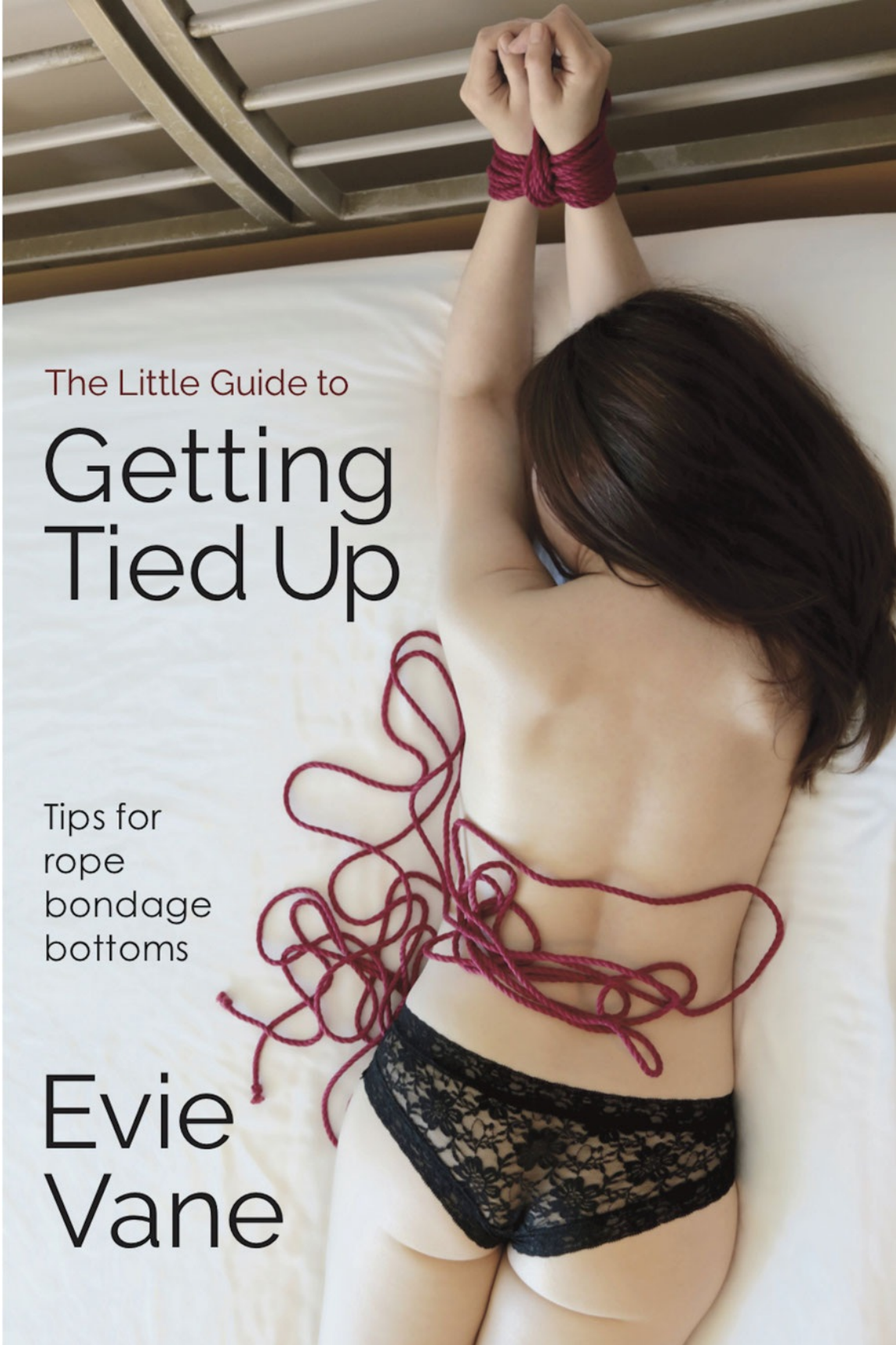


The Little Guide to

Getting Tied Up

Tips for
rope
bondage
bottoms

Evie
Vane



The Little Guide to

Getting Tied Up

Tips for
rope
bondage
bottoms

Evie
Vane

The Little Guide to Getting Tied Up

Tips for Rope Bondage Bottoms

Evie Vane

Copyright © 2014 by Evelyn Vane. All rights reserved.

Cover design by David Delp, Creative Director, pilotfire.com.

Cover photo by -Mr-D-. All photos throughout the book are used with permission.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the author.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the author is illegal and punishable by law. Please respect the hard work of the author by keeping your copy for your use only.

ISBN 978-0-9998276-2-8

v. 1.0

This book contains explicit material and is intended for mature audiences. All photos are of the author and depict entirely consensual scenes.

Also by Evie Vane:

Better Bondage for Every Body

Contents

[Author's Note and Disclaimer](#)

[Introduction](#)

[1: Shaping Your Desires](#)

[\(Types of rope scenes, types of rope\)](#)

[2: Finding and Evaluating a Rope Top](#)

[3: Mindfulness](#)

[\(Ways to cultivate it, nerve-damage considerations\)](#)

[4: Being Prepared](#)

[\(Mental prep, physical prep, the rope bottoming bag\)](#)

[5: Trusting Your Instinct](#)

[\(Including 3 easy ways to develop instinct\)](#)

6: Knowing Yourself

(Physical and mental conditions, negotiating, safewords)

7: Communicating with Your Rope Top

(What to communicate and what not to)

8: Making a Connection

(Ways to foster connection, sub drop)

9: Being Always Curious

(Building endurance, increasing flexibility, pain processing, exploring complementary practices)

10: Extra Tips for Suspensions

(Before, during, and after the scene)

Appendix A: Evaluating a Hardpoint for Suspension

Appendix B: Horror Stories

Appendix C: Rope Bottoming Resources

Acknowledgments

Author's Note and Disclaimer

Much of this book is subjective; it's based on my experience and what's come across my radar. I am a 44-year-old female who's 5 feet, 2 inches tall and weighs 115 pounds, and who regularly stretches and does crunches. On a good day, I get a nice walk in or maybe even a jog or some light free weights, but mostly I sit at a desk all day. My experiences getting tied up will be much different from a 260-pound 6-footer who can't touch their toes or a 20-something circus aerialist. Every single body is different, and you should never do anything that does not feel right for you or your body.

I'm not a doctor, an anatomy expert, or a fitness pro. My tying skills begin and end with my shoelaces. I live in San Francisco, and my access to the international rope scene is limited. I'm not claiming to be an expert on rope bottoming (the rope community's term for getting tied up); I just love it and do it regularly, and was heartbroken by the number of preventable injuries happening. I've made many dangerous mistakes because there was no book like this—and I see other people making the same ones often. Hopefully reading this will help you stay safe.

Rope bottoms before me have paved the way for this, sharing their insight with others even when getting tied up was much less understood and accepted than it is today. We should all appreciate their efforts even if we never know all of their names and faces. Thanks to them and other pioneers in the BDSM community, education about rope and other BDSM practices has become much more widespread and accepted on a greater scale.

This is only one small contribution to those educational efforts, a not-exhaustive guide. I urge you to do as much other research as possible and to explore complementary areas, such as other BDSM practices, yoga, tai chi, tantra, and meditation. Please know this also:

You and you alone are ultimately responsible for your safety in rope.

Not your rope top (the person who does the tying). Not your class instructor. Not any author. By reading this book, you absolve me of any and all liability should you experience a rope-related injury. Use the information herein at your own risk.

Note on terminology: I use “rope top,” “rope bottom,” and the gender-neutral plural “they” for a single person, because these seem to be the simplest and least offensive terms to the greatest number of people. Other terms for “rope top” are “rigger,” “rope artist,” and “nawashi” (a Japanese term generally used to mean “rope artist.”) Other terms for “rope bottom” are “rope bunny,” “rope model,” “rope kitty,” and even “rope slut” and “rope whore.” Substitute in your mind whatever term makes you happy. Personally, I don’t give a hoot what anyone calls me as long as the tying is good.

Introduction

Rope tops have plenty of resources: books, videos, YouTube tutorials, frequent classes on everything from playful bedroom bondage to advanced Kinbaku/Shibari techniques, conferences, private lessons. Rope bottoms? Not so much. Searching online for “rope bottoming” is a lot like calling into an empty canyon. (See Appendix C for some notable exceptions.) Classes are not nearly as prevalent as for rope tops. And if you search the web for “getting tied up,” well...be sure to duck before all the porn whacks you in the face.

The assumption of people new to rope is often, “Hey, it doesn’t take any skill to just lie/stand there and get tied up, does it?” Well, yes and no. Sure, you can get tied up without any skill other than wearing your skin well. But certain skills will help you stay safe and have more fun. Here you will learn, among other things, what I consider the 7 Helpful Skills of Rope Bottoming. Those skills apply whether your wrists are bound to the headboard or you’re hanging from a meat hook by one ankle.

Will you need the same level of skill for every rope scene? Of course not. Common sense and experience should tell you what level of preparation you’ll need for different scene intensities. But with rope bondage, as with any kind of BDSM play in which you can be seriously injured, it’s a good idea to be more prepared and skilled than a scene calls for.

Riggers often use a safety factor of 10 when evaluating equipment and hardpoints for suspensions. (The hardpoint is the piece that supports all of the body’s weight, like an eyebolt screwed into a ceiling beam.) If the person being suspended weighs 150 pounds, for example, then the gear and hardpoint need to be able to support 1,500 pounds (10 x 150), just in case. I urge you to use a similar safety factor when evaluating your own equipment (your experience, your body’s abilities, your mental and physical state) for any given scene. Being overprepared is better than being underprepared in my book.

Which brings us to our first warning. You’re going to get a bunch of these. Do not gloss over them like you would the 10-page user agreement for your latest

app. The safety warnings are here because rope can be very dangerous and even fatal! If you don't believe me, set up an account on FetLife (similar to Facebook for kinky folk) and read the posts in the Rope Incident Reports group. Or just skip to the horror stories in Appendix B. Say it with me:

Warning: Rope can be dangerous. You could experience injuries from rope that last from hours to years. You could die from rope bondage.

Got it? Good. Now that is not to scare you off. The people who have died from doing rope bondage generally were doing insanely irresponsible things (such as doing risky ties alone or while drunk or on drugs), or they had preexisting health conditions, or another part of play (such as intentional asphyxiation or strangulation) was the fatal factor. I'll offer safety tips throughout the book, but for now just absorb this mantra and repeat it every time the rope calls to you:

I will approach rope bondage with mindfulness.

Congratulations, you've just discovered Helpful Skill No. 1: Mindfulness. More on that in Chapter 3. Being mindful and possessing the other skills won't guarantee that you won't get injured or even die. But they will increase your chances of doing a rope scene safely and in a more fulfilling way.

The 7 Helpful Skills of Rope Bottoming are:

1. Mindfulness

2. Being Prepared

3. Trusting Your Instinct

4. Knowing Yourself

5. Communicating with Your Rope Top

6. Making a Connection

7. Being Always Curious

Keep in mind that these skills are subjective, not set in stone. Feel free to develop your own or not use any that don't resonate with you. We'll discuss each of them in depth later on, but first let's cover the basics: defining your experience, learning about different types of rope scenes and rope itself, and finding and evaluating a rope partner.

Chapter 1

Shaping Your Desires

Let's look at three scenarios—all negotiated and consensual, of course. If you're new to BDSM, make sure to read up on consent before you do rope or any other kind of play.

1. Soft lighting illuminates the bed. Plush pillows and blankets caress your naked limbs. Maybe your eyes are closed; maybe they're covered with a satin eye mask. Sexy music grinds a slow beat. The room is as warm and comforting as a lover's breath. The rope twines around your wrists, pulling your arms gently over your head as your partner fastens the rope to the bed frame—taking their time, teasing you with kisses or whispering what they're going to do to you. By the time your legs have been tenderly spread a few inches and your ankles wrapped, you feel sensuous and aroused and completely safe, submitting to the experience, knowing that whatever happens, you will be treated adoringly.

2. You shiver slightly from the chill in the club, no clothing at all to keep your body warm. You feel exposed—strangers are watching, and your partner has instructed you not to close your eyes. The music is blaring a grating industrial track. The cement floor is cold beneath your bare feet. When your partner cinches the rope around your chest, it feels rough and unyielding. Your arms are tied behind your back, and you can't scratch that maddening itch on your cheek. When the ropes are in place, your partner picks you up like a suitcase and tosses you onto a mat. You have no idea what's going to happen; maybe you're even a little afraid.

3. You struggle as your partner wrestles you to the ground, their weight pinning you down. The rope abrades your bare skin as you try to wriggle away, and you rack your brain for ways to fight back without hurting yourself more. You manage to flip over onto your stomach, and your partner quickly ties your ankles together and drags your naked body across the floor. Your hands clutch back at the rope until your partner ties your wrists together, slapping your face as punishment for trying to escape. Tears stream from your eyes as a ball gag is shoved into your mouth. Your partner puts you in a hogtie that leaves your lower half completely exposed. You know what's coming next, and you're pretty sure it's going to hurt.

Whew, is it hot in here, or is it just me? Maybe one of those scene descriptions floats your boat, maybe not. The point is that there are as many different types of rope experiences as there are people in the world, and knowing which sort does float your boat is the first step in making it happen.

That doesn't mean you can order up a rope experience like à la carte sushi. Every tying experience is unique, and if you have strong expectations for a rope scene, you're setting yourself up for disappointment. But on a basic level, it's good to find a rope top who's on the same page as you. That brings us to Helpful Skill No. 2: Knowing Yourself. More on that in Chapter 4, but for now it's just important to realize that if, for example, you want a light, sensual experience and the rope top you're considering is a heavy-duty sadist, it's probably not a great fit.

Types of Rope Scenes

There's a lot of overlap in these categories, and they don't cover everything, but they'll give you some flavors to taste.

Rope tops generally follow either the Japanese style—including Shibari/Kinbaku, which uses artistic and carefully studied patterns of rope placement, sometimes involving erotic pressure points—or the Western style, which actually covers a wide range of individual styles. I think of Western like the Wild West—anything goes. It can look artistic, can be merely functional (“Let's just get that bod in the air!”), can involve just a few ropes or enough to make you look like a mummy.

Basic floor scenes: Any rope scene is which the bottom is not suspended (either partially or fully); could be as easy or as challenging as you please. There are endless variations; it includes things like just wrists or ankles bound, spread-eagle ties, shrimp ties, hogties, breast and genital bondage, bondage for sex, and the ever-popular “making shit up” style.

Ichinawa: Japanese “one rope” technique. Intimate and sensual, it focuses more on connection between partners and the sensation of the rope than any formal or even aesthetically pleasing pattern.

