:** I most frequently use it to create loops (using [fisherman's knot](#)) that I slide under the legs of furniture. Later, I can easily anchor rope with knots, carabiners or tension clips if I need to work quickly. Almost every hotel room I've played in has these and, sometimes, I've discovered them, stealthily in place, many years later.
- Thick synthetic yarn is great for finger and toe ties. It works well in the shower, bathtub & spa because it does not shrink. It's cheap: rather than washing it, throw out what you use after play.
- Specialty rope
 - Electroconductive rope: mixed results with e-stim; some people like it.
 - Silk: luxurious but very expensive if you buy high quality.
 - Coconut: extremely scratchy, typically used for heavy crotch/CBT play.

Useful tools & accessories

- A [marlinspike](#) (or a small + medium-sized screwdriver or even a few nails of different diameter) can help you loosen tricky knots.
- Carabiners for faster hookup to attachment points. For suspensions, only use carabiners rated for climbing. There are [many types/shapes](#) to choose from.
 - Traditional oval carabiners are harder to find now but are extremely useful for certain rope extensions because they are symmetric: two separate ropes looped through the ends under tension will form a straight line.
 - I prefer smaller pear shaped carabiners when I travel and when I'm using a single main rope on the narrow side + anchoring on the wide side.
 - I prefer large D carabiners when I need leverage (many rope passes through the carabiner) for suspensions.
- Clips. For ground ties, you can use anything with a breaking strength greater than 50-100kg. The technical term is [spring clips](#).

Rope literacy

Terminology

The following is a selection from <http://www.animatedknots.com/terminology.php>

- **Bend:** Joins two ropes or fishing lines, e.g., [Sheet Bend](#), [Alpine Butterfly Bend](#), [Figure 8 Bend](#), [Ashley Bend](#), [Hunter's Bend](#), [Zeppelin Bend](#).
- **Bight:** Made by folding a piece of rope so that the two parts lie alongside each other. When tied near the rope's end, the parts will be the Tail lying beside the Standing End. A bight can be used to finish many knots - making them easy to untie by just pulling the tail. The term "Bight" does not imply a "Loop" and does not mean the same.
- **Breaking Strain:** The theoretical strength of a rope - derived by averaging many tests of a rope tested under optimal conditions, i.e., when stretched slowly while wound many times round a smooth, large diameter drum. The theoretical breaking strain is rarely (if ever) achieved in practice despite claims made by enthusiastic knot proponents.
- **Dressing a Knot:** Arranging the components of the knot to optimize security and/or strength.
- **Hitch:** Attaches a rope to something, e.g., a **Hitching Post**, dock pole, mooring buoy, anchor, or cleat. Such knots include the [Rolling Hitch](#), [Cleat Hitch](#), [Buntline Hitch](#), [Icicle Hitch](#), [Distel Hitch](#), and [Lighterman's Hitch](#).
- **Loop:** Made when a rope forms a partial circle with the ends crossing each other.
- **Round Turn:** Two passes of a rope round an object – to completely encircle it.
- **Slipped:** A knot is *Slipped* when it is completed using a loop or loops. The best known example is the [Bow](#), a slipped version of the [Square Knot](#). Many of the knots described can be *slipped*. Using a loop makes them less secure - think of shoelaces - but they are released more easily.
- **Solid Braid:** A tightly woven single-braid rope which cannot be spliced using a [Brummel](#) or a [Long Bury](#) technique.
- **Standing End:** The long end - the part not knotted. The standing part lies between the standing end and the knot.
- **Stopper Knot:** A knot in the end of a rope – used to prevent fraying or to prevent the end passing through a hole.
- **Strands:** The major components of a rope – three in a three-strand rope. Each "Strand" is made up of many separate fibers.
- **Tail:** The short end – the part getting knotted.
- **Turn:** One pass of the rope round or through an object.
- **Whipping:** A binding knot used to prevent a rope's end fraying.

The knot alphabet

These are the most basic knots you need to know as they are integral parts of more complex knots:

- Overhand, half hitch, half knot (a.k.a, overhand), square knot, sheet bend, figure 8, slipped knot, noose (slipped overhand): www.animatedknots.com/indexbasics.php
- [Granny knot](#) (you need to understand the difference between it and the square knot: the square knot can slip if tension is applied in the wrong direction!)
- [Lark's Head](#): how most harnesses begin

Cutting rope & maintaining rope ends

Cutting rope is easy. The question is what to do with the ends.

