SCOUTS BUSHCRAFT

# Knots, Lashings & Cordage

Activity-Specific Risk Assessment

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| **Activity duration**<br>60 minutes | **Participants**<br>Scouts / young people | **Location**<br>Outdoor or indoor activity area |
| **Activity leader**<br>To be completed | **Date / time**<br>To be completed | **Group size**<br>To be completed |

**Scope:** Teaching basic knots (reef knot, clove hitch and bowline), square lashing with wooden poles, and a demonstration/practice of natural cordage using prepared plant fibres and the reverse wrap method.

## 1. Risk rating guide

**Low:** Unlikely to cause harm when controls are followed. **Medium:** Requires active supervision and controls. **High:** Do not proceed until risk is reduced. The leader must reassess if conditions, equipment or group circumstances change.

## 2. Hazard assessment

| Hazard | Who may be harmed / possible harm | Control measures | Residual risk |
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| **Ropes and loose cord** | Participants or leaders; trips, entanglement, rope burns or tightening around fingers/limbs. | Keep spare rope coiled and work areas tidy. Do not loop rope around hands, fingers, neck or body. Do not swing ropes. Keep lengths manageable and supervise tightening. | **Low** |
| **Wooden poles / spars** | Participants or leaders; splinters, cuts, impact injuries or poles falling. | Inspect poles before use; reject cracked, rotten, unstable or splintered poles. Use poles of manageable size and weight. Carry poles horizontally with ends controlled; never throw or swing them. Store securely when not in use. | **Low** |
| **Square lashing and frame construction** | Participants; trapped fingers, pinching, frame collapse or impact injuries. | Demonstrate before practice. Keep fingers clear while tightening frapping turns. Use stable poles on level ground. Leader checks lashings and structure before handling. Keep structures small and low; no climbing, sitting or hanging from them. | **Low–Medium** |
| **Scissors / cutting tools** | Participants; cuts or puncture injuries. | Use blunt-ended scissors where suitable. Give clear instructions and supervise use. Cut away from the body, pass handles-first and store safely when not in use. Any knives or sharp tools require a separate approved activity and risk assessment. | **Low** |
| **Nettles / plant fibres** | Participants; stings, skin irritation, allergic reaction or contact with unsuitable plants. | Prefer prepared, dried fibres. If fresh nettles are handled, use gloves and long sleeves. Only use positively identified, suitable plants; avoid unknown plants and contaminated areas. Wash hands after handling. Do not taste or ingest plant material. | **Low–Medium** |
| **Plant harvesting** | Participants; scratches, stings, contact with insects or harmful plants; environmental damage. | Harvest only with permission and where appropriate. Leader identifies the plant and selects a safe area away from roads, dog fouling, pesticides and pollution. Avoid protected species and over-harvesting. Use gloves and supervised methods. | **Low–Medium** |
| **Slips, trips and uneven ground** | Everyone; falls, sprains or impact injuries. | Inspect the activity area first. Remove avoidable trip hazards, mark boundaries and keep bags/equipment out of walkways. Stop activity if ground or weather conditions become unsafe. | **Low** |
| **Inappropriate use of cordage / knots** | Participants or others; falls or serious injury if used for climbing, lifting or restraint. | Explain that practice knots, lashings and natural cordage are for learning and light-duty demonstration only. Never use for climbing, rescue, lifting people, securing loads over people, restraints or safety-critical purposes. | **Low** |
| **Group movement and behaviour** | Participants; collisions, distraction or misuse of equipment. | Set clear boundaries and behaviour expectations. Give one instruction at a time. Maintain suitable adult supervision and position leaders so all working groups can be observed. Stop activity immediately if unsafe behaviour occurs. | **Low** |
| **Weather / outdoor conditions** | Everyone; cold, heat, dehydration, wind-blown equipment or poor visibility. | Check forecast and site conditions. Provide suitable clothing, drinking water, shade or shelter as needed. Secure equipment in wind. Move indoors or stop if conditions are unsuitable. | **Low–Medium** |

## 3. Safe working arrangements

**Before the session**

- Confirm permission to use the area and check access, boundaries and emergency arrangements.
- Check participant needs, relevant medical information, allergies and additional support requirements through the normal Scout procedures.
- Inspect all poles, ropes, fibres and equipment. Remove damaged or unsuitable items.
- Prepare plant fibres in advance where possible. Identify any plant material being used.
- Brief any supporting adults on the activity, hazards, supervision positions and stop signal.

**During the session**

- Demonstrate each technique before Scouts begin.
- Keep the group within the defined activity area and maintain active supervision.
- Keep workstations separated enough to prevent ropes and poles interfering with other groups.
- Do not allow horseplay, throwing, swinging or climbing on structures.
- Stop and correct unsafe practice immediately.

**After the session**

- Count and inspect equipment; store ropes and poles safely.
- Dispose of plant waste appropriately and wash hands.
- Check the site for discarded cord, tools or other hazards.

## 4. Emergency arrangements

- Stop the activity and make the area safe. Do not move a casualty unless they are in immediate danger.
- A suitably qualified first aider should be available in accordance with the group's normal arrangements; first aid kit and communication method should be known to leaders.
- For serious injury or a severe allergic reaction, call 999 and follow emergency operator instructions. Send an adult to meet emergency services and provide clear site access details.
- Inform the appropriate Scout lead and record/report incidents and near misses using the organisation's procedures.

## 5. Leader checks before starting

- ■ Site checked and activity boundary identified.
- ■ Poles, ropes, scissors and fibres inspected.
- ■ Participant needs and relevant allergies considered.
- ■ First aid arrangements and emergency communication confirmed.
- ■ Adult supervision and group size appropriate.
- ■ Demonstration completed and safety rules explained.
- ■ Weather and ground conditions suitable.

## 6. Approval and review

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| **Leader completing assessment**<br>Name: _____ | **Signature**<br>_____ |
| **Date**<br>_____ | **Review / changes required**<br>_____ |

**Important:** This is a planning aid, not a substitute for the organisation's current safety rules, local site procedures or the leader's on-the-day assessment. Adapt it to the actual venue, group, equipment and conditions before approval.