Partial suspensions: One body part is always in contact with the floor, while the rest of the body's weight is supported by rope and a hardpoint. The supporting body part could be a foot, the entire lower body or upper body, arms or hands, etc.

Full suspensions: Rope and a hardpoint completely support all of the body's

weight. The body could be an inch off the floor or 15 feet; if no body part is touching the ground, it's a full suspension. There are static suspensions, in which one pose is held the entire time, and dynamic ones, in which the bottom either is moved through pose transitions by the rigger (say, sideways to face up to inversion) or moves on their own through different transitions. If the bottom does the moving solo, it's sometimes called dancing in the rope.

Double or triple suspensions: These can be partial or full; they include more than one body. Before you jump into one ("The more the merrier—rah!"), consider that you may be in very close proximity with your fellow bottom(s) for quite a while. Your private parts may be touching; you'll be smelling the other bottom(s)' skin, hair, breath; you'll be experiencing their energy just as much as the rope top's. So choose your bottoming partners thoughtfully.

Predicament bondage: The bottom has a limited range of positions, and none are comfortable; switching positions means trading one kind of discomfort for another: a different kind of pain for each, say, or pain versus humiliation. Example: The bottom is forced to stand on tiptoes or their hair will be yanked painfully. This style doesn't appeal to me one bit, but some people love it.

Speed tying: Getting the bottom tied up as quickly as possible, sometimes while they're fighting back. It can be as simple as Graydancer's Tie 'Em Up and Fuck 'Em method, which has just three steps and takes, like, literally a minute. Speed tying can even be applied to suspensions (check out Saki Kamijoo on Vimeo). Usually the look is less about beauty and more about function.

Escapist bondage: Wherein the fun is in the bottom's trying to get free of the ties without help from the rope top.

Hojojutsu: Japanese style used to restrain prisoners quickly. Can involve fighting back and can be painful. Tends to involve riskier ties, like neck rope and single strands.

Semenawa: Japanese concept of torture or punishment rope; the goal is to create ties that are stressful or painful.

~

Any of these can also involve fantasy and role-playing. Captured princess/prince, pirates, intruders, abductions, interrogations...the possibilities are limited only by your imagination and turn-ons.

When I meet a potential rope top, I ask them what turns them on about rope and what type of experience they like to have. I'm open to many different kinds of experiences; one of my turn-ons is experiencing the energy and style of each individual partner. But I'm not an extreme masochist, so if I hear phrases like "beautiful suffering" or "pushing edges," I proceed with extreme caution. These phrases may be the very things that turn you on, however.

One of the words that turns me on, as you can see in the photo below, is "hogtie." (Ropework by -Mr-D-. Photo by Michael Sundin Photo.)



I really urge you to honor what feels right to you. Some bottoms have a need to please that causes them to ignore what's right for them. I recommend that you don't let a rope top's hotness, persistence, conviction, community status, or even international fame influence your decision to be tied by them. In the end, you'll have to live with the experience.

And remember to have fun! It's your scene. If you want to be a captured maiden or lad being ravaged by a pirate, get out that ruffly shirt. If you want to be abducted by a secret agent who needs to know that damn code, practice saying "I'll never tell" convincingly. Don't be embarrassed about your desires in a scene; whatever turns you on, you can bet there's a whole group of people who feel the same way.

Types of Rope

Rope can be made from many materials. Some are natural, such as hemp, jute, cotton, silk, and linen/flax. Some are synthetic, such as nylon and polypropylene. Rope can have a natural color or be dyed any shade of the rainbow.

There are different methods of processing, different finishing treatments, and different ways of arranging the strands, such as braiding and twisting. To top it off, there are different lengths (measured in feet or meters) and different diameters (measured in inches or millimeters).

Your rope top will likely have a preference, but you should pay attention to see if you're allergic to the material. Also be aware that some rope types are scratchier than others; coconut rope, for example, is intentionally very scratchy. And some shed more, especially if the rope hasn't been processed or finished properly (hello, jute!), meaning little fibers fly off it and can get up your nose, making it itch or even making you sneeze.

Speaking of rope tops' preferences, I have never met a rope top who doesn't have a specific method of coiling their rope (arranging each length in a neat little bundle). So don't just start picking up rope after the scene and coiling it any which way in an effort to be helpful. Ask if they want help coiling, and if they do, they'll show you how to do it their way.

Don't be discouraged if you can't do it well right away. Your rope top has done it so many times, they could do it in their sleep, while you're just learning—and learning while maybe dealing with a certain degree of spaciness, depending on your scene. Just keep trying, and if you tie with the person and practice enough, you'll get it eventually.

Chapter 2

Finding and Evaluating a Rope Top

Once you've determined what type of experience turns you on, the next step is finding someone to have it with—unless you're into self-bondage, which is outside the scope of this book. If you already have a partner who's into rope, lucky you! You can skip ahead.

Ways to Find a Rope Top

FetLife.com. There are many resources on this valuable site. You can find out about local rope munches and chapters of the group Rope Bite, peer rope workshops, classes, and rope communities; you can even place a personal ad for a rope partner. Another BDSM-oriented social networking site is Collarspace.com. It's more focused on dating, and I have no personal experience with it.

Workshops and classes. Rope tops are often looking for bottoms to attend classes with. You may think classes for tops are booooooring and have nothing to teach you about getting tied up. Not so fast! I'm a big believer in bottoming at classes because:

- 1. You can always learn something from watching and talking with the other bottoms.**
- 2. It's a great way to get to know a rope top in a casual and safer setting.**

3. Education and practice make rope tops better, and better rope tops make for better bottoming experiences!

Just don't expect classes to be actual scenes, though. While you may be lucky and get a few minutes of scene-type play during practice time, the rope tops are there to learn, not to fulfill your fantasies. If you think it's not worth it, consider negotiating for something in exchange for your time: dinner out or a massage or whatever you feel is fair.

Conferences. In the U.S., some big ones are Shibaricon, Rope Camp and Bondage Expo Dallas. There are of course others all over the world, such as BoundCon. And there are usually partner-finding threads either through FetLife or the conference itself, so you can even attend without a partner and still have a fabulous learning and playing experience.

Play parties. From dungeons to play spaces to bars to private homes, there are play parties in all the major cities and smaller ones too. You may meet someone there, or maybe you'll see someone doing a scene whom you'll want to get to know more in the future. Do not ever interrupt a scene, however. If the scene is clearly over and the players have separated, it's perfectly OK to approach the rope top and introduce yourself. It would not, however, be OK to sidle up to the rope top as they're untying their bottom and say, "Can you do me next?"

If you do approach someone who is partnered, whether the partner is present or not and whether the relationship is an open one or not, please be considerate of both parties. Unless the partner is a slave or owned, or a protocol is in place that would make directly contacting them inappropriate (check with the top if in doubt), I think it's good old-fashioned courtesy to check in with both people initially. Their heartfelt relationship is deeper than our rope lust.

But it's more than that too. I think all of us bottoms are united on some level, and that we should treat each other kindly and thoughtfully. We're not competing with one another; we have similar desires and needs, and there's plenty of rope

play to go around. Treat other rope bottoms as you would want to be treated.

Referrals. Get to know the other rope bottoms in your area and ask who they've been tied by and who they recommend. Again, be up-front and mindful of not "stealing" someone else's rope partner, though—ask if they mind if you contact the person. You can also let rope instructors know you're available if any of their students need a rope bottom.

Other online sources. You can find pretty much anything online these days. But while sites like Craigslist are great for many things, rope play is a hell of a lot riskier than buying a toaster. Do you really want to add unnecessary risk by getting tied up by someone who can remain completely anonymous, unknown, and unaccountable to any sort of community?

~

Overall, be proactive about finding a rope top! Yes, it takes guts. Yes, you may get turned down—maybe several times. But my experience has been that if you just sit around waiting for someone to ask to tie you up, you're going to have a sore butt for all the wrong reasons.

I'm constantly putting myself out there. I get turned down. I've experienced what felt like downright snubbing. (But who knows what kind of day the person was having?) But I also get tied up a lot. So don't take a turn-down personally, and realize that if you ask 10 people and 3 say yes, you're probably getting tied at least 3 more times than if you had sat around waiting for someone to ask you. A sense of entitlement won't serve you here.

How to Evaluate a Rope Top

So you've been proactive and found someone you might be interested in. Hooray! Now do you just strip, throw your arms out, and cry, "Take me!"? Of course not. First you need to establish that the rope top is skilled in safety and in

creating the kind of experience you're looking for.

Note that I said “skilled in safety” and not “safe.” Just as the only true form of safe sex is abstinence, the only true form of total rope safety is not getting tied up. Sometimes things happen that even the most experienced, safety-conscious top couldn't have planned for, like natural disasters or unexpected seizures or heart attacks. But you do want to ensure that your partner knows how to minimize the risks.

I'll give you some pointers for evaluating a rope top before, during, and after a scene in a minute, but the most important factor here brings us to Helpful Skill No. 3: Trusting Your Instinct. It's that little or even loud voice that urges caution or gives you the green light, that weird feeling you get when a person says or does something, that thought you can't even put a name to that leans you toward aye or nay. Instinct does not need a rationale or a name or even a fully formed thought. Learn to hear it, feel it, and honor it. Your instinct is perhaps the most helpful of the Helpful Skills you will ever have in your rope bottoming toolkit. We'll cover it more in Chapter 5.

Not all of the following suggestions are always possible to do, but the more you can, the better assured you'll be that you and your rope top are the right fit for each other—or not. Also, be aware that the only experience that will be reliable for you is your own. Whatever you see in another scene or hear from another person is only one version of the story, so take all input outside your own experience with a grain of salt.

Before the Scene

Watch the rope top do a scene with someone else. Do they seem to be checking in with their bottom regularly? Do they seem focused on what they're doing, or are they looking around at people walking in and out, waving to friends, etc.? Do they seem calm and confident, or fumbling and uncertain? Do they seem to be enjoying the scene or merely killing time? Do their style, demeanor, and bearing seem like a good fit for you?

This could also be a good time to surreptitiously eye their rope and gear. Is the rope clean and in good condition? If the rope top uses rope in the crotch area or

in the mouth, do they toss it back afterward in the same pile as the other ropes (can I get an “Ewwww!” here?), or do they put it in a Ziploc bag or otherwise keep it separate? Do they have safety shears within reach?

If you have the chance to observe them more than once, do they seem to choose experienced and empowered bottoms, newbies, or a mix? If I see someone who tends to go mostly for newbies, it’s like they have a big, flashing marquee warning sign over their head. What exactly about experienced bottoms doesn’t appeal to them? Hmmm...

Ask about training and experience. This might take some finesse, because you don’t want it to feel like the Spanish Inquisition. Rope tops can be just as sensitive as anyone else (surprise!), and you don’t want the first impression to be that you’re doubting their skills.

I like to feel out sensitivity by starting with a compliment, like: “Hey, that hogtie [suspension, takedown scene...] you did was so hot. Did you learn those moves in a class or did you teach yourself?” Then you can see how open they are to discussing their experience. Anyone who has trained formally is usually happy to talk about it, so if the person is vague or refuses to discuss it at all, you may want to seriously consider moving on to someone else.

Ask for references and actually contact them. Landlords do it; hiring companies do it—and your physical and mental safety is worth way more than any rental or job. You should absolutely ask for references and not feel weird about it. Again, do this with consideration. You can say, “I like to prepare as much as much as possible to make sure we both have a good time. Do you mind if I talk with some people you’ve tied?”

Again, though, remember that the people you talk with are giving you only one side of the experience. Also, it should go without saying that you should keep anything you hear in strictest confidence unless the person gives you permission to share the information. (See the terrific article “Rope Bondage References” on KinkyClover.com for more helpful info; Clover, who wrote it, is a well-known and highly respected rope bottom.)

Evaluate the rope top on a physical level. Do they have any physical conditions, such as diabetes or a history of seizures, and if so, are they taking care of those conditions appropriately? Do they have any physical limitations? If you'll be doing a suspension, are they able to support your body alone if something goes wrong, or would a spotter be necessary? Tifereth, a well-known and highly respected rope bottom and top, recommends that they be able to support a minimum of 50 percent of your body weight if no spotter is present.

Do you see the top drinking or doing drugs? One scotch might make for a nice, relaxed rope session, but being obviously intoxicated should throw up a big red flag for you.

Do a mini scene. If you're thinking of suspending with someone, do a more casual floor scene first, where the risk of injury is lower. If you're thinking of doing a floor scene with someone, ask them to tie a simple chest harness or hogtie on you first. How they handle a mini scene is a good indication of how they'll handle a more intense one.

During the Scene

Time for another warning. This one should be common sense, but we all know how rare common sense is these days.

Warning: Do not go to a stranger's house alone for your first tying scene.

Call me overcautious here, but I say don't rely on safe calls, don't rely on references, don't rely on word of mouth that a rope top is safe. You have only one life and one body. Don't risk them on a rope scene. Even if you're pretty sure the person is not a serial killer, a wide range of other horrors can happen when you're alone with someone while tied up—as in, helpless: mental torture, physical abuse, rape...use your imagination.

While you're getting to know your rope top, meet in a place where other people will be around—a dungeon monitor is ideal, but just having any other people present will lower the likelihood that your rope top will abuse you in a way you haven't negotiated.

Check in with your rope top right before your scene, using your voice, ears, and eyes. I usually start by asking, "How was your day?" If they say they had a stressful day at work, got cut off on the highway, and didn't have time for dinner...well, it's time to relax and get some food first. Especially if we're tying at a place where alcohol is being served, I'll say, "I've had a half a glass of wine. How about you?" Look into their eyes. Do they seem clear, focused, and confident? Sleepy, shifty, or glassy? What is your instinct telling you about their ability to keep you safe for this particular scene, in this location, at this moment?

Warning: Do not get tied up if you or your partner is intoxicated or under the influence of drugs.

Your and their judgment, balance, coordination, and self-awareness will be compromised if you're intoxicated or high. Rope tying is potentially dangerous already, and even what seems like a simple scene can go horribly wrong. Don't take on the added risk. There is always another chance to be tied up.

I personally don't feel intoxicated after one drink if I've eaten something, and in fact, it sometimes helps calm my nerves before an intense scene. Your tolerance may be higher or lower. Know yourself and err on the side of being overcautious.

Continue evaluating during the scene. Do you feel like you're being handled safely? If something doesn't feel right, even if you're not sure exactly what feels wrong ("Gee, isn't that rope awfully close to my windpipe?" "Hmm, my leg doesn't really go that way"), tell your rope top. And if too many weird

feelings happen or your partner isn't responding appropriately to your concerns, it may be time to consider coming out of the rope entirely.