If you are using nylon rope:

- The quick'n'dirty method is to wrap electrical tape tight around the ends. Have a second person apply tension to the rope to make the braid tight (thinner), which will ensure the tape adheres better and stays longer. To save effort, apply wider tape to a tensioned rope before the cut: you get two wrapped ends.
- The best method is to soak 1cm section with clear nail polish and let it dry overnight. The solvent will melt/shrink the nylon. Cut through the middle of it and both ends will need no more work. Note that you'll have to work a little harder to cut through the hardened rope.

If you are using natural rope, the best approach is to whip the ends. It is not that complicated to learn how to do a [common whipping](#) and even [sail whipping](#) can be learned with a bit of practice. One of the reasons I like Twisted Monk hemp is that it comes with sail whipping and you can even order different colors of whipping for different lengths of rope for easy identification.

Soapbox: Traditionally, natural rope has had knots tied at the ends to keep the strands together. That's the go-to approach in the shibari/kinbaku tradition, for example. I don't love it. Knots can slow down the pulling of rope through other rope, they add bulk when rope is extended and require weird workarounds when the two knots don't end up exactly together when extension is needed (they hardly ever do). Whipping, while requiring a bit of extra effort, is a superior technique. Trust the world's navies: they have relied on natural fiber rope far longer than kinksters.

Storing rope

There are many ways to store rope. Whichever way you choose should satisfy one requirement: you should be able to get your hand on the middle of the rope and uncoil/extend it within 5 secs of picking it up.

If your rope stays at home, use [rope chains](#) (I prefer not to tie the knot at the top in order to speed up making the rope ready for use). If your rope travels, use shibari-style [rope bundles](#).

If you leave rope in bundles for a long time, it helps to "relax" it before use. A simple way to do this is to wind the rope once around a "column"--one side of a carabiner or the leg of a piece of furniture that will not mind rope friction--and pull it back-and-forth a few times under light

tension. You can do this end-to-end (if you have a helper) or a few feet at a time, moving it back and forth with your arms.

Tip: The above technique works well for fluffing new hemp rope, which makes it gentler on the rope bottom's skin and easier to handle.

Extending rope

If your ends do not have knots, [use a sheet bend](#). If your ends have knots, [trap a Lark's head on the knots](#). If the knots are not together, create a fold in the longer rope to align them.

Anchoring ties

Every tie must begin somewhere: its initial anchor. As a tie progresses, the rope may choose other anchors.

Columns, columns everywhere

A column in BDSM rope terminology is anything one can wrap rope around: hands, arms, neck, torso, legs, feet, a table/chair/bed leg, etc. Tying a rope to a column is a one-column tie (1CT, a.k.a. single column tie). Tying two columns together is a two-column tie (2CT, a.k.a. double column tie).

One of the key skills of a good rigger is being able to see columns in places where others don't. For example, a table top is a column: it may take a lot of rope but you can surely wrap it. A person can be secured to a table using 2CT (person, table top).

When one or more of the columns are body parts, two special considerations come into play:

1. We have to observe safety rules to ensure that nerves are not compressed and blood/air supply is not impeded. Much of the complexity of BDSM anchoring revolves around securely tying columns w/o compressing tissue. There are at least four separate issues to consider:
 - a. Can a knot/tie be made securely without applying undue pressure on tissues?
 - b. Does the pressure applied on tissues change if the rope is put under tension, e.g., does the knot slip?
 - c. If there is a problem midpoint in play, can the tension on tissue be adjusted?
 - d. If the column needs to be released, can this happen without undoing the entire tie or most of it?
2. We have to worry about the owner of the column(s), i.e., the subject, attempting to escape the ties. This brings two main considerations into play:

- a. Can the knot be untied at all by the subject? For example, forward tension column ties with unlocked bights can usually be untied if a subject gets their fingers or teeth on the knot but reverse tension column ties and forward tension column ties with locked bights cannot, as long as the end of the rope is secured. (If you don't know the difference between forward and reverse tension ties, no worries: read on.)
- b. If the knots can be untied, are they within reach of the subject? Sometimes, the solution for creating an escape-proof tie is simply moving a knot by a few inches.

