

A Practitioner's Guide to OUTDOOR PLAY BASED LEARNING KNOTS, ROPES & TYING THINGS DOWN

Help! How do tie knots and what rope do I use?

Tying knots can get us into a real tangle. They can look so...complicated. Never fear, our on the ground practitioners tell us that just 5 knots can cover most situations in outdoor ELC. So what exactly do we need these knots for?

- ✓ Moving things
- ✓ Building and securing things
- ✓ Swinging from things
- ✓ Shelter and hiding underneath things
- ✓ Tying things up and down

That's not all though, it's not only the knot we need to consider, what about the rope?

Using the right rope for the right job – Type

Basically, there are 2 types of rope: **static** (not stretchy) and **dynamic** (stretchy). Climbing rope tends to be stretchy (dynamic) so if you fall there is some 'give'. It's worth being aware of this when you choose your rope. Think about building a rope swing, if your swing is low to the ground and you use stretchy rope you, or the children, might end up with a muddy bottom! So, a static rope is better for swings.



Extra Tip: Paracord is great for tarps and dens. Why? Paracord has some 'give' for movement in the wind, without this movement your tarp will likely rip, and no-one wants a ripped tarp on a wet day!

Using the right rope for the right job - Strength and Safety

Thickness is a decent indicator of strength, however buying from a reputable supplier will enable you to check that you have the right rope for the right job, especially while you gain rope experience.

You have made sure your ropes are strong enough for the job you require. Think about the weather, is it weather-proof? What weight do you expect it to bear? Always check your ropes for damage, fraying or rotting - ropey ropes can create a hazard!

Extra tip: Some insurance companies require a 10mm thickness as a minimum for swings. Check your insurance policy for rope related small print.



Minimise the rope risk

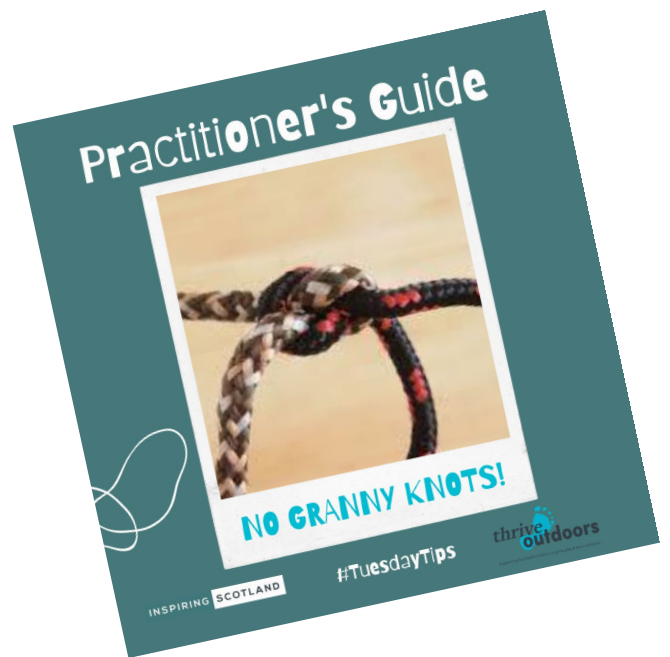
Think about the rope's role, and consequences if it fails (assessing the risk)

What happens if your tarp falls down? What happens if a rope swing comes undone? A falling tarp might present a risk of getting soaked or perhaps someone getting stuck underneath, the risk from falling from a swing could potentially be more significant so make sure you look at the risk involved and check your rope and knot are suited to the job! Work out the risks and how you can reduce this.

What to do and what KNOT to do

Do: Leave the granny knots at home. There are much better knots that can do a much better job. When it matters, for example, keeping a rope secure on a swing, make sure you use an appropriate rope and knot.

Don't: Tie a couple of granny knots, wrap it up and over six times and one for luck. Tempting, but this is what NOT to do.



Help! If I only learn one knot, what should it be?