Does your rope top leave you alone at all during the scene? If one of your hands is free and scissors are within reach while your top uses the restroom 5 feet away, that's one thing. But in general your partner should be with you at all times while you're tied up, and if they're not and they haven't arranged for someone else to "babysit" you, that's another big red flag and maybe even a reason to safeword out of (meaning end) the scene.

After the Scene

Did the scene end smoothly or abruptly? Was the transition out of the scene appropriate? Did you have to safeword out? Did you feel spacey, spent, and settled? Tense, irritated, and angry? How your rope top handles the ending is just as important as the beginning.

Are you getting the aftercare you negotiated for? More on negotiation in Chapter 6, but let's assume you discussed some kind of aftercare. Is your rope top still being considerate of you and giving you the time you need to reconnect with the world, or are they rushing you to recover because they need to be somewhere or want to play with someone else? Appropriate aftercare can make a big difference in how you feel in the days to come, when you may experience sub drop or withdrawal. (More on sub drop in Chapter 8.)

~

True Story

Very early in my rope days, I met a rope top at a party. He had a reputation for being knowledgeable and experienced, and we did a brief, casual scene that night in which I was tied to a chair. My leg was in the air, and my foot started to

go numb. I told him, and he looked at all the rope placements and said it was fine, there was no danger of nerve damage. After another 5 minutes I said I was not OK with the numbness and wanted to come out, so he took me out. The circulation to my foot returned in a few minutes and all was fine.

About two months later, we were doing an inverted suspension (meaning head near the floor and feet in the air) at a club. My neck and shoulder started to feel weird, and I told him immediately. He glanced at the rope placement and deemed it not a major issue; he finished what he was doing after a minute or two and then adjusted the bothersome rope. When I came out of the rope later, I could not raise my arm above the level of my shoulder on its own. It took 6 weeks for the nerve damage to heal and for me to regain full use of my arm.

If I had been more experienced or aware, I would have realized from that very first scene that the rope top valued his own judgment more than the bottom's input, which can increase the chance of injury. Pay attention to your partner's behavior even in small scenes; this can help you when you're considering other, more intense scenes in the future.

~

Now that we've covered the basics, let's move on to the 7 Helpful Skills of Rope Bottoming.

Chapter 3

Mindfulness

Oh my God, I can't believe it took me so long to get here! Damn traffic. And I left work early even though I'm behind on that project, and my boss is going to chew me out, and I hate my job anyway—I should just quit and start a jewelry-making business, so no one can tell me what to do ever again. Jewelry...ugh, why did I wear this necklace my ex gave me? Now I'll be reminded of him all night. I should post a photo of this scene on FetLife tomorrow so he can see just how much fun I'm having without him and eat his emotionally devoid heart out...

Sound familiar? The exact words running through your head will differ, but most of us have a constantly running internal dialogue that mixes thoughts of the past, present, and future. And that mental chatter keeps us from focusing fully on the here and now.

Mindfulness is Helpful Skill No. 1 for a reason: It affects every aspect of the scene. It is being conscious, being aware, being focused on what is happening in the present moment. It is tuning out the person who cut the line at the grocery store, the fight you had with your kid, work deadlines, your vacation two months from now.

Holding on to things that happened in the past or worrying about things that will happen in the future will not serve you in your present rope scene. It will also divert your attention away from potentially dangerous issues that may arise. Let everything past and future go so you can “drop in”—be present—as fully as possible.

Part of the beauty of rope, for me anyway, is that it's an escape from the everyday. A rope scene can be glorious, passionate, even transcendent—but not if half your mind is somewhere else. You have chosen to be here, with this

person and in this scene. Make the most of it.

So how do you cultivate mindfulness while preparing for a rope scene? If, like me, you lack the meditation skills of a Zen master, don't despair. In fact, many people like tying or being tied up because it actually puts them in a meditative state. But beginning the scene with at least some mindfulness will help you get to that meditative state more easily.

Ways to Cultivate Mindfulness

Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and breathe deeply. Focus on your breath and how it feels in your body. Follow it as it makes your abdomen and chest rise and fall. Focusing on the physical will take you out of your head and away from the mental chatter.

Eye gaze with your partner. Face each other silently and look deeply and openly into each other's eyes. Doing this for even just 2 minutes can be very grounding—and also very connective. If you have never tried eye gazing before, it might feel strange at first. Don't give up! Just acknowledge the weirdness silently to yourself and keep gazing. It can help to pick one eye to focus on and stick with it the whole time.

Breathe with your partner. Sit in front of your partner, facing away or toward each other, with their arms wrapped around you, and breathe together. You can either inhale and exhale at the same time or “feed” each other's breaths by one of you inhaling as the other exhales, whichever feels more grounding. Breathing together in this way will also help foster a sense of connection.

Practice auditory meditation. If I'm in a noisy place and can't tune out all the sounds, I go the opposite route: I close my eyes and take them all in, focusing only on sounds for a few minutes. Try not to identify each sound for what it is; just hear them all and let them float away. Eventually they'll lose their meaning and impact; they'll all blend into an innocuous wave that will ebb back into the sea.

Stretch. Not only will stretching loosen you up, but focusing on the physical

will take your mind off the mental. You don't have to do full-on yoga or even sit on the floor; you can do standing stretches like side bends, quad stretches standing on one foot, calf stretches leaning your hands against a wall, and hamstring stretches by reaching for your toes.

~

During a scene, mindfulness may take a different form. You might focus on the sensation of the rope on your skin or the way it compresses your body. (One of my favorite sensations is the vibration created when a rope is dragged across another rope, creating a pitch in my body like a tuning fork. Yum!) You might focus on your partner's touch or breath. You might focus on your own breathing or on dealing with the intensity, in whatever shape it comes in—maybe it's pain; maybe it's pleasure. But whatever is going on, staying mindful will help you make the most of the experience.

Staying mindful can be particularly difficult when you're in a noisy club, when your friends are watching, when you're in a dungeon with people screaming or shouting, and so on. Just remember that if you are focusing on the sensations of the rope, the connection with your partner, your breathing, etc., you are not focusing on all those other things.

If you ultimately let go completely in your rope scene and float off into sub space, rah for you! Sub space, however, brings us to another warning and some talk about nerve damage.

Warning: Whether in sub space or not, periodically check in with your body for danger signs, such as pain, tingling, numbness, and/or itchiness.

A conscientious, experienced, and trustworthy rope top will prompt you to check in, asking you to press against their hand or make a thumbs-up sign, or they'll do other bodily checks to make sure no nerves are being compressed or otherwise compromised. If you trust your partner completely to do this on your behalf, far be it from me to tell you not to go ahead and float off to another plane of existence.

Personally, I can't imagine trusting anyone that much that I would risk injury. Nerve damage can happen in less time than you may think—even in a matter of seconds.

Also, not only is your rope top trying to focus on many things aside from bodily checks, but there's no way for them to know what's going on inside your body unless you tell them—even with motor tests! There are so many things that someone on the outside can't see or check for, like tingling and nausea; only you can feel them and communicate that they're happening. And even if your partner could check for all possible issues, they'd have to check so frequently that they wouldn't be able to do anything else. Take responsibility for your body and your safety, and stay aware of potential issues.

I let myself float away but always keep one part of my consciousness on my body and come back to check in with it regularly. (Yes, it's really hard sometimes!) My check-ins involve wiggling my fingers, rotating my wrists, moving my feet, etc. Is anything tingling, numb, or excessively painful? Does anything feel weird in a way I can't quite describe?

If at any time you feel tingling, numbness, or weirdness, tell your rope top immediately.

Don't try to guess whether tingling or numbness is a circulation problem or a nerve issue, because even if it's "just" a circulation issue that will resolve itself shortly after the ropes are removed without leaving any permanent damage, numbness can mask the feeling that tells you nerve damage is happening. Tell your rope top. You can always get tied again later—unless you're injured because you didn't address a nerve issue when it was happening.

Nerve damage takes different forms, from mild to severe. In suspensions, the most commonly reported nerve injuries seem to happen from compression of the ulnar or radial nerves in the arm, often from an upper-body tie that's usually (and, according to some people, mistakenly) called a takate-kote (TK), or box tie. But, of course, nerves run throughout the whole body, not just the arms.

As I'm not a medical professional, I'm not going to discuss nerve damage in great detail. But as a rope bottom, I can tell you that it really helps to learn your own body, including where the nerves are located in your arms and legs, because every single body is different. If you can tell your rope top which areas not to lay rope on because that's where a nerve is, you'll increase your chances of coming out uninjured.

The photo below shows one version of a takate-kote. If this had been for suspension; I wouldn't have locked that left thumb on the right elbow, because locking the thumb makes it harder to switch arm positions in the air. (Ropework and photo by [The_Silence](#).)



But, wait! you say. Why all this fuss about nerve damage? What's a little loss of sensation or wrist drop...my body will heal eventually, right? For one thing, maybe the injured area will heal completely; maybe it won't. There's no way to tell. For another thing, even if it heals, the injured part may be more susceptible to being reinjured in the future. And for a third thing, consider what you do on a daily basis. If your job, for example, involves typing on a computer all day, what are you going to do if you get wrist drop and can't type for 2 weeks or even 6 months? Will you lose income or even your job? What if you couldn't drive your car because you can't maneuver the stick shift or even just the wheel? I can't emphasize enough that you must be aware of the risks and choose the level of risk that is acceptable to you.

If you'd like to learn more about nerve damage—how to avoid it, first-aid treatments, other people's recovery times—read through the archives on FetLife's many rope groups, such as Riggers and Rope Sluts, Rope Incident Reports, and Ask a rope bunny. RemedialRopes.com has an excellent section on nerve damage. Esinem, a widely respected rigger and instructor, has studied nerve damage and published his findings on his website, Esinem.com. WykD Dave, another widely respected rigger and instructor (who has tied the likes of Lady Gaga), has written about it on his website, Rope-Topia.com, as well.

You'll find plenty of information if you search, but use your own judgment even when considering info from medical professionals. There's a lot of helpful stuff; there's also a lot of incomplete, contradicting, and downright incorrect info out there, especially in Internet land.

And if you do ever get injured, it's of course recommended to see a doctor and to be honest about how the injury happened. There are plenty of kink-friendly doctors, at least here in the U.S.; check out the Kink Aware Professionals Directory on the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom's website (www.ncsfreedom.org).

Emotional support is important too, because injuries have a way of making us blame ourselves and feel bad even when there were many factors at play. Consider posting on the Rope Incident Reports section on FetLife and talk with other rope bottoms and tops—you'll likely gain a much healthier and broader perspective on your injury than if you just keep it to yourself and feel ashamed.

OK, back to being in the rope. I recommend that you don't look at the rope while you're being tied, because 1. You may accidentally get whipped in the face or even in the eye by the rope, and 2. It's harder to surrender when you're watching every little thing that's happening.

Once a scene is complete, mindfulness for me takes a different form: consideration. Am I getting the aftercare I need? Am I giving my rope top the aftercare they need?

Regardless of what I've negotiated, I check in with myself to see if I'm getting the aftercare that will make me feel like the scene is complete, that I'm nourished and cherished. Sometimes you might need extra aftercare from your rope top than you anticipated—it's OK to ask for more than you negotiated for! But realize that your rope top may not be able to provide it or may not be fulfilling your needs even if they're doing what you did negotiate. So sometimes aftercare takes an unexpected form. Sometimes you may want to ask someone other than your rope partner to provide aftercare; sometimes you may want to do self-care (we'll get to that more in Chapter 8).

Or sometimes you may even need less aftercare than you negotiated, and that's OK too. Maybe you just want a quick hug and you're done—nothing wrong with that as long as you're not short-changing your rope top. Only you know the amount of aftercare you need in that moment.

Not every scene and aftercare will go as you've negotiated, but being mindful of your needs at this stage will go a long way toward making you feel fulfilled in the scene and mitigating any sub drop in the days ahead.

Please remember that your rope top has needs too! And that tops are not always so easily able to ask for aftercare. I often ask after a scene, regardless of whether we've negotiated top aftercare, "Is there anything I can do for you?" Once you're back in the real world and can walk without falling over, try offering your rope top some water or something from the food table if you're in a club with snacks. Other potential offerings include wiping their neck or head with a cloth towel or with paper towels from the restroom—isn't that sweat they built up making magic for you sexy?—or a neck rub or backrub or even something sexual or whatever else you feel comfortable with. You don't have to be a professional massage therapist to gently and affectionately knead or even just stroke a neck, a back or feet.

In all the times I've offered to fetch a snack, provide a neck rub, or just snuggle, regardless of what was negotiated, no top has ever said no to some kind of caring attention.

Afterward, even if your top refuses any aftercare at all, please remember to always thank them. They worked just as hard and likely spent even more time than you did learning the skills to make the scene happen. If your scene went horribly wrong because your top was a total ass and didn't listen to your communication or whatnot, you can skip the appreciation and offer constructive feedback. If there were things that went well and things that didn't, express appreciation for what worked and make a mental note to offer other feedback when it feels appropriate.

Bonus: Happy, fulfilled, appreciated rope tops are more likely to want to tie you up again. Call it a win-win.

Chapter 4

Being Prepared

If you want to get the most out of your scene, you'll need to do more than just choose a good partner. You'll need to do your part, which includes preparing, mentally and physically. That's why Helpful Skill No. 2 is Being Prepared.

Many of the videos and photos of rope scenes you'll see, especially with suspensions, show thin, young, bendy types. If you don't fit that mold (I certainly don't), for heaven's sake do not think you can't get tied up. I've seen all kinds of people do all kinds of rope scenes, even including suspensions, very successfully: muscular people, people with a BMI much higher than average, older people, people who can't touch their toes. I had a very low pain tolerance and was not particularly flexible when I did my first suspension at age 41.

Pretty much anyone can do some kind of rope play, barring any serious medical or physical condition that dictates otherwise. If you're concerned about what you should and shouldn't attempt, please consult a medical professional. (For suspensions, see "BDSM Bullshit: Who Can Be Suspended?" in the Articles section on RemedialRopes.com.) But don't let what you see in photos and videos discourage you.

Having said that, being fit and somewhat flexible will expand the possibilities of what you're able to do. Being able to calm the chatter in your head will allow you to drop in and be fully present in the scene. Taking care of your physical needs (going to the bathroom, satisfying hunger and thirst, identifying injuries and sore spots) will let you focus on the experience more completely. Let's break it down.

Mental Preparation

Being tied up is an act of surrender, I believe, both to your partner and to the experience. Surrender comes to some easily, to some not easily at all, and at every degree in between. Maybe you need the “fight” wrestled out of you first, and you like to psych yourself up for the wrestling by listening to heavy metal music. Maybe you’re eagerly longing to hand over the control reins to someone else after a long day at a high-powered job, and soothing music and a bubble bath will help you ease into that transition. Whatever helps you get into the state of mind of surrender can be beneficial.