Anchoring to eyes & loops

If you are lucky, you'll have various eyes, rings and loops to use for anchor points. Sometimes, you may want to create loops in rope to use as anchors. What knot you use depends on (a) where in the rope you need the loop, (b) the direction of tension.

- End of single rope: [figure 8 on the bight](#)
- Middle of the rope: [alpine butterfly](#)

Once you have a loop, you can anchor using Lark's Head for doubled rope, round turn and two half hitches or a clip/carabiner.

Hitches & friction knots

When we are securing rope to a table leg we don't have to worry about compressing the table leg (unless it is an antique with priceless finish) and can use any of a range of knots designed for securing rope to posts: [hitches](#).

- Round turn and two half hitches will get you most of the way if you don't need easy tension control.
- If you need to be able to slide the attachment point, [Blake's Hitch](#) works well in most cases, even in slippery nylon rope. Blake's Hitch is an example of a friction knot. It adds enough friction to even be useful in certain suspension situations, e.g., adjustable support for a limb (never for a main line).

Locking rope to rope

A special form of anchoring is ensuring that when ropes cross, the crossing point stays the same even after tension is applied. While this can be done with more complicated knots, in most cases one of the following two would do nicely:

- Half hitch: the default in traditional Eastern work
- [Munter hitch](#): when you want a clean, decorative look

This type of securing rope to rope is usually referring to locking (off).

Weaving vs. knots

Traditional Eastern (shibari/kinbaku) techniques rely on lots of knots. Knots add bulk and can apply uneven pressure on the skin. Sometimes that is desirable. For the cases when it is not, one solution is to use a weaving technique where friction between ropes is generated via the weave and not via knots. Weaving is more common in Native American and Celtic traditions. You can see an example in [Leto's hip harness](#).

Thinking through ropes, knots, ties & subjects

It is important to develop a habit of evaluating the fit of knots & ties to the situation you are in, which at minimum includes the rope(s) you are using and the person/people you are tying up. Here are some of the things you should be thinking about:

- What's the rope condition? Has the material aged? Is there extended wear in key spots, e.g., the middle of the rope, where other rope could rub against the bight?
- Is the working strength of the rope far greater (4x - 10x, depending on what you are doing, because knots weaken ropes) than the loads you will apply to it?
- If you will be taking pictures or video, how does the rope color interact with the subject's clothing/skin? How does the sheen of the rope affect photography/video?
- Are the knots well-chosen for the type of rope? Most synthetic ropes are more slippery than their natural fiber counterparts. A knot that would hold in hemp might slip in nylon. Extra turns, hitches and overhand knots are sometimes needed for synthetics.
- Will the knots be easy to untie? That's an especially important question if you'll have to untie under tension.
- Do you have enough rope on hand? Is it close enough so you can reach it if you need to extend rope under tension? Alternatively, can you lock off rope + leave the subject to walk over and get extra rope? (When doing suspensions, the answer is not always "yes".)
- How long will the tie take? How about undoing the tie? How does that fit with the overall flow of the session?
- Does the tie need to be picture perfect or just get the job done?
- Does the subject seem able to handle the tie?
- How long will the subject need to be in the tie? Can the tie be easily adjusted if the subject experiences atypical discomfort, pain or numbness?
- If the subject faints, how quickly can you free him/her? (Don't think untying, think cutting.)
- If the subject is very weak (can't stand, for example), can you quickly and safely undo the ties and transition the subject to a position where they do not require your immediate attention?

- What is the likelihood of you making a mistake with this tie? What are the likely failure modes? What can you do to anticipate, prepare or mitigate any risks?

“Ideal” knots

Based on the questions above, we could define an ideal knot as one that, given a job it needs to do:

1. It works equally well, regardless of the type of rope used or the subject.
2. It's easy and quick to tie & dress.
3. It can be easily adjusted after it is tied.
4. It's easy and quick to untie, but only by the rigger.
5. It doesn't slip under tension (unless it is a slip knot that's meant to do this).
6. It doesn't come untied if the tension varies, e.g., when a subject struggles.
7. If it is a one- or two-column tie, it allows us to easily and precisely choose the tightness around the column(s).
8. It is impossible to tie incorrectly: either it works or it's obvious that it doesn't work.
9. Unless it is a decorative knot or a sensation-oriented knot, it is compact and, ideally, flat(ter) than alternatives.
10. It could be tied/untied under tension.