Without a doubt 'The figure of 8' – this is a great 'go to' knot, very secure, adaptable with lots of applications. This is your rope swing knot!

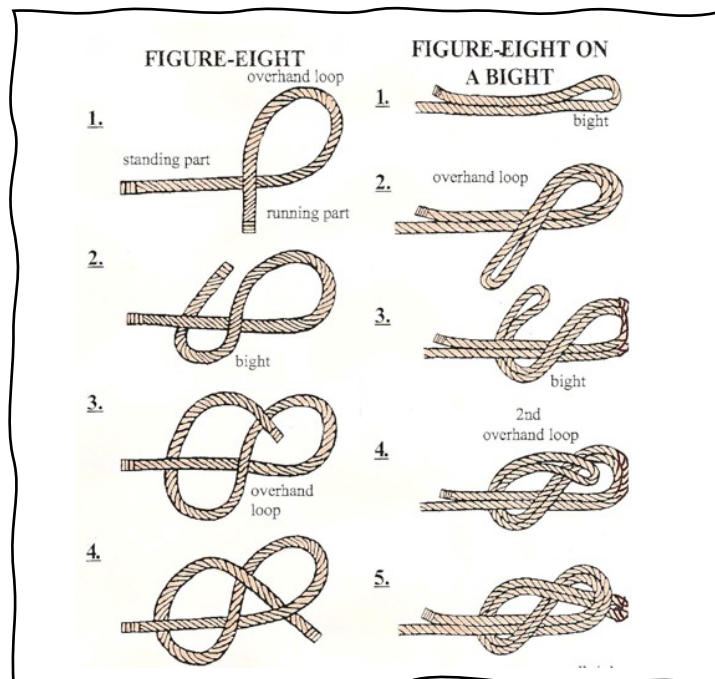


Image credit FCDWL Broxburn

Practise, practise, practise

Practice makes perfect, the more you tie your knot(s), the more experienced and confident you will become.

Carry a piece of rope and practise in spare moments throughout the day. This will help build your confidence, and importantly, help build confidence within your team that you are learning how to tie the right knot for the right situation. Tie knots with children and see how their skills (and yours) develop over time

Check the knot Always check existing knots and have someone check your new knots (especially for high risk activities and equipment) - include 'knot checking' in your risk assessment.

Add another knot Once you've practised and mastered one knot, learn another one.



Storing your ropes

Tying up your rope in a neat and orderly way saves time, keeps ropes neat for storage AND they are ready and raring to go when you need them. No-one wants to untie a wet, knotty rope! For those tangled granny knots with 6 wraps up and over – take a knife, cut it and save yourself the unravelling time.

Share the love by showing the children and your team how to store a rope as beautifully as this one.

Finally, Our top 5 knots for use in Outdoor ELC

- 1 **Figure of 8** a great secure and multipurpose knot that won't let you down
- 2 **Constrictor Hitch** a quick and simple secure knot that has one added simple step from the common clove hitch
- 3 **Round Turn and 2 Half Hitches** a really easy way to secure an end to an object
- 4 **Timber Hitch** a great one to teach children as it's SO simple
- 5 **Taut line hitch** perfect for putting up those tarps and shelter to get a tight line that can be made tighter

VIDEO! Want to see knot tying in action?

Simon from Family and Community Development West Lothian has created a video to help you take those first steps, this is one to watch! [Watch it here.](#)

Useful Links

Scouts Simple Knots <https://members.scouts.org.uk/factsheets/FS315082.pdf>

Reflection on Ropes by Creative Star <https://creativestarning.co.uk/play-resources/reflections-on-ropes/>

Tied in Knots by OWL Scotland
<https://www.owlscotland.org/images/uploads/resources/files/postcard2Tied in Knots.pdf>

'Knot Guide' App on Apple and Google Play (from your mobile phone)

How to tie 10 Essential Knots by the Scouting Guide
<https://scoutingmagazine.org/2017/04/tie-essential-scouting-knots/>

Practitioners Tips 'Knots and Ropes' has been produced in conjunction with FCDWL Broxburn