Even very athletic suspensions with very empowered rope bottoms are, in my opinion, an act of submission. Because even if you have practiced a suspension with your partner many times, and you both identify as equal partners in the scene, you will still need to deal with the pain, the uncertainty, maybe even a moment or two of panic (“What the hell was I thinking? Why didn’t I just stay in my nice, safe bed?”). If getting tied up were as easy and certain as a walk on the treadmill, it wouldn’t be much fun, would it? The fear, the uncertainty, the rush, the sense of accomplishment—all of those feelings can contribute to an incredible scene, and all of those require certain amounts of submission on the bottom’s part.

So I believe that whatever you can do to feel confident and safe enough to surrender, and to otherwise be in the right headspace, will go a long way toward creating a fulfilling scene. My mental preparation includes telling my inner critic to shut up—the one who sneers that I’m too old, too out of shape, too inflexible or otherwise too incapable to do the scene. I remind myself of the really intense scenes I’ve done, like the suspension 12 feet off the concrete floor when I spat in the face of my fear of heights. I also remind myself that no matter how intense, challenging or even downright painful the scene will be, I can probably look forward to that blissful sense of transcendence and the complete mental and physical letting go that, for me, is sub space.

Figure out your own version of a pep talk to yourself and don’t be too embarrassed to use it.

Then there is overall mental health. I'm not going to discuss whether people who get tied up or engage in any other BDSM practice are more or less mentally healthy than the average person, because it's irrelevant for our purposes here. You want to get tied up; I want to get tied up; and our goal is to do it safely and enjoyably. But I do urge you to honestly examine your reasons for wanting to be tied up, and if your instinct is telling you that you're using rope play to re-live damaging incidents or re-create old wounds, please strongly consider getting help from a mental health professional. Rope play, like any other BDSM practice, can be therapeutic, but if you are using it as a replacement for professional therapy, you're doing both yourself and your partner a disservice—and you'll likely find it is not very effective for that goal anyway.

The last part of mental preparation is letting go of expectations for the scene. Every scene has its own flavor, and although having a general intention can be beneficial—for example, “I want to connect with my partner” or “I want to expand my boundaries”—having specific expectations is, as mentioned, a recipe for disappointment. Why? Because 1. There are too many factors you can't control—your partner's needs, style, and mood; the weather; the kind of day you both had; etc. and 2. If you're trying to dictate how the scene goes, then you aren't really surrendering to your partner or the experience, and you won't get all the lovely benefits of surrendering, like sub space.

Please remember also that rope tops are not vending machines, there to serve up your fantasies with the push of a button. You both have your own needs and desires, and for a scene to be fulfilling for both of you, both of your needs have to be met. Even if your need is for absolute objectification or submitting completely to your partner's wishes through consensual nonconsent, that's still a need. Your rope top has them too. Treat your partner with the courtesy, consideration, and respect they deserve, and never take for granted the experience they're helping create for both of you.

Physical Preparation

There is such a wide range of rope scene types, as we've discussed, and obviously the intensity of the scene will determine how much physical preparation you'll want to do. You'll find detailed recommendations for suspensions in Chapter 10, but for even the least intense scene, I recommend that you:

- Eat something beforehand, but don't stuff yourself. You want to be delirious from bliss, not hunger. But when that rope coils around your stomach, you also don't want it to be squishing a stomach full of meatball hero.
- Stay hydrated, but don't drink so much that you need to hit the bathroom every 15 minutes.
- Pee right before, even if you just went 30 minutes ago. When you're feeling that lovely vibration of rope running across your skin is not the time to be hearing the call of nature.
- Avoid heavy perfume or cologne. Everyone's taste in scents is different. I know rope tops who won't tie certain people because of their fragrances, and I don't get tied up by people whose fragrances turn me off.
- Stretch. Light stretching for light scenes; deeper stretching for more intense or prolonged scenes, especially suspensions. You'll find a list of the stretches I do in Chapter 9.

- Check in with your body. Do you have any injuries, old or recent? Is anything strained or hurting on this particular day? Let your rope top know.

- Spend at least a couple of minutes cultivating mindfulness, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Your Rope Bottoming Bag

It can also be a good idea to pack a rope bottoming bag. Again, what's in it will depend on the intensity of your scene. If your scene will be very light and your rope top is well prepared, you might not need anything at all. If your scene will be more intense, you may want to include:

- Any medications, inhalers, EpiPens or other items you may need in case of a medical emergency
- A hair tie if you have long hair
- A warm and snuggly sweater or scarf, or even a towel
- Water and a nonperishable snack, like trail mix or a Clif bar
- Flats (some clubs have a must-wear-shoes rule, and you might tire of those 6-inch stilettos or stompy boots)
- Arnica gel or cream (available at major drugstores; considered good for muscle soreness and bruising), acetaminophen (like Tylenol), and/or an NSAID (like Advil, Motrin, or Aleve). Some people also take arnica tablets orally.
- Hand sanitizer (for after your scene and before your snack if, for example, you've been pawing a dirty floor)

- Eye rewetting drops (maybe you cum so hard your eyeballs dry out, or you wear contact lenses)
- Comfy clothes to change into afterward. Maybe an extra pair of undies too.

Some rope bottoms also like to bring their own safety shears, which are used for cutting the rope in emergency situations. I don't, because I would never let anyone tie me up who is negligent or forgetful enough not to bring their own safety shears.

For the days after the scene, Tiger Balm, arnica gel or cream, and magnesium oil can help with muscles soreness; magnesium oil can be itchy or stinging when you first put it on, but that sensation goes away pretty quickly. Magnesium is great for muscle relaxation in general and comes in the form of Epsom salts (magnesium sulfate) for the bath too. Clover has posted that she likes to have Bio-Oil and Palmer's cream for rope marks in her rope bottoming kit too.

Clothing

You can do rope in anything from your birthday suit to an evening gown, but keep the nature of your scene in mind and also be mindful of anything that compresses the chest or diaphragm or otherwise restricts your breathing, like a corset, hood, or gag. Avoid underwire bras as well if there will be rope on the chest, especially for suspensions.

I usually like to err on the side of being comfortable in clothes and spend my pain bank on the rope and any impact toys used instead.

~

True Story

I once did a paid bondage performance at a party. It was a last-minute invitation, and neither the rope top nor I knew exactly what to expect. We had initially discussed light bondage, but once there we decided to do a suspension instead. No nudity was allowed, so I traded my dress for Saran wrap wound around my breasts. It felt snug, but I thought I could breathe fine. Sure, on the ground. Ten seconds into an inversion, the edges of my vision went wavy and I saw stars. I pulled myself up, took some deep breaths, and tried again. Ten more seconds back in it and I was 5 seconds away from blacking out.

The rope top had me out of the rope in less than 30 seconds, and I didn't pass out. He sat me down with my head between my legs and was very reassuring, and we did come back later that night with a successful suspension, but at the time I felt like a failure. There are a lot of lessons to be learned here, but the most important one is: The wrong clothing can ruin your scene. Err on the side of being comfortable and able to breathe well.

Chapter 5

Trusting Your Instinct

Gee, that rope feels kinda tight on my ribcage. Should I say something? But I guess it's OK, because I can still breathe, if not deeply. My thumb feels weird too, but I can still move it, and it's not even tingling, so that's probably fine too. Yipes, rope on my private parts? We didn't discuss that, and it makes me feel uneasy, but I didn't say it was a limit, so I'll just suck it up. OK now my thumb really is tingling, but this tie took 30 minutes, and I've only been in it for 5. I really don't want to ruin the scene. I'll just tough it out...

This type of thinking, in which you ignore your instinct, can lead to injury. Probably every rope bottom has this kind of internal dialogue at some point, if not every single time they're in rope. The biggest question I had when I started getting tied up was, "Is it supposed to be this painful, or am I just a wuss?" It can be difficult, especially when you're a beginner, to know what kind of pain is to be expected and what kind is a signal that something is wrong.

There is no easy answer, alas. The only way to figure it out is through experience and talking with other rope bottoms and tops. Having the same tie done by different people can also be insightful, because every rope top's style, placement, and tension are slightly different. There are often also many variations of any tie—some hogties are so comfy that you could do the New York Times crossword puzzle in them (well, if you could write with a pen in your nose). Some ties are just painful by nature, but it takes time and practice to figure out which ones.

But while experience takes time to acquire, instinct is something you already possess and can access immediately—you just have to learn how to hear it and honor it.

Merriam-Webster defines "instinct" as:

A way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is not learned...behavior that is mediated by reactions below the conscious level.

Sometimes instinct has a voice, as in, “I need to get out of this rope right now!” Sometimes it’s more of a not-fully-formed feeling—that “Spidey sense.” As mentioned, instinct does not need a logical reason or justification. It plays beyond the realm of the rational. Don’t let your conscious reasoning override it.

Let’s say you’ve attended a class with a world-famous rope bondage instructor who has been tying people up for years and is also super hot. You take a shine to each other, and the instructor is leaving the next day but wants to tie you up that night in their hotel room. “What a fabulous opportunity!” you think. “And how can I go wrong with a world-famous rope bondage instructor?”

But then your Spidey sense starts tingling. Why are they insisting on the hotel room instead of the popular party when you’ve said no sex? Why are they not quite looking you completely in the eyes? Why did their bottoming partner in the class look annoyed? Something just doesn’t seem right here—and even if all the facts look fine on paper, your instinct has the right of veto.

Of course, I’m not saying to be more or less wary of world-famous rope instructors! The few I’ve met have been wonderful. (And most stay at people’s houses, not hotels.) But you get the point. Don’t let a “great opportunity” or fame or hotness or anything else override your instinct.

Trusting your instinct will serve you in every aspect of a rope scene, beginning with evaluating rope tops. It will also help you avoid the tough-it-out mentality that can lead to injury. You know that mentality, right? Maybe the tie took a long time, or people are watching, or you don’t want to disappoint your partner or ruin the scene, or you think your pain tolerance “should” be higher or your stamina “should” be greater. So you push past what you know is right for you. But to stay safe, you must chuck this mentality out the window.

In the photo below, my instinct told me that candle would be trouble. And yup, the wax spilled all over me, the rope, and the floor when I twitched. But the rope top knew I liked wax play, so it was all good. (Ropework and photo by

Cryptocat.)



“Should”s have no place in rope bondage. There is only what you can and cannot do in the moment. Even if you’ve done a tie a dozen times with no problem, if you are having an issue this particular time, you need to address it. Second, remember that you can always get tied up again—maybe even in the next few minutes!—except if you get injured.

If you’re having an issue, and your partner makes an adjustment, you still want to listen to your instinct about whether the adjustment alleviated the problem. If not, you’ll need to tell them. Don’t feel like you’re being a complainer. Just say calmly that you’re still having the issue.

If you’re worried that your rope top will end the scene completely, tell them you’d like to continue in a different form if possible. Experienced rope tops should be able to switch the tie so it works better. Less experienced tops might have to take you out completely, but then just tell them how much you would like them to retie you.

~

True Story

The scene was a very stylish BDSM party in another city. I had been hooked up with a rope top through a mutual friend in San Francisco, and we’d exchanged a few messages but had never met in person. I knew this person had been doing rope for years, had studied internationally, and taught classes. Did I want to live up to his abilities? Hell, yes. Did I want to show my friend back home that he could confidently recommend me to all of his hot rope top friends around the world in the future? Fer sure! Also, I felt a chemistry right away with this person and did not want to disappoint him.

He put me in a box tie, which I’d done too many times to count, and started pulling the ropes through the suspension ring and hoisting me up in the air. A spot on my arm immediately and loudly complained in a way that I knew was not normal. I told the rope top, he adjusted the placement of the rope, and we

went back to it. My arm kept on hurting, and I started mentally beating myself up for being such a lame-ass over that one little spot. I really considered toughing it out, but then good sense kicked in.

“I’m really sorry, but that arm is just no good,” I said. “I really don’t want to come out completely, though. Can we please switch to something else?” Without missing a beat, he switched to a partial suspension that took the pressure off the arm.

And at some point when I stopped mentally beating myself up again for being able to do “only” a partial, guess what? We had a really great, hot scene. And another one the next night. And we’re planning to get together the next time I’m in town. If I hadn’t listened to my instinct and communicated the issue, not only might I have gotten injured, but I likely wouldn’t have been able to drop into the scene as fully, because I would have been too focused on that damn arm.

~

3 Easy Ways to Develop Instinct

If you feel like your sixth sense is more like six galaxies away, don't give up on it. There are ways to boost the ability to hear, feel, and trust your instinct. And a more finely tuned instinct will actually help you in life, not just in rope.

These came from different sources over the years that I can't remember anymore, so unfortunately there are no credits. Also, again, these work for me but might not for you. Experiment, research, and develop your own methods—much has been written on the subject of developing instinct (like *The Gift of Fear*, by Gavin de Becker) and there are many more methods than just these.

The finger snap test. Let's say you're weighing two options—for example, should you go on a date with a certain person or not. Snap your fingers and listen to the first answer that pops into your head: yes or no. If your fingers happen to be tied and you can't actually snap them, just visualize it.

Practice guessing. At least once a day, when you make a choice that you're not certain about—it could be as simple as what to have for breakfast or what outfit to wear—guess ahead of time how you'll feel about your decision later. Then check in with yourself later to see if you were right.

Get out of your head. As mentioned, doing anything physical will help take your focus away from your thoughts. Have you ever noticed how you can think more clearly after exercising, how suddenly the answer to a question or problem you'd been having is right there in front of you? It's because you've cleared your conscious thoughts away to make room for instinct to surface.

Similarly, doing something creative can help you get out of your head and tap into your instincts, even if the activity isn't highly physical, like drawing or playing the guitar.

~

Now that we've covered the subconscious information gathering that is instinct, let's move on to information gathering on a more conscious level: knowing yourself.

Chapter 6

Knowing Yourself

Let's consider two scenarios.

1. Rope top: So, any injuries or anything special I should know about?

Rope bottom: Nah, I'm pretty good. I promise to tell you if anything feels bad.

2. Rope top: So, any injuries or anything special I should know about?

Rope bottom: No injuries currently, but I had carpal tunnel syndrome last year. I have asthma, and there's an inhaler in my bag. There's a nerve in my arm here [points]. Also, if you blindfold me and spin me around, I'll probably throw up. Aaand, well, it would be really nice if I get to have an orgasm.

It's pretty obvious which response is more helpful to a rope top—and whatever helps your rope top will help you too. You don't need to share every last detail of your physical and mental state, but providing info on the big issues will help you stay safe and help both of you have a better experience.

It bears repeating here that a good rope top will be able to adjust the tying and the scene to accommodate your injuries, conditions, and state of being. Don't be embarrassed or feel like you're being difficult. Your partner doesn't want to see you get hurt or come away miserable (in unintended ways anyway) any more

than you do.