When there are too many choices to consider, these criteria can help you focus on the one (or few) knots you should learn from the dozens that are available.

One column ties (1CT)

The traditional one column tie is the [bula bula](#) from the kinbaku tradition. It's hundreds of years old and its age shows: it is far from an ideal knot. It can slip in synthetic rope, requiring an extra overhand or half-hitch. Under tension it can flip in any rope. It is not easy to adjust its tightness. It is bulky.

Soapbox: I use bula bula sparingly, usually when I want a very tight 1CT (rarely, pressure reasons) or when tying traditionally. If you are to master one single 1CT knot, it should be the [Somerville Bowline](#). Invented circa 2010 by a rigger (@Topologist), it is taking the BDSM community by storm. It is close to an ideal knot. It works with any kind of rope. It can be tied in 10-15secs by an experienced rigger and unties faster. It either works or collapses: it is very hard to make a mistake. It does not change shape as tension direction varies. It allows for relatively easy adjustments. It can be untied from either end. It is quite compact. The list goes on...

Special purpose 1CTs

When you:

1. Need a tight 1CT
 - a. [Bula bula](#) (study variations to learn the intricacies of this knot and be careful about tissue pressure and the direction of tension)
2. Have access to the end of the column (hands, feet: the knot can be slipped on).
 - a. Want a fast tie, perhaps with some preparation ahead of time + then quickly slipping & cinching.
 - i. Are not putting too much tension on the tissue.
 1. [Cat's Paw](#) (pressure is distributed only to two ropes)
 - ii. Want to be able to very easily adjust tension on the column.
 1. [Zip Snare](#), which is based on the [Prusik knot](#) for climbing.
3. Need to tie the column to the end of the rope and adjust the slack via the tail.
 - a. [French bowline](#)
4. Need to tie a column in the middle of the rope
 - a. [Captured overhand cuff](#)

Two column ties (2CT)

Two column ties operate on a basic common principle of perpendicular wraps: first we wrap the two columns together with the rope and then we wrap the thus created wraps (perpendicularly) to prevent escape + adjust rope tension.

The traditional two column tie, like the 1CT, originates from the kinbaku tradition. Like the bula bula, it has numerous problems and should be avoided, especially by beginners who can accidentally finish the tie using a square knot, which can slip, as opposed to a granny knot, which does not.

Soapbox: While I do not have the same overwhelming preference as in the case of 1CT ties, I do like the [two column Somerville Bowline](#) because it is relatively compact and does not change shape when loaded from different directions.

There is no one “close to ideal” 2CT. Too much depends on the columns involved. To understand the nature of the trade offs, you need to understand the difference between [forward and reverse tension column ties](#).

When it comes to forward tension 2CTs, I usually go with a somerville bowline. When it comes to reverse tension 2CTs, if I need speed, a [captured loop 2CT](#) works well. When lots of wraps to relieve pressure are required but a loop that can act as a fulcrum is not needed, [Chanta Rose's 2CT](#) works well (it's demoed twice in the video: once for the wrists and once for the ankles).

Rope bars

If you need a “bar” (a significant distance between the two columns), that requires a completely different set of reverse tension ties, depending on where you want the rope to exit and how fast you want the tie to be. For a faster tie where the rope exists close to one of the columns, use a [basic spreader bar](#). For a slower tie that is symmetric and that allows tension control at each of the columns, begin like you would with the basic spreader bar but split the two ends of the rope and start wrapping each from the middle towards the arms. Tie off with a half hitch.

Rope bars look great but they do take a long time to tie. The symmetric version above has the advantage of being faster to untie (assuming you don’t need your rope immediately) as it can be slipped off the columns once some of the tension is removed. This also means that a symmetric bar 2CT can be “prepared” in advance, slipped on and tightened.

Very fast CTs

When you need speed and you don’t care about tissue pressure, use [Texas Handcuffs](#).