For you to share information, of course, you need to know it. Some of it you already do, and some of it will come through experience. Let's break down Helpful Skill No. 4: Knowing Yourself.

Medical and Physical Conditions

Medical conditions are things like diabetes, asthma, a heart condition, panic attacks, allergies, a history of seizures, circulation issues...anything that has required or might require medical intervention. Even if your condition is under control, it behooves you to disclose this information to your rope top—in the event that it shows up while you're tied up, you want your partner to be able to handle it calmly and smoothly, and not waste precious time wondering what the hell is happening to you.

Physical conditions you would do well to disclose are things like breast implants, nerve or joint injuries, relevant surgeries, a bad back, a trick knee, areas of very low or high flexibility, whether you're getting over the flu, whether you're extra sore from a gym workout...anything going on with your body long-term or short-term that could affect the scene or, more important, your health.

Mental Conditions

Rope play, like many other forms of BDSM, can trigger very intense feelings, emotions, and memories. Maybe you love having your wrists tethered to the headboard and your legs closed, but being spread-eagled with your ankles fastened to the bedpost will flash you back to a terrible experience. Maybe you feel fabulous in a hogtie with someone's boot pressing your face to the floor, but put a gag on you, and you're done. Knowing and communicating your mental and emotional triggers, both major and minor, is important. Gather them in a written or mental database the same as you would medical and physical issues.

Situational Issues

Maybe you don't have problems with your shoulders while you're just walking around the mall, but when your arms are bound behind your back in a box tie for more than 5 minutes, ouch. Maybe your knee is fine when you're sitting at your

desk, but it'll go out 10 minutes into a partial suspension when that leg is bearing all of your weight. Maybe your lower back feels great until you arch it just an inch too far, then you'll be in agonizing spasms. These things are sometimes hard to predict—it's not like we're hanging out in rope by the office water cooler—but you can build your self-knowledge database as you experience them.

It's a good idea to check in with your body during the days after a rope scene to see if anything feels unusually painful or strained, and then try to work back to figure out what caused it. (Not always easy—the memory of a rope scene can get very blurry!) For example, maybe you will discover that you have an awfully stiff neck, and perhaps you'll ask for neck support the next time you're in that same position.

The biggest situational issue can be the most blissful: sub space! What characterizes sub space for you? Maybe you go nonverbal—and if so, how will you communicate with your rope top? Maybe you bark like a dog; telling your partner ahead of time will ensure that they don't think you're angry and want to be taken out. Pay particular attention to your behavior and abilities or lack thereof while you're in sub space, and communicate them to your rope top. If you'll be less likely to notice any signs of potential danger or injury, you'll need your partner to be extra alert and remind you to check in.

Knowing Your Wants

Notice that part about the orgasm in situation No. 2 above? Your rope top is not a mind reader, so share what you really want without embarrassment. Maybe it's something of a sexual nature; maybe it's floating off into sub space; maybe it's making an intimate connection. Because we're dealing with tops here, however, who may be more or less domly/dommely, sadistic, service-oriented, fluffy, etc., it's important to realize that just because you ask for something doesn't mean you're going to get it, unless you've both negotiated it as a must-do. And even if you've negotiated for something to happen, it might not happen for reasons neither of you could predict.

Negotiating

Once you know yourself at least a little and what will make a scene fulfilling for you, you can begin negotiating with your rope top for the scene. Negotiation can be as simple or as involved as you choose, but I urge you to err on the side of negotiating more than you think the scene will involve, for one main reason: You will be tied up, may be unable to free yourself, and may have restricted communication abilities! Duuuuh, right?

If you were doing a simple spanking scene with no bondage in a dungeon, presumably you could run away or holler to the dungeon monitor if necessary. If you're bound hands and feet to a St. Andrews cross with a blindfold on and a gag in your mouth...hmmm, not so much.

Also, maybe you think rope by itself will make for a spectacular scene (and it sure can), but what if it turns out something added will give it more flavor? A little face slapping, say, or some nipple clamps or paddling? Renegotiating in the middle of a scene generally isn't a great idea (endorphin highs do not make for good judgment), so it's good to cover all the potential bases ahead of time.

You can find many general BDSM negotiation checklists online; just search for "BDSM negotiation checklist" or "BDSM negotiation form." It's helpful to consider the potential scene elements in those along with discussing your medical, physical, and mental conditions; your wants; and aftercare. For rope scenes, you'll particularly want to discuss the following.

Safewords. How will you safeword if you don't have use of your hands? The most obvious choice is your voice; you can negotiate to use plain language (in which your communication is taken at face value, such as "stop"). Or you can use special spoken words; the most common are "green" ("I love this"), "yellow" ("Please check in with me"), and "red" ("Stop immediately"/"Get me out right now").

How can you safeword if you don't have your voice? You can use a hand signal. One type is one finger for green, two fingers for yellow, and three fingers for red. Another type is making a fist and then opening all the fingers together, repeatedly, to mean red. A third is the thumbs-up and thumbs-down. You can hold also an object, and if you drop the object, it means red.

How can you safeword if you're gagged and your hands are tied? One way is to use a pattern of grunting (three grunts, pause, three grunts, pause). Another is to use a pattern of head shaking (left, right, left, right) or head nodding (forward, back, forward, back). But be extremely careful about using gags with rope, especially in a scene that could cause nausea and vomiting. A ball gag that you can spit out if necessary might be fine, but if you're wearing a heavier or tighter gag or a hood that can't be easily cut off and you vomit, the results can be disastrous and even fatal.

I also suggest in general that you know and trust your rope top beyond a shadow of a doubt before you do a scene in which both your hands and your voice are severely restricted.

For the scene in the photo below, we agreed on a combination of head motions, grunts, and wiggling to communicate. And that gag was looser than it looks. (Ropework by ModusVitaeSF. Photo by The_Silence.)



How long will you stay in the tie? Knowing in advance can help you prepare mentally.

Will you be doing just one tie, or will there be transitions? Again, knowing can help you prepare mentally and pace yourself.

Are rope marks OK? How about bruises, cuts, abrasions? Realize that even if you say certain kinds of marks aren't OK, they may happen by accident anyway. You can sometimes minimize marks by wearing thin, stretchy leggings and a long-sleeve shirt—try see-through, netting, or lace if standard opaque doesn't feel sexy enough.

How much warning time does the top need to untie you? Realize that if you say, "Get me out now!" it may take anywhere from 10 seconds to a few minutes for the rope top to actually free you completely. I generally err on the side of overcaution, as you may have guessed by now, so if my partner tells me they need 5 minutes' notice, I give them at least 7 for my own peace of mind.

The Compounding Effect

So you love rope, and you love hoods—or clamps or whips or breath play or whatever. If you combine rope with another favorite BDSM practice, it should be double the fun, right? Um...maybe. Rope can heighten your sensations to the point where adding something else can be too much.

If you're negotiating as a new rope bottom and haven't tried rope combined with your other faves, consider combining conservatively until you know how you'll respond. At the very least, tell your rope top it will be a new experience for you

doing these things at the same time.

Aftercare

Rope scene aftercare can vary widely from person to person, both in what's included and the length of time required—some people are good after 5 minutes; some need an hour or more. And needs can change by the day, hour, and scene. Honor whatever you and your partner need in the moment.

Aftercare may include snuggling. It will hopefully include snacks, compliments, and gratitude (as discussed in Chapter 3, give your rope top aftercare too!). A blanket is lovely as well.

If massage is part of your aftercare, avoid massaging, rubbing, or pressing on rope marks and bruises, as it can make them worse. Shay Tiziano, who co-created RemedialRopes.com and is a registered nurse, offers this advice on bruising: Consider applying ice to minimize the bruises or help with the pain. Be careful not to over-ice, which can cause skin damage; gentle cooling for 20 minutes every couple hours should be sufficient. And be aware that NSAIDs can increase bruising.

Also, if you have bruising, you may want to hold off on that hot shower for a couple of days, to avoid making the bruises worse—go lukewarm instead.

Saying No

Getting to know your body, needs, preferences and pleasures (and developing your instinct) means that you will more readily know what doesn't work for you. And that means saying no more often: no to certain ties, no to certain scenes, and no to certain people. If saying no comes easily to you, you can skip ahead.

If, on the other hand, you're like me and you generally try hard not to hurt other people's feelings, or you tend to want to be accommodating and not seen as difficult, it may take time and effort for you to feel comfortable saying no. But remember that you're not doing anyone any favors by agreeing to do something

you're not really into.

If someone wants to tie you up, but you don't feel it's the right fit, you can simply say, "Thank you for the offer, but I'm going to pass." You don't need to apologize. You don't need to offer an explanation, even if they're persistent. (If they press you for a reason, you can always say, "I don't think it's a good fit" or "I'm just not feeling it.") You don't need to qualify your answer in a way that leaves the door open for the future unless you want to.

The same phrase will work for a particular scene too, or you can say something like, "That won't work for me." Knowing yourself will do you no good if you don't say no to what you think or know won't be good. It is your body and it is your say what you do and don't do with it. Use your self-knowledge wisely.

~

True Story

I still cringe thinking about this night. It was my second "official" tying scene with a rope top I found very attractive. The first one was at a play party and involved hojojutsu (a rough take-down style). Everything we did in that first scene was consensual, but it turned out to be much rougher than I expected, because the floor was hardwood, I was not that familiar with hojojutsu, and he was a self-identified sadist. There turned out to be no time for aftercare, because he started the scene toward the end of the party. I was covered in huge bruises the next day and feeling tossed to the wind.

I know myself to have a medium pain tolerance, to need some kind of aftercare, and to like to be prepared. So at the next event, I asked for more info about what ties we'd be doing and what aftercare would look like. He said we would be doing a suspension and that's all I needed to know. Period.

If this happened today, I would refuse to do the scene. But because I found him so hot and wanted to please him, and because I wasn't very experienced or comfortable saying no at the time, I ignored my instincts, disregarded my self-knowledge, and went ahead with it. And from the very first harsh jerking off the

floor to the painful dropping transition where I actually screamed, it was a nightmare. I didn't have the right flexibility or pain tolerance for what he wanted to do. In less than 10 minutes I insisted he take me out.

The experience felt even more humiliating because some of my friends were watching. And our aftercare consisted of my sitting at his feet while he hit on another girl.

It certainly didn't put me off rope forever, but it did shake me up pretty badly at the time. Now I'm just glad that nothing more than my pride and heart were injured, because it could've been a lot worse. I remind myself of this experience anytime I consider going against my instinct or discounting my self-knowledge.

Chapter 7

Communicating with Your Rope Top

Hmmm, this chest harness feels awfully tight; is it supposed to be this tight? I can barely breathe. And my left foot is falling asleep—well, I’m pretty sure it’s falling asleep, given the position. Probably not a serious issue, and I don’t want to bother my partner unless I know it’s serious. And what was I thinking wearing these stilettos? If I ask to take them off, though, will the whole tie need to be redone? I’ll just suffer through it. Suffering’s part of what I signed up for, right? Now I really can’t feel my foot at all, dammit. I just hope we do a transition soon.

A wonderful rigger I know, ModusVitaeSF, calls suspensions a team sport, and I heartily agree. Helpful Skill No. 5 is Communicating With Your Rope Top because without clear communication, without acting like the team you are part of (as in the example above), you’re putting both yourself and your top at risk. The risk can range from mere dissatisfaction with the scene to severe injury. And, as if your own injury weren’t enough of a deterrent, think of the damage to the rope top’s reputation and peace of mind if you get injured in a scene under their care.

We’ve already covered many things to communicate before a scene in the previous chapter. Here we’ll discuss what to communicate and what not to in the actual scene and afterward. But first, let’s talk about how to communicate.

The more specific you can be, the better. Saying, “My hand feels weird” is a good start if that’s all you can manage, but saying, “The wrap on the left wrist is on the bone” is better. Saying, “My left leg hurts” is good, but saying, “The lowest shin wrap on the left leg—too much pressure” is better. Speak as calmly, clearly, and succinctly as you can. If you feel yourself starting to panic, tell your partner immediately and try to breathe deeply and calmly until you’re out.

You may have noticed that in the “better” phrases, I used the impersonal “the” as opposed to “my.” That’s a personal preference; I feel more objective and less like a complainer using impersonal articles when communicating with my rope top.

Also try to communicate as soon as you notice an issue, to give your partner plenty of time to alleviate it. A minute or two can make a huge difference. If you wait until something is no longer bearable and then yell desperately, “I need to get out right this second!” it may affect how safely your rope top can take you out. Cutting someone out of rope is actually riskier than taking them out in a calm, controlled, progressive manner. Also, keep in mind that unpredictable things can happen that might add to the time needed to take you out—a rope may jam, for instance.

Trusting your instinct will go a long way in helping you know which things are worth mentioning—the little voice in your head that is worried about a small thing will most likely turn into a louder voice worrying about a now-bigger thing soon enough. But let’s cover the major areas.

What to Communicate During a Scene

Any kind of pain, numbness, or tingling is always something to tell your rope top. It doesn't matter if it took them 45 minutes to tie you up and you've been in the tie for only 2 minutes. Remember that it doesn't matter if you think it's "just" a circulation issue; the numbness means you wouldn't feel a more serious nerve issue, so you should communicate it. It doesn't matter if you've seen many other people do this tie with no problems, or if you yourself have done this tie a dozen times with no problems. Itchiness can also be a warning sign—not the kind from a stray hair on your cheek but the kind that covers, say, just your thumb or part of your hand. Tell your rope top immediately to avoid injury.

Dizziness, lightheadedness, nausea, and breathing problems. You can lose consciousness very quickly in rope, and while fainting may not be a life-threatening issue, your rope top would have to deal with getting dead weight untied or cut out of the rope quickly, which is not easy. Similarly, you don't want to vomit in rope. Depending on the position, you may choke on your vomit or end up swallowing it back. At the very least, you'll make a mess on the rope, yourself, the floor, and possibly your partner. It is much better and safer to avoid fainting and vomiting by telling your rope top when you experience any of the warning signs: dizziness, lightheadedness, seeing stars, wavy vision, nausea, etc.

There's a tragic incident that supports this point: A rope bottom's passing out ended in a fatality in a double predicament-bondage scene. See Appendix B for the details.

When you're having a lot of trouble with something. It could be your shoes or the room temperature or the noise. It could be a headache, or the fact that the rope top has pinched your skin for the 12th time while tying you up. Whatever you're having so much trouble with that it's taking your focus away from the pleasure of being tied is, in my book, worth communicating.

Maybe your partner can alleviate the problem, maybe not, but I always feel better at least having mentioned it.

If you're having trouble with the tie itself for whatever reason, communicate that as well. It doesn't matter if the tie is supposedly very easy or gentle, or whether your reasons are physical, mental, or emotional. If you're having trouble, you're having trouble, and you should tell your partner.

When you're getting spacey. A good rope top will know when you're slipping off into sub space; they'll see that faraway look or different breathing rate or the change in how you're holding your body, for example. But I always like to say it anyway: "I'm getting a little spacey." Why? Because 1. It lets them know that I might be less able to monitor my own safety, and they will (hopefully) be more watchful on my behalf; 2. It lets them know that my ability to communicate might be affected; and 3. Many rope tops derive satisfaction from seeing their bottoms all blissed out. Why deprive them of your euphoria?

When you're starting to fatigue. Try to give your rope top 2 to 5 minutes' notice, depending on the tie, when either a specific body part is becoming fatigued or you're getting tired overall. Maybe they can give you extra support or transition you into a position you can sustain longer. At the very least, they'll be able to take you out in a controlled manner.

If someone outside the scene is too close or creeping you out. Your rope top will hopefully be aware if someone is encroaching on your scene space, but sometimes there's a lot going on in a club or dungeon, and they may be so focused on tying you that they don't notice the person edging over with a crop pointed at your ass. Too many clubgoers and partygoers are not aware of proper scene etiquette, so feel free to ask your rope top to keep an eye on anyone who is getting too close or sending creepy or invasive vibes your way.

When you're really enjoying something. Communication doesn't have to be just about the negative stuff; share the positive too! Presumably your partner will know by the look on your face or your enraptured moans how much you're enjoying something, but feel free to say things like, "This is so hot" or "I am so turned on right now" or "You are totally rocking my world" or whatever. Who doesn't like to hear when something's going right?

What Not to Communicate in a Scene

Let's start by admitting that sometimes the actual tying part of a rope scene can be boring. Not if you're doing hojojutsu or any kind of resistance play, of course, or ichinawa, or if your partner otherwise makes the tying part of the fun. But some ties, especially for suspensions, are more complicated than others; some rope tops are slower than others; some make a connective, intimate act of tying and some don't. And your natural M.O. may be to fill boring voids with small talk. I urge you not to.

Why? Because 1. Do you want your rope top focusing on having a conversation, or do you want them focusing on tying you safely and pleasurably? And 2. Making idle conversation will put your own focus outside of the scene.

Here are a few things you might want to keep silent about as soon as the rope touches your body:

Comments on the other clubgoers. Who's coming and going; who's there with whom; who's wearing what.

Questions or comments about the rope or the tie for the mere sake of conversation, like, "Ooh that's really pretty; the last time I did this tie, it didn't have the same symmetry."

Anything relationship- or dating-related, like, “So what do you want to do for Valentine’s Day?” or, “Hey, are you still seeing that hottie from the café?”

Anything related to the everyday, like, “What do you want for dinner tonight?” or “Oh, I picked up the dry cleaning, so can you please remember to take that stuff to Goodwill?”

News, politics, celebrity gossip, the weather, the fight you had with your boss, etc. You get the idea. If it’s not helping either of you become more fully immersed in the scene, it can probably wait. If you’re bored, try some of the meditative practices outlined in Chapter 3 or the connective practices described in Chapter 8.

~

True Story

A rigger and I had spent some time working out variations of an inverted suspension from a single-leg futomomo (in which the leg is bent at the knee and rope binds the shin to the thigh) in a class earlier that day. I found all the variations we did in the class really painful and lasted no more than 2 minutes in any of them. But I kept the shrieks internal and tried to calmly answer his questions and communicate what was working and what wasn’t. Together we worked out what hypothetically would be the best combination of rope placement, tension, etc. He thought adding support lines on both sides of the leg, instead of having just the traditional single support line, would help alleviate the pressure.

Later that night at a party, we decided to try it out. First, I was nervous about the hardpoint, because we had never suspended there before and the floor was hardwood—nothing to cushion a skull should anything fail. I kept the fear to myself for a while, then realized it was taking my focus away. So I

communicated my concern, and the rope top reassured me about its safety (relative safety anyway, as suspensions are edge play and risky already, and doing an inversion over a hardwood floor even more so). I felt better immediately, and my focus returned.

When he pulled me into the air, the pain was again immediate and acute despite the two support lines. But after I spent a minute breathing deeply and visualizing the pain spreading to nontied body parts, the bliss washed over me like a wave. All of that back-and-forth communication earlier had paid off!

But here's where we get to the really impressive communication. Because this rigger had never done that exact tie with two support lines, the rope jammed as he started untying. (By that time I had been upside down in the futomomo for maybe 10 or 15 minutes.) Very calmly and matter-of-factly, he said, "This is nothing to worry about, but the rope has jammed, and I'm going to ask X to hold you while I get it out."

If I had detected even one note of tension or panic in his voice, or if he had decided to not communicate to me what was happening at all, and just had someone come in to hold me up without telling me why, I might easily have panicked—especially given my earlier fear about hitting the hardwood head first. But his communication made all the difference. X held me up, the rope top unjammed the rope, and I got out safely—and with bliss intact.

Chapter 8

Making a Connection

Connection is a particularly hot topic in the San Francisco Bay Area rope community as I write this, and I think my good friends Kanso and True_Blue of Bondage Erotique, as well as instructors coming to teach here from overseas, like Peter Slemrian of Denmark, have had a lot to do with it. But even if it weren't a buzzword right now, making a connection would deserve a spot on the Helpful Skills list. In fact, I believe it's a skill every bottom, not just rope bottoms, can benefit from.

Maybe sometimes you'll just want your rope or pain fix and call it a day. Nothing wrong with that. But if you and your partner are just using each other to get rope-high needs or pain-receiving/pain-giving needs met all the time, you're missing out on one of the big benefits of doing what it is we do: feeling the intimacy of meeting another person in a place where your everyday masks are off.

For me, this type of connection, this intimacy, is what can change rope play from mere pleasure to transcendence. And, as with all aspects of rope, there's a scale. There are the small connections and intimacies, like hearing the rope top's unexpected gasp of pleasure or seeing the sweat dripping from their brow or pooling in their back, or feeling their breath on your neck. There's the way their face looks when they're standing 3 feet away and gazing at you adoringly all tied up in their handiwork. There's that deep connection of feeling them inside you when you're completely immobilized in rope and at their mercy.

For some, making a connection happens through the physical, through their partner's sensuous caresses or kisses or spansks or slaps. For others, it can be completely energetic, with no touching other than to apply the ropes. To feel connected with your partner, first you have to know what kinds of things will make you feel connected, and there is no single answer; you'll have to figure it

out for yourself.

I do a lot of rope play as a way of getting to know someone, instead of getting to know the person and then exploring rope together. So I often find myself half-naked and tied up with someone who is basically a stranger, which can make for some very surreal “What the hell am I doing?” moments. But it’s part of the turn-on for me, the challenge of creating intimacy with someone I’ve just met. Here are some things I do to connect that might help you too.

Ways to Foster a Connection

Allow yourself to be vulnerable. For someone to connect with you, they have to see you. Not the perfect rope bottom in your imagination but the real you. Let your emotional guard down. Giggle or laugh or whimper or cry. Tell them you're scared or nervous. Let those moans of pleasure out of their cage. Nuzzle your partner's neck if they get close enough, or lean against them a little. Be brave. Rope tying is a dance, and wallflowers don't have much fun.

Look for your rope top's humanness. Same concept as above. For you to feel connected with your rope top, you have to see them for who they are in the moment. Not the person who executed some complicated concept for a photo shoot, not the instructor who has rope bottoms from here to kingdom come begging to be tied, not the person who may have taken out the trash that morning.

Sweat is so sexy to me because it's both a visual symbol of the effort the rope top is putting in to make a pleasurable experience for us, and because it's something most people are embarrassed about—sweating is an act of vulnerability. Ditto the sounds they might make—grunts or groans or sighs. Look for those little signs that your rope top is present and unique, and celebrate them. They're like little bluebirds leading the way to connection.

Eye gaze with your partner before the scene, as described in Chapter 3.

Eye gaze with your partner even if they're not gazing back. This came from my friend HoneyCat, who is a rope switch and also knows a thing or two about tantra. Gaze at a spot as close to your partner's eyes as you can—maybe it's the back of their head; maybe it's even their waist—and visualize them gazing back at you.

I don't remember if HoneyCat said to visualize them doing this adoringly, but

that's exactly how I do it. I imagine them gazing at me as if they're a sculptor and I'm the most beautiful, amazing creation coming to life under their hands. Not only does this make me feel connected to them while they're busy doing the work of tying or whatnot, but it helps boost my confidence and self-esteem.

Shut out distractions. Maybe you can do this through meditative practices; maybe a blindfold or earplugs would help. (Be aware of the added risks that come with blocking any of your senses, though.) Maybe you want to get tied up only in quieter, private spaces and not noisy, crowded clubs. The more you can minimize distractions and keep your focus more fully on your partner and the rope, the more connected you will likely feel.

Don't fight the chemistry. Again, I'm not a medical professional, but it is generally agreed that in a rope scene (as in other BDSM scenes), the body can release endorphins (hormones that activate the body's opiate receptors, similar to morphine), adrenaline (a hormone that's part of the "fight or flight" response to stress), dopamine (a neurotransmitter involved in the feeling of reward), and oxytocin (a hormone that contributes to feelings of bonding). Let 'em work their magic! They're like little golden tickets to the Wonka connection factory. Don't second-guess why you're feeling so at peace or so attracted to this person or so at one with them even though you may not know them well. Just go with it.

These chemicals are very powerful, and below we'll discuss ways to handle it when your body and mind return to their everyday state. If you want to learn more about the chemicals themselves, do an online search for "BDSM brain chemistry" or "BDSM biochemistry."

Be physically close during or afterward in whatever way is comfortable to you both. Maybe you just lay your head on your partner's lap with their hand in your hair. Maybe you snuggle each other, or you sit on your rope top's lap or between their legs on the floor. Maybe it's sex. Whatever feels right to you in terms of a physical connection can foster mental and emotional connections too. I've done tying scenes in which I felt like I just

wasn't able to connect, and then we snuggled afterward and suddenly it was there. Connection can happen at any time.

~

If you don't make a deep connection, don't beat yourself up about it. It's not a requirement for a great scene. Just focus on the enjoyable aspects of what you did—your rope high or sense of accomplishment or whatever.

If you do make a deep connection, rah! But also remember the context and that the feeling may be temporary. Rope scenes can be like film sets. Ever notice how actors always seem to be hooking up while they're filming a movie together? They get swept up in the drama and passion, and they're in close quarters doing intimate scenes. It's the same with a rope scene. The emotions can be so intense; you can even feel like your rope top is god-like. Plus there are all those chemicals flowing through your body—remember that some can produce an ecstasy on par with morphine or heroin. The result is that you may feel like you're actually in love. Don't shut it out or be afraid of it, but realize that it may be temporary and situational.

And please, please, don't be a "stalker"—someone who is so desperate for or addicted to the thrill of being tied up that they overwhelm the rope top with messages and requests to be tied up again. Showing appreciation is one thing; bombarding someone with inconsiderate neediness is entirely another.

Sub Drop

So you went to heaven and back. You and your rope top felt your souls touch. You reached the heights of transcendence and ended up a quivering mass of spent flesh. Hooray for you! Savor that experience. Feel free to relive it in your mind the next time you're stuck in traffic or stressed out, or anytime you need to remember how beautiful and amazing life can be.

But a day or two or even three or four days after the scene (sub drop follows no standard time schedule)...you crash. Maybe the irritability creeps in slowly, and you find yourself snapping at someone over something little. Maybe you wake up one morning in tears. Sub drop takes different forms and comes at different times for everyone, but the bottom line is it can feel like shit—that's why it's called sub drop. You feel really, really low.

This is completely natural. The same as with drugs you shoot or sniff or drink, your body will go through withdrawal after a great rope scene. How do you cope?

For one thing, I find that good aftercare goes a long way in preventing or alleviating sub drop. It puts a happy closure on the scene, ties it up in a lovely package that then feels complete and more separate. I can take it off my mental shelf and look back on it fondly without being so attached to it.

But without good aftercare (which for me usually involves at least 15 minutes of snuggling or closeness and kind words or looks), I feel set adrift, and the doubts that creep in ("They didn't like me enough to snuggle?" "Did I disappoint them?") make dealing with sub drop even harder. Figure out what good aftercare is for you, and make sure to negotiate for it.

Next, just recognizing sub drop for what it is can help. You can tell yourself, "This feeling is totally normal, and it will pass eventually." Some people panic and get desperate, the same as with drugs or alcohol, and feel like they need another rope fix right now or they will die. You won't die from a lack of rope, I promise. You'll just feel really crappy until your body returns fully to its everyday state.

Checking in and sharing your feelings with your partner—again, in a considerate, nonstalkerish way—can help with sub drop as well. A check-in email or phone call should not be considered bothering them; it's part of finishing the scene thoughtfully. If anyone makes you feel bad or is dismissive when you try to check in, that's a very good reason to consider never playing with them again.

Check-ins can help through the mere refreshing of the connection—hearing your partner's voice or reading their message to you. It can also help if there are any lingering doubts about something that happened in the scene. Maybe you're obsessing about something you think you did “wrong,” and your rope top can set your mind at ease. Maybe there's something they did or that happened that made you feel weird, and you'll feel better if you tell them. Little doubts and fears and weirdnesses can feel magnified when you have sub drop, so alleviating them can help buoy your spirits.

Being extra kind to yourself in the days after a rope scene can help with sub drop too. Take a nice bath (warm, not hot, if you have bruising), treat yourself to something special (but be careful to not overdose on sugar, which can contribute to the emotional roller coaster), go to bed a little earlier than usual and let your brain process everything at its own pace. Try meditating or exercising—even a gentle walk can help get your mind and body out of sub-drop mode. Talk with kinky friends about how you're feeling or post a status on a social networking site. Getting responses and seeing that people care can really help boost a mood.

And consider planning another rope scene, either with the same person or someone else. Having something fun to look forward to can make a big difference.

If for some reason you ever feel so low that you're actually suicidal, go the nearest emergency room or call the suicide hotline. In the U.S., the number is 1-800-273-8255, and you can call 24/7.

Chapter 9

Being Always Curious

My good friend Danarama has every reason to rest on his laurels. He was one of the Two Knotty Boys (world-renowned rope instructors) and has taught countless students, written books, made videos (one has more than 350,000 views on YouTube), and performed all over the world. He's been tying people up for at least 20 years. And now he's the director of Kink.com's Kink University. If anyone gets to sit back with a smug look and boast about being a master, it's him.

But does Dan do that? Nope. He is constantly curious, always seeking new information and following up on new developments, not just in the rope scene but in many areas. He still takes all kinds of classes and seems to approach learning with a beginner's mind. He's always working out new things. And this is, I would bet, a huge factor in what has made him such an amazingly skilled rope master. That's why Helpful Skill No. 7 is Being Always Curious.