Lengthwise 2CTs

There are cases where you want to bring two columns tightly together with many spaced wraps. The typical approaches for doing this are:

- [Ladder ties](#)
- [Futomomo](#)

Using one column ties to bind two columns

If the two columns are going to be touching each other then a 1CT can be used to bind them together. This usually looks best with many wraps and is a special variation of the lengthwise 2CTs above. In BDSM terminology, these are often called gauntlets. There are three main approaches:

- Repeating reverse tension: takes a long time to tie because of all the tail pulls
- Repeating half hitches: ditto as above
- [Weaving](#), which can be very fast to tie and untie

N column ties

The general pattern of first wrapping columns and then wrapping the wraps perpendicularly can be generalized to N columns: one set of wraps around all the columns and N-1 perpendicular wraps between the columns.

For example, in a traditional TK (takate kote/gote or box tie) [chest harness](#), the three columns are the torso and two arms and the kannuki (the cinches that go under the armpits on the top wrap and, sometimes, on the bottom wrap also) are the perpendicular “wraps” that tension the tie across the columns.

As you start seeing these types of patterns in ties you will be well on your way to becoming a flexible rigger who can use the rope alphabet to create poetry.

Harnesses

Harnesses build a framework of rope around parts of the body. There are three main purposes for harnesses:

- Decoration: adorning the body to make it more beautiful
- Restriction: preventing movement
- Anchoring: creating structure to allow ropes to be attached (required for suspensions but also very useful in ground play)

There are infinitely many harness variations. Here I will focus on the two most important types (chest & hip) with the minimal set of quick, safe and very versatile examples.

Hip

Most people start tying chest harnesses first but tying chest harnesses well is a lot harder than it looks. Therefore, I'd recommend starting with tying hip harnesses and experimenting with ground play involving anchoring the harnesses to objects and/or limbs.

Over the years I created my own version of a hip harness using weaving as opposed to knots. It was very comfortable, which allowed for extended play, and it offered attachments from every direction and “handles” for sex. A few years ago I discovered a [better version](#), which I have switched to using and recommending as one of the simplest and by far the most versatile hip harness I know. It is very comfortable. It can be worn all day and it even allows the rope bottom to go to the bathroom with the harness on. This is very important for long and/or casual play where the dom wants to maintain immediate access to the body of the sub over long periods of time. The catch is that it takes some time to tie & untie because of the weaving.

There is a [much more elaborate version](#) of the above hip harness. The one word I'd use to describe it is "bombproof". However, it is a lot more complicated to tie & untie and I would only recommend it for extended suspension play because bottoms find it super comfortable (it reduces the pressure on the inside of the thighs). It includes a crotch rope, which is a mixed blessing: useful to hold things in but also a deterrent for certain kinds of play.

Chest

The chest harness that most people see first is some version of [takate kote](#)/gote (TK for short). It is a fine harness to try in ground play but I would very strongly recommend that you do not begin suspension with a TK harness. Learning how to tie TK for suspension well takes a lot of practice. It is a tie that, depending on the suspension position, can apply significant pressure to sensitive areas on the arms and cause nerve damage for some people in a matter of minutes. If you want to use TK for suspension, I strongly recommend using a [chest-loading TK](#), which is an advanced tie.

The most versatile chest harness that I know is the [shinju, adjusted to handle suspension](#), if necessary. Rather than learning how to tie several different shinju variations, I recommend you become really good at tying this one. It is super comfortable (can be worn all day) and is flat enough to even wear under loose clothing. It offers attachment points from the front, back and sides. It leaves the arms free, which allows them to be tied separately in whichever way is most useful for play, including making multiple transition ties with the arms. In suspension, it buys your rope bottom a lot more time in the air because it does not apply pressure to sensitive areas on the arms where important nerves come close to the surface the way TK does.

Other useful harnesses

- A [quick shoulder harness](#) is great for tying in bed and can do wonders for bedroom sex, especially for women who like to ride hard on top.

Practicing sensual rope

With the information gained so far, you can tie columns by themselves and together and you can create attachment points in rope and on the body. This gives you infinitely many opportunities to tie your partner, which brings the question: how should you tie your partner?

Since the goal of sensual rope is to create feelings, the answer to the above question is based on the intent around the feelings you'd like to create. Ties & position are tools, not end goals. In very domination-oriented sessions, the majority of intent may come from the dominant (using pre-agreed goals/limits). In more collaborative play (or when you are playing with a new partner) intent arises as part of the session negotiation.