If you just replay all the good scene stuff and gloss over the other stuff, you'll never improve. If you wait for rope bottoming information to come to you, you may be dusting cobwebs from your hair before getting captured in a rope web. Be proactive.

This doesn't mean thinking negatively, by the way! Just because you strive to improve doesn't mean you're presently inadequate. I'm gonna go all Zen on you right now and say that you are perfect exactly as you are, in this moment. If a scene didn't go well because the top wanted you to do something you weren't capable of, consider it a lack of skill, experience or imagination on their part. Team sport, remember? Your partner must meet you where you are for a successful scene.

So while you're improving, accept yourself and celebrate your unique gifts and strengths. Maybe you can't spin upside down like a toy top on speed, but your

gracefulness can light up a room. Maybe you can't do a split or a full backbend, but you can make a connection like nobody's business. Maybe your greatest skill right now is that sweet little sigh you make that drives your partner wild.

Remember the aspects that make you uniquely you, and don't let other people cause you to judge yourself negatively. (This isn't always easy when you look at photos or videos of others, but remember also that you have no idea where those people started.)

Here are a few things it's good to be always curious about.

Building Endurance and Stamina

Part of this is physical, and part is mental. Endurance to me relates to what types of ties and sensations you can endure; stamina relates to how long you can stay in a tie.

Boosting your physical fitness level will go a long way toward helping with both; that includes both strength training (such as lifting weights) and cardio (such as jogging). Eating well is important too. Quitting or reducing smoking can help improve your lung capacity and your circulation.

I've also found that minimizing alcohol helps improve my sense of balance (even when I'm not actually tipsy) and helps my body recover more quickly from a rope scene. Explore methods with an athlete's mind: Would an athlete get up off the couch, where they've been chowing down chips during a 2-day TV binge, and go run a marathon? Not so much.

Especially with suspensions, strengthening your core will help a lot. Try crunches, Pilates, leg lifts, Plank Pose, etc.

You can build mental endurance and stamina through practicing rope (good old R&D), meditation, learning what to expect, working on your inner demons in therapy, developing a personal pep talk, and likely in many more ways I haven't thought of yet.

Your partner also contributes to your stamina in a scene, because adjustments and transitions can help you last longer.

Increasing Flexibility

The more flexible you are, the deeper and more comfortably you can go in a tied position. And the more comfortable you are, the longer you can stay in it. Explore what ties you like to do and then put together a stretching routine that targets the areas used. After the scene, it feels nice to stretch your muscles in the opposite way in which they were when you were tied.

I'm not going to recommend a specific routine, because everyone's body is different and I'm not a fitness instructor. There are a gazillion books on yoga and stretching exercises, and you can find free instruction on YogaJournal.com and elsewhere; be curious and find stretches that work for you.

My stretching routine several times a week includes Downward Dog, Pigeon, Cow Face, Reverse Prayer, Cat-Cow, Upward Bow (Wheel), Plow, seated V stretches, lunges, shoulder and arm stretches, calf stretches, and hamstring stretches. It may sound like a lot, but the routine takes only around 30 minutes.

Developing Pain Processing Ability

This goes hand in hand with building endurance and stamina, because rope can be painful. And thank goodness, because otherwise we might not get all of those lovely chemicals flowing! Learning how to take in pain and harness its energy will help you go deeper into the experience and also last longer. However...do you feel what's coming?

Warning: Never push beyond your abilities or limits, or tolerate the kind of pain that will cause an injury.

There's a big difference between doing breathwork to help you deal with the sensation of a challenging tie that has proper tension and placement, and trying to endure a misplaced tie or pushing beyond your abilities. Honor your limitations always.

Ways to process pain when the tie is safe and manageable:

Visualize the pain spreading to other body parts, so it thins out and becomes less intense in the localized area.

Breathe into the painful area using visualization to soften the area and put more space into it.

Know that pain has a profile of how it manifests in the body. After a minute or two, a pain that seems unbearable at first can be absorbed by the body and feel less acute—the body accepts it and moves on. During that first

minute, try to step outside the pain, detach from it. I tell myself matter-of-factly, “It’s only pain.”

Sometimes the inclination to run from pain stems from things we attach to it, such as fear. If you know you won’t be injured and that you’re in control to end the scene at any time, you can let go of fear and look at pain more objectively as just a temporary condition.

Welcome the pain in, like a cool breeze on a hot day. It seems counterintuitive to welcome in something that hurts, but if you think of pain as a sensation that wants to help you reach the holy land of sub space, it becomes more of a friend and less something to endure. If the breeze metaphor doesn’t work, you could imagine it as a wave washing over you or even a magical dose of sparkling fairy dust...whatever makes the pain seem like a beneficial or even loving force.

Vocalize. It can be words, moans, barking, an “Om”—whatever sounds that take the pain outside your body. If you use this method, tell your partner ahead of time so they know what to expect.

Simply accept it. This can involve fantasy. For example, I sometimes imagine I’ve been kidnapped by my rope top, who wants to have their way with me and there’s nothing I can do about it. This takes the pressure off, takes the responsibility to “do something” about the pain out of my hands—the only choice is to give in and accept it.

In the photo below, you can see a fave fantasy game: captured princess. And if that futomomo had gone into a full suspension, it would have taken some major pain processing. (Ropework by MrKiltYou. Photo by Michael Sundin Photo.)



Building Connection Ability

We discussed some ways to connect in Chapter 8, but the possibilities are endless and are unique to every person, every partnering, and every scene. The more methods you have at your disposal, the easier it will be to make connections happen when you want them to.

Exploring Complementary Practices

We've already mentioned yoga. True_Blue—who is not just an ethereally graceful rope bottom but a certified yoga instructor and the co-founder of our local meet-ups for suspension bottoms—points out that yoga can help with more than just flexibility, breathwork, and mindfulness. Yoga is a practice of exploring boundaries and edges, and of sometimes expanding those boundaries to reach new levels. It's also a practice of knowing yourself, which can help you learn to recognize which edges are there to help keep you safe. All good reasons to explore yoga if you love being in rope!

We've mentioned tantra, meditation, and tai chi too, but almost anything can be a complementary practice to rope play if you have an open mind. Studying for an exam can help you build mental focus. Learning how to ski or snowboard can teach you balance. Swimming laps can teach you about breath management. The important thing is to step outside of rope and explore other things that will challenge you. Then you can take those newfound skills back to rope and use them to reach a new level.

Chapter 10

Extra Tips for Suspensions

You're tied as neatly as can be, with plenty of supportive rope. When your second foot leaves the ground and you settle into place, you feel weightless and heady. Your rope top puts you into a gentle spin, and you extend your arms behind you like a bird's wings, because you're flying without a care in the world. You're the most graceful creature who ever existed, a magical being born of another world. You wish you could stay there forever.

Or how about this?

You try to shift your arms, but there's little give in the rope, and you're feeling the constriction and the discomfort. One leg is already off the ground, tied with a mere two wraps on the thigh. You fear but also anticipate the moment your second foot is lifted—can you do it, or will the pain be too much? You breathe deeply, knowing that even if you can handle this position, it will not be the end; your rope top is known for transitions, and you'll need every ounce of stamina and courage you possess to get through them. By the end of the scene, you're as high as a kite, a spent heap of jelly limbs, mentally and physically drained but completely satisfied. You feel as accomplished as an Olympic gold medalist.

There are as many kinds of scenes in the air as there are on the ground, from gentle to torturous. There are partial suspensions and full suspensions, ones with lots of rope and ones with very little, ones with just you or with other people. Ones that make you feel adored and ones that make you cry (sometimes both at the same time).

Being off the ground intensifies everything. The pressure of the ropes is greater; placement and tension issues are magnified; the balancing skills required can be greater—both physically and emotionally. You'll likely be dealing not just with pain but with the added sensation of figuring out your body's position in space. You may be dealing with nausea or dizziness or a fear of heights.

Now is a good time to point out that partial suspensions are not necessarily easier or safer than full ones. All it can take to turn a partial into a full is lifting a foot off the ground. But even if the entire scene remains a partial, it deserves the same consideration as a full. Don't think of it as "just" a partial; think of it as the intense and potentially injury-causing rope scene it is and give it the safety consciousness it deserves.

I love floor scenes, but suspensions send me into the stratosphere. The training and skill required on the rigger's part makes me feel extra special. Add the physical and emotional challenges on my part, and it's like no other form of rope or even BDSM play.

But there are good challenges, the kind that make you feel accomplished, and then there are safety risks and also mere unpleasanties that can hinder your focus. These tips will help you reduce the latter two so you can get the most out of the scene and increase your chances of coming out unharmed. Speaking of unharmed, guess what it's time for?

Warning: Suspensions are edge play, an extreme sport. You can experience temporary or permanent injury. You can die. Do not ever let anyone suspend you who is not trained properly and who does not respect your safety.

Also, as much as I hate to repeat myself, some of you might have gone right to this section and skipped the important stuff in the other chapters. So several things are repeated here from earlier.

Before the Scene

Eat something but don't stuff yourself. Make sure you're hydrated too, but don't drink so much that you have to pee every 15 minutes. Doing these things alone could greatly reduce your chances of fainting. Also carefully consider your caffeine intake. Some find it gives them more energy; I find that too much makes me tense and less able to settle in.

Use the bathroom right before you get tied up, even if you just went 30 minutes ago.

Stretch. If you know what tie you'll be doing, focus on the areas that will be affected (shoulders for a box tie or strappado, spinal stretches for backbends, etc.).

Check in with your body. Do you have any injuries, old or recent? Is anything strained or hurting on this particular day? Let your rope top know.

Make sure your clothing won't unduly restrict your breathing and that you're in shoes you can stand in for longer than you expect.

Spend at least a few minutes cultivating mindfulness (see Chapter 3).

Have your rope bottoming bag with you (see Chapter 4).

While You're Getting Tied

Don't lock your knees. If you're required to stand still, keep a slight bend in your legs. This will keep blood flowing and can reduce the risk of fainting. I also raise my heels alternately off the floor when possible to keep my feet from falling asleep.

Don't shift your weight from hip to hip. You'll just make each hip sore in turn. Stand in a neutral position (Mountain Pose in yoga, with the feet hip width apart) with your weight evenly distributed, shoulders rolled back and down, and pelvis tucked slightly under. Relaxing your shoulders as opposed to hunching them up will help protect some of your nerves.

You know how porn stars arch their backs and stick out their breasts and booty to look sexier? That's a speedy route to Achy Town. -Yua- posted a wonderful article on FetLife that includes a description of how to stand in more detail; see Appendix C.

If you're on the floor, you don't have to kneel. You can sit cross-legged or with your legs to the side or however is comfortable. You can also ask for a pillow or a blanket to sit on. There's no sense in your legs falling asleep under you or your being focused on discomfort that serves no purpose in the scene.

Don't dance. Maybe your favorite song is calling to you, but if you shake your booty or anything else while you're being tied, you can interfere with proper rope placement and tension. Dance in your head but keep your body focused on the tying. ("Dancing in the rope" also refers to a fun form of dynamic suspension, which is different.)

Breathe deeply. Different people recommend different kinds of breathing, such as breathing mostly into the abdomen or even doing yogic pranayama. If I remember to breathe more than shallowly at all, it's a win for me. Also, if I know that a rigger tends to tie extra tightly on the chest, I tell them but also breathe even more deeply into the chest while they're tying to create more room. (Don't hold your breath, though—keep your chest expanded as you exhale. It takes practice.)

Don't "help" your rigger. Whether the rope is caught between your toes or your rigger is having trouble pulling rope through a tight spot, fight any temptation to assist. You'll probably only make the issue worse; plus, you'll be conveying that you think your rigger can't handle it on their own. It will also put you in the controlling mind-set that is the opposite of submission.

Keep your focus. Do whatever you can to tune out distractions, such as meditative practices or even just closing your eyes. Tangible aids can help but come with their own cautions. A blindfold can decrease your sense of balance and where your body is in space. A hood can do the same as well as restrict your breathing. Earplugs are not recommended, because you won't be able to hear your rigger.

Speak up. If something is bothering you now, it will likely bother you much more when you're in the air. And it's much easier to adjust a tie on the ground than off. So even if you consider the issue minor—say, the wraps around your chest are slightly too tight—it's better to tell your rigger now. This is part of trusting your instinct. Every time I've thought, "Hm, this is bothering me a bit but maybe it'll change when we go up," it became a bigger problem in the air.

Don't try to tough it out, because your effort will likely be counterproductive. You may have to come down sooner than you'd hoped, whereas if you had spoken up, the issue could've been resolved and you could have lasted longer.

Keep the connection going. Realize that your rigger's focus on the rope is them focusing on you, even if it doesn't seem like it. Think of the rope as an extension of their touch. Breathe in sync with them. Smell their skin or their hair. Take in their energy. Realize also that connection can be tangible or energetic. The right look from 10 feet away can be just as connective as a hand on your heart.

While You're in the Air

Make micro-movements. You're not a statue; in any position you can move your body slightly to change the distribution of the rope pressure without messing up the tie. Point or flex a foot, suck in your abs, arch your back, lift or lower your head. Mere centimeters of adjustment can make a world of difference!

In the photo below, can you spot all the micro-movement possibilities?
(Ropework by Peter Slemrian, teaching in a private lesson. Photo by -Mr-D-.)



Just breathe. Breathe anywhere where there's more room to take a deeper breath. If your chest is bound, as in a takate-kote, breathe into your abdomen or into the part of your chest that's above the rope. If you're in a facedown suspension, breathing into the back can help. Breathe through your mouth or your nose. Breathe as noisily as helps you; I tend to exhale with a whooshing noise through my mouth while adjusting to especially challenging ties.

If you're having difficulty breathing deeply anywhere, take shallow sips of air and try to conserve energy by not moving or speaking unnecessarily. Visualize breathing into the painful parts as well to create more space and good energy there. (It sounds woo-woo, but it works.)

Focusing on the breath—feeling it enter and leave your body, feeling your abdomen or chest rising and falling—can also take your mind off the pain. And if you are really struggling to breathe, of course tell your rigger immediately.

Remember the pain profile. Shifting into a suspended position from the ground or transitioning in the air can cause an initial shocking pain, especially if it's a jerking lift or a quick drop. Your first instinct may be, "Ack, I can't do this!" But if you're not at risk of injury and the tie is just a challenging one, give it a minute or two—sometimes the body will adjust and the pain will ebb all on its own. Learn how pain manifests itself in your body and remind yourself of its profile when you're in the air.