Negotiation cornerstones

- How are the top & bottom feeling today?
- What are the goals of the session? What are the top & bottom hoping for?
- What do the top & bottom like about sensual rope? What do the things they like feel/look when they are great?
- How will the bottom signal s/he loves/hates something and wants more/less of it?
- What is the safety framework (implicit vs. explicit consent, ongoing consent or not, safe words/actions, time limits)?
- Any health issues the top should know about?
- What are the hard limits for this session?
- What's the plan for aftercare?

Safety framework

In less intense ground ties, a typical traffic light (green, yellow, red) safety framework works well. Green means “go” and also “more”. Yellow means “don’t stop but reduce intensity or change”. It is usually a good idea to have the top check in with the bottom. Red means “immediately stop and check in with the bottom”. The words don’t have to be green/yellow/red; it’s the meaning that’s important. Green is implicit by default.

Unfortunately, in many situations, especially public play, negative stigma surrounds the use of a safe word, even if it is “yellow” and not “red”. I have talked to countless bottoms who endure far past what’s reasonable because they don’t want to be seen using a safe word. To deal with this problem, I often negotiate the use of a separate word whose meaning is essentially “parlay”: a request from the bottom for the top to check in and have a discussion. The discussion may be anything: from increasing intensity to trying something new/different to decreasing intensity. I find that especially less experienced subs/bottoms are more likely to use this neutral parlay word than, say, “yellow”.

If the bottom will be gagged or in any way unable to use his/her voice, a nonverbal signal must be negotiated. The common one is shaking the head while trying to make noise along the lines of “uh-uh-uh”. (The typical use case is signaling there is too much cock down the bottom’s throat.)

For suspensions or when the ground ties become stressful/intense, it is useful to add another layer, which is time based. If the bottom says “N minutes” it means they can only be in this position for N more minutes. The top is responsible for untying the bottom and/or changing the direction of tension or tightness of binds or transitioning to a different position that loads the body (and, in some cases, mind) in different ways.

In very intense situations, e.g., when heavy endorphins are expected, it is useful to consider an always-on indication of consent, a.k.a., ongoing consent. The typical way to do this is to give the bottom an object to hold. If the object falls out of their hand/mouth that, in effect, triggers a safe word. Whether that's yellow or red depends on the context of play.

Using rope well

Now that you have your intent and know what mood/feelings you want to create you can build a plan (or at least the beginning of a plan you can use as a starting point for flow). In addition to the knots/ties/positions you want to use, and often much more important than them, is how you will apply rope to the bottom. Think about all the mood-creating variables under your control:

- Movements
 - fast ⇔ slow
 - smooth ⇔ jerky
 - gentle ⇔ forceful
 - top moving ⇔ top moving bottom
- Position relative to the bottom
 - dominating ⇔ neutral ⇔ elevating
 - touching ⇔ close ⇔ far
- Breathing
 - excited ⇔ neutral ⇔ meditative
- Voice
 - loud ⇔ neutral ⇔ quiet (whispering)
 - Can the bottom hear or is s/he under sensory deprivation, e.g., with headphones or earplugs?
- Eye contact
 - Direct ⇔ indirect
 - Has the bottom been asked to avert his/her eyes?
 - Has the bottom been blindfolded?
- Rope tension
 - light ⇔ tight
- Knot cinching
 - gentle ⇔ forceful
- Bottom's clothing
 - on ⇔ cut/ripped ⇔ off
- Light
 - bright ⇔ dim

Every time you touch the bottom with your body or with the rope is an opportunity to affirm the shared intent. How you move your body around the bottom is very important.

Especially in floor play there are many opportunities to create contact between your body and the bottom's in various ways. Though you may be tying with your hands, consider the position of your legs and torso and how you'd like the bottom to be relative to them. Just a few examples:

- You can begin a chest harness that ties the arms behind the back standing up by putting the bottom's head between your legs, creating a nearly flat "shelf" from the back to tie on.
- If you are taller than the bottom, you can learn to tie standing close behind him/her with your arms wrapping around them. This creates a very intimate envelope.
- If you'd like to move the bottom early in a tie, when his/her arms are free, research [aikido joint locks](#) and you'll find many ideas. As with any application of martial arts, be extra thoughtful about how you use them.
- If you'd like to create a fast & forceful tying dynamic, research [hojojutsu](#)'s fast rope techniques. (Hojojutsu's slow rope techniques are in many ways the ancestors of modern day shibari/kinbaku.) The same caveat applies as above: hojojutsu is a martial art and many of its techniques are not safe (cinching knots, knots around the neck, etc.). That said, much can be learned about how to move with rope around a bottom to create certain feelings by studying hojojutsu.

Suspension

Rope suspension is wonderful. It's also dangerous and complicated. It cannot be taught (well) quickly and requires a lot of practice. In this section I will offer a handful of DOs and DO NOTs to help you get started.

DOs

- Do get very comfortable with ground ties before you start suspensions.
- Do study suspensions and suspension safety before you try them. The very best & well-organized set of instruction videos I know of are [here](#). Don't forget to tie for feelings.
- Do get some anatomy books and familiarize yourself with the pathways of key nerves.
- Do seek help in ensuring you have safe anchor point(s) for suspension.
- Do aim to have multiple anchor points for suspension. They make distributing ties much easier and significantly reduce the risk of stuck ropes on suspension rings.
- Do practice safety drills: stuck rope, lowering a fainted bottom to the ground, etc.
- Do start suspensions using a shinju suspension harness and a Leto hip harness.
- Do start with a partial suspension (one leg on the ground).
- Do a [basic seated suspension](#) for your first full suspension (but use the Leto hip harness).
- Do explore sex, impact play & sensory deprivation in suspension.
- Do remember that the process is greater than the outcome.

DO NOTs

- Do not trust anchor points in cement/concrete. They are exceedingly tricky to get right and can fail critically in an instant. Use a suspension frame instead.
- Do not start suspensions using a TK harness. Traditional TKs pose nontrivial risk of nerve compression in some suspensions and chest-loading TKs, which reduce but do not eliminate the risk, are difficult ties to get right.
- Do not start by doing multi-position transitions in suspensions. Executing ties such that tissues are protected from multiple directions of load is an advanced technique.
- Do not use any alcohol or mind-altering substances when doing suspensions. Unless you've done so many suspensions that you are working from muscle memory, you'll need your brain.

Anchoring suspensions

Anchoring suspensions safely is not easy, especially if there will be any type of dynamic loading.

Beam attachment

In a typical house, the safest place to do suspensions from is large structural (as opposed to decorative) ceiling beams.



Single attachment points

The typical approach you'd see in gyms using [attachment plates](#) is risky for full body suspensions in concrete ceilings, unless you can go all the way through whatever you are attaching to and connect to a metal plate on the other side. It is possible to use these if you are attaching into strong hardwood and you'll be using a light subject without excessive dynamic loading. If your subject is heavier, you'd need to attach through to something on the other side.

It's better to create more than one attachment point. For example, attach three points in a line and suspend a metal tube/pipe or a structural bamboo beam through them. This will give you many more options for play than a single attachment point, including play without suspensions. It's well worth considering.

Frames

The easiest and most secure way to do suspensions at home or outside is with a strong frame. There are some BDSM-specific options that are easy to hide from the eyes of vanilla visitors while others can be the cornerstone of a well-equipped dungeon:

- [Tetruss](#): great because of its light weight + packability. Travels well and fits anywhere. The catch is that it *feels* less sturdy because the aluminum legs can flex a bit.
- [Dungeon Delights](#): made from heavy gauge steel, which makes it very sturdy, yet can also be (dis)assembled quickly.
- [Multi-point suspension frame](#): perfect if you have the room (and wallet) for it. You will find this in many well-equipped London dungeons.
- On Etsy, [bondsofsteel](#) (in the US) and [Taixo](#) (in Europe) also offer both wooden & metal frames with optional customization.

If you want to make your own metal frame, you can easily do it with [Key Clamps](#) or any of their knockoffs around the world: search for [structural pipe fittings](#). It pays to consult with experts on the size of tubing you'll need based on the size/type of setup you require, unless you overprovision using [precomputed tables](#) or [structural load calculators](#) (also [here](#)).

Swing set frame elements make it very easy to safely assemble a frame using elements readily available in stores. Search for [swing set brackets](#). Some examples:

- [For 100mm wood poles](#)
- [For large dimension rectangular lumber](#)
- [For flexible lumber sizing](#)

If you cannot find large-enough single beams you can “engineer” beams by gluing and bolting through smaller-dimension lumber. The resulting structure will be even stronger.

There is an easy trick to keeping a heavy frame stable on an uneven floor: do not attempt to cut the supports parallel to the floor. Instead, leave them uncut and use a furniture coaster (sliding pad) as shown in the picture below. The beam is resting on a single corner, which is quite alright.



And here is what a frame inside a home looks like (per @Topologist, whose setup this is, the hand rings are not for suspension: just for pull ups). The space under the frame can be reused: for example, you can keep a couch and slide it out of the way.



The architecture of ties

This section includes examples of simple combination ties together with the rationale for executing the ties in the particular way.

Versatile hog tie variation

This is a very versatile tie executed with a single 30ft (9m) rope. The goals of the tie were to:

- Evoke the exposure/defenselessness feelings of a hogtie by binding the hands close to the feet behind the back.
- Enable play in multiple positions: lying on stomach or back, kneeling and in partial suspension.
- Provide easy access to all sensitive areas.
- Be comfortable-enough for multi-hour play.
- Allow easy transitions to other positions.



1. Begin with a rope bar around the ankles where the starting Lark's Head knot is in the middle and you split the double rope, wrapping each strand independently from the middle towards the ankles.
 - a. It is important to tie the rope bar while the legs are in the final desired position. This way, the pressure of the wraps will be even. If you tie the bar with the legs straight and then spread them the wraps closest to the knee will exert much greater pressure.
 - b. If you want to prevent the bottom from closing the knees, insert a hard object into the rope bar as you wrap. An unsharpened pencil works quite well. Trap it with wraps past its end to ensure that it does not rub the skin.
2. Take each split end and exit towards the ankle.
 - a. We will need this line to anchor the hand tie in Step 7.
3. Make one wrap around the foot under the ball of the foot.
 - a. This wrap serves a purely sensory purpose: it increases the feeling of the feet being bound.
 - b. If you want a stricter foot binding, you can cross from one wrap to the other but that risks increasing tissue pressure if the position is changed, which is why I didn't do it here.
4. Anchor the wrap with a half hitch.
 - a. This isolates the rope tension going to the toes, which have sensitive blood flow, from the pressure the arms will exert via the rope lock in Step 7.
5. Weave between the toes, making sure the rope is not too tight.
 - a. This serves a sensory function but also increasingly isolates tension to the big toes, which we will tie in the next step.
6. Tie the big toes with a square knot.
 - a. This protects the toes from uneven tension coming via the arms.
7. Pass the ends by the pinky toes and bring them down along the outside of the feet, anchoring with a half hitch around the level of the ankle.
8. Tie the wrists with a French bowline knot.
 - a. Because you are working with a single rope, make additional wraps to distribute the rope pressure.
 - b. If you have rope to spare, leave about 1 ft (30cm) of rope at the end.
9. If you had remaining rope in Step 8, wrap the remaining ends over the arm and lock them with a simple half hitch.
 - a. This spare rope can be useful if you wanted to bring the wrists together for a stricter tie: wrap *over* the wraps of the French bowline to protect the tissue from the pressure of a single rope and tie with a simple square knot.

Now that the tie is complete, you can do any number of things:

- Work with the sub in this position
 - Increase the intensity of the tie
 - Bringing wrists and/or elbows together

- Tie the hair or wraps around the mouth to the rope bar (a friction knot would be very useful here to adjust the tension).
- Impact: flogging the back or pussy, ass play, bastinado (one foot at a time because of the angle of the feet).
- Lift the sub on her knees where you have completely open access to the head, upper body and thighs.
- Push the sub on her back
 - Beware of foot cramps and increased rope tension on the toes.
- Do a partial suspension by anchoring to the rope bar.
 - Only do this with subs that have healthy & flexible backs. Lift gently: a little tension goes a long way.
 - Note that some people have trouble breathing in this position.
- Untie the arms, keeping the legs tied and transition to any number of other positions.