Don't panic. Panicking never helps anything, and if you panic and have to be cut out, you're putting yourself at more risk than if you had been taken down methodically. If you do feel yourself starting to panic, tell your rigger immediately. Breathe as deeply as you can but try not to hyperventilate, and remember that if you need to come out immediately, it's your right—and you'll be on the ground soon.

Don't worry that you look fat, ungraceful, or anything else negative. This is still one of the hardest things for me—I fight back negative thoughts about looks every single time I'm in rope. But I also know that when I'm focusing on looks, I'm not surrendering and not getting the most out of the experience. It's one thing to consider how to make a position look more graceful—by pointing your toes, say, or arching your back—but it's entirely another to just worry that you look unattractive.

If it helps, you can look at these negative thoughts as insults to your rigger. They found you special enough to tie and have made you a living work of art—are you going to disrespect their creation by deeming it unattractive? Also, know that anyone watching will be focused much more on your face—the suffering, the passion, the radiance—than on any flab squished by the rope. Trust me.

Actively practice pain processing. See Chapter 9 for some methods.

Consider spinning or swinging. Usually the rigger will do this for you if you've agreed on it, but you can also create your own momentum if you're in the right kind of tie and have your rigger's blessing. If you've never spun or swung around before, I suggest you start slowly; some people get really dizzy or nauseous.

To reduce dizziness, you can try the dancer's trick of spotting: Focus on a point and then whip your head around to the opposite point as you spin. This has never worked for me. I just keep my eyes closed, which does. If nothing seems to work, try conditioning yourself slowly; some bottoms say they've become less dizzy with practice.

Try dancing in the ropes, again with your rigger's prior knowledge and proper rope setup. Dancing means changing positions on your own; for example, you swing your legs from straight out in front of you to bent behind you. There's a great video clip of Mademoiselle O on Vimeo doing this, or see it via ShibariCircus.com. (And remember that your own dancing doesn't have to be as skilled as Mademoiselle O's to be fun. I'm guessing she

practiced hard for that one short scene and that she's had years of ballet and gymnastics training.)

Coming Out of the Ropes

Move slowly. Even if you feel fine, it can take a while for your body to readjust to being back on the ground and to being back upright if you were horizontal or inverted. It also takes time for circulation to return to normal. And sometimes you can be so rope high that you just don't notice, say, that you're about to fall over. Lying down is perfectly appropriate; so is asking your rigger to hold you until you feel steady.

But whatever you do, don't rush into stretches or run to get your clothes on or whatever. Allow yourself the same presence and mindfulness as you cultivated during the tying and the flying. The untying is still part of the scene.

Don't let your partner move your body parts back to the untied position. For example, if your arms have just been untied from a box tie, don't let your partner pull them forward for you. Your rigger is trying to be helpful, of course, but this can be painful. Only you know the pace at which your body parts can move back to their everyday positions, and if you take my advice, that pace will be slow. Just say, "Thanks, but I'd rather do that myself."

Check in with your body. Do some gentle neck bends and shoulder rolls; wiggle your fingers and toes; flex your hands and feet. Does everything seem to be functioning normally? If not, it's better to find out sooner rather than later and seek medical attention if necessary.

Drink water. Aside from being restorative physically, drinking water can feel very grounding and centering—it's a small act that can have a big effect. I drink at least a little water even if I don't feel thirsty, just for the other effects. Eating a snack can help too, but I suggest saving the big meal for later until your body is fully back to normal.

Wrap up. Even if you don't feel chilly right away, a cozy sweater or blanket can be very comforting and nurturing right after an intense scene. And your body temperature will likely drop at some point; it's nicer if you don't have that naked, freezing-cold, "Now where did I leave my damn shirt?" moment.

Don't skimp on aftercare or gratitude. Different people have different needs. Honor what is right for you. See Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 for some aftercare ideas for you and your rigger. And remember that good aftercare might help lessen the severity of any sub drop in the hours or days to come.

Everything After

Deal with sub drop. If you're one of those lucky people who doesn't get sub drop, hooray for you! For the rest of us, sub drop is the inevitable down that's the body's way of balancing the high. It can range from mere crankiness to downright depression. Even just naming it—realizing what it is and that it will pass—can help. See Chapter 8 for more about sub drop. And remember that any rope top worth playing with will be there for you for a reasonable amount of follow-up care. You deserve it.

Have a support team. Make friends with others in the rope community, both tops and bottoms, and share your experiences. Talking about your time in the rope extends good experiences, puts bad ones into perspective, and fosters connections with like-minded people. On the physical side, I have a massage therapist and a chiropractor on my support team for the aches and tweaks. Who might you add to help support you physically?

Give and get feedback. Feedback, both positive and constructive, helps

everyone improve. Be considerate. If I offer anything constructive, I always start with the things I liked first. And realize that most people don't offer feedback unless asked directly. You can say, "Is there anything you think I can improve on?" Also review the scene on your own. Were there parts where better communication might have helped, for example? More flexibility in the shoulders or lower back? Be honest with yourself while still celebrating the awesome parts.

Build stamina and endurance. Strengthening your core (through crunches, Pilates, leg lifts, etc.) will serve you well in all kinds of suspension scenes. See Chapter 9 for more ways to boost your physical abilities.

Combat ennui. You may one day think, "Rope? Meh, whatever. What's on Netflix?" Plateaus are perfectly normal and mean you're actually growing and evolving even though they make you feel stale. Maybe rope no longer really is your thing, but before you quit for good, I urge you to first:

Take a break. Coming back fresh can give you a new perspective.

Tie with a different partner. Even if you want to keep your current one, you can bring new ideas and energy back to them.

Explore new styles—attend performances, watch videos, look at photos. Maybe something will inspire you anew.

Learn rope from the top side. Experiencing rope from the other end can change how you feel about being a bottom, and at the very least it will help you communicate more effectively and feel more empowered in the rope.

Challenge yourself to improve. The more positions you can do, the longer you can last, and the deeper you can go in your scene can all dramatically transform your experience. Really think about what will make your scenes send you into the stratosphere, and then figure out how to get there.

In the end, not even the most experienced rope bottom in the world can tell you what will make a scene great for you or lay out a plan for you to accomplish it. Take the reins in your own hands, tell yourself you can do it, and celebrate the wonderful uniqueness of you, your body, and your rope experience.

~

Happy and safe tying to you! May rope take you to places you never imagined, as it has done for me.

Peace and love,

Evie

Appendix A

Evaluating a Hardpoint for Suspension

If you're going to be hanging from something, especially facedown or upside down, you want to make sure it's not going to come loose and drop you—you can suffer broken bones, spinal injuries, and brain damage, for starters. (See “Sex Club Spanked With Lawsuit...” on SFWeekly.com for one example of a rope bottom who shattered her jaw when the ceiling bolt she was suspended from fell out.)

And if you're taking responsibility for your own safety, you won't trust your rigger alone to gauge the safety of a suspension hardpoint—the knowledge and skills are distinct from tying. I've seen even otherwise very skilled riggers make mistakes in evaluating hardpoints or not evaluate them at all, just trusting the points because they saw other people using them.

Thankfully, Topologist—a longtime instructor of rope bondage, including suspensions, as well as a performer and an avid safety advocate—has provided us with a detailed explanation of how to evaluate a hardpoint. Learn his techniques and don't be afraid to use them. Any rigger who's worth suspending with won't be offended, and in fact may even be impressed, when you conduct your own safety evaluation. Also consider that someone who uses the wrong technique may not be skilled enough in safety to suspend you at all.

How to Evaluate a Hardpoint

by Topologist

There are, generally, three approaches to evaluating a hardpoint.

1. The “Two Big Guys” Test

There’s a notion, in certain quarters, that if you get two big guys to test-hang from a hardpoint, or even bounce around from it, you have then “proven” it safe, since it just took a load far in excess of what’s expected during the suspension to follow.

This is a complete fallacy and you should not only avoid using this test, but avoid anyone who uses it.

The problem with the logic here is that just because a piece of equipment sustained a certain load once, doesn’t mean it will sustain it again in the future. In fact, the test could even be the thing that weakens the equipment to the point where it fails the next time it’s loaded. Think of what happens when you bend a paper clip back and forth until it breaks—it’s not that you bent it hardest the last time; it’s that all the previous bending weakened it until suddenly it let go.

Banking on the “track record” of a hardpoint that, for instance, 100 other people have suspended from without incident is essentially the same as the Two Big Guys test; all you have proven is that it didn’t fail last time, which tells you very little about whether it may fail this time.

2. Direct Inspection

This is the gold standard for evaluating a hardpoint. It means that you personally, on this occasion, right before going up, looked at every part of the rig and you were able to determine from that inspection that each component was properly

assembled, sufficiently strong, and not showing signs of excessive wear.

One of the hardest parts of direct inspection can be estimating the strength of the materials you are looking at. You want each component to have a breaking strength at least 10x the amount of weight you expect to put on it. Some materials have counterintuitive strength and wear characteristics, so it's best to be familiar with the technical specifications for the particular components involved—but in everyday terms, you should be looking at something it would take an unimaginable amount of force to break. As in, if you saw it in pieces, your first thought would be, “Holy crap, how in the world did that happen—Godzilla?”

Another way of evaluating a component is to consider what its normal use would be—if something is designed for the purpose of dynamically supporting humans in applications where failure would result in injury, it's probably appropriate for suspension bondage (assuming it's installed properly!). Examples are equipment made for rock climbing or swingsets.

3. Knowing the Point's History

Sometimes it's not practical to inspect every aspect of a hardpoint immediately before your scene. While not ideal, in these cases you are forced to rely on information about how the rig was designed and its condition at some past point in time. The questions you should ask yourself when evaluating the quality of such information include:

- How credible is the person who installed or last inspected the point? Do they have relevant professional expertise and certifications that would allow them to determine its safe loading?
- Was the person who installed or inspected the point doing so with your current use of the equipment in mind?

- What events could have transpired since the point was inspected? Has it seen a lot of use? Could someone have monkeyed with it and compromised its safety?
- How trustworthy is the information? Did you get it straight from the mouth of the person who performed the installation/inspection, or is it more like a fanciful piece of local lore that everyone tells each other to avoid uncomfortable questions?

Don't be too generous in assuming that other people in the rope scene know what they are doing. I've discovered improperly assembled frames in use in the play spaces of several major BDSM events.

Specific Types of Equipment

Freestanding frames. This is my favorite type of hardpoint to use, not only for the versatility (as you can frequently tie to many different points on the frame), but because you can almost always easily inspect every aspect of the equipment.

As well as visually inspecting a frame, it's a good idea to swing around a bit on it and see how it behaves under load. Do the structural members deform? Are the joints loose? Do its feet slide/walk around? All of those are danger signs you should pay serious attention to—they may not completely disqualify it, but they're definitely an indication you need to do some extra diligence to ensure it is safe enough for your intended use.

Tripods. One popular design for portable frames is the tripod. Be aware that some tripods can be tipped completely over if you swing too hard on them; it's a good idea to test out the safe range of angles before going up. Some lightweight tripod designs may deform a bit under normal use—if you're going to accept such deformation, make sure it's on the basis of

knowing that it's within the design specs.

Also be especially vigilant about proper assembly with portable frames, and pay attention to the section on eyebolts below for those that incorporate an eyebolt rather than welded-in-place attachment points.

Most lightweight tripods are designed to be loaded only from the top; don't grab on to or otherwise support your weight directly from one leg of the frame.

Eyebolts. An eyebolt is a bolt with a round hole/ring at one end that you can attach to. Some light-duty eyebolts are constructed of a metal rod bent into a circular shape, leaving a small gap in the loop; those should never be used for suspension, as they can fail catastrophically by suddenly opening up during use. Eyebolts suitable for suspension may be forged, cast, or welded, but in every case should have a smooth, uninterrupted ring of metal where you are clipping in.

In order to inspect an eyebolt, it needs to be of the type that goes all the way up through whatever it's attached to, and you need to be able to see the nuts on the other side, to ensure they are still snug. Such bolts should ideally be installed with two nuts, the top one being a locknut (meaning it resists loosening under torque and vibrations). Make sure that there's no chance of unscrewing the bolt by rotating in suspension; generally a swivel (a small piece of gear with a fixed-in-place top and a bottom that turns 360 degrees in place) should be rigged between the bolt and the suspension ring, to prevent rotational forces being transmitted to the bolt.

Bolts that just go up into something and disappear—and in particular lag bolts (which are like a big wood screw)—are impossible to inspect and should be viewed as extremely suspect. Eyebolts installed horizontally, or generally in any situation other than the bolt going straight up through something, and you loading it straight down, are also suspect; most eyebolts are designed only to be loaded directly in line with the bolt.

There is a great variety in the quality of metal from which a bolt may have been

constructed, but in general a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch diameter bolt is likely to be safe, and anything under $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter is highly suspect.

Anchors into concrete. Concrete ceilings are the bane of rope suspension. Properly installing an anchor into a concrete ceiling is a technically complex endeavor, and there is no way to ascertain from visual inspection whether it was done properly. Improperly selected, installed, or loaded anchor bolts will often appear perfectly solid right up until the moment they let loose completely. Even if a bolt was installed properly, the quality of the concrete it was installed into may not be sufficient.

In short, anchors into concrete should be avoided whenever possible, and if you do choose to use them, all the normal caution you would approach a hardpoint with should be tripled.

Hoists. While in no way necessary for suspension, hoists open up a whole extra set of fun possibilities—but also some new dangers:

- Most people do not have the expertise to inspect the condition of a hoist, so you're often relying on the conscientiousness of whoever owns the equipment.
- When using electric hoists, you need to consider how you'd get down in an emergency in which the power went out.
- Hoists that use wire rope can sometimes jam in a way where the wire gets bent and wraps in the reverse direction, so that the load goes up when the hoist is operated in the "down" direction. This jam can later unstick itself, unspooling a bunch of wire and creating a sudden free-fall drop of up to several feet. The jam may have been created by the previous operator, and left lying in wait for you. I'm not aware of any practical way to really protect against this.

- A hoist mounted above you may fall on you if its mounting fails; this is particularly likely when subjected to a drop producing forces many times in excess of the expected load, as described above.

For all these reasons, I personally prefer to use rope and pulleys if I want to be able to adjust the height of my ring during suspension.

Note that while “hoist” and “winch” are often used interchangeably in casual conversation, technically a winch is a device designed to pull something along the ground, whereas a hoist is designed to hold weight suspended in the air. Never suspend from a device that is labeled as a winch.

Evaluating Your Rope Top’s Evaluation

Often your top may be more equipped to evaluate a hardpoint than you are, by virtue of specific foreknowledge of the equipment or special relevant expertise. That doesn’t mean you need to take their conclusions on faith, however. If someone tells you something is safe, always ask them how they figured that out, and listen carefully to their answer.

Is your top’s justification for the safety of the point based on specific evidence they collected, or assumptions they are making? Does it contain aspects of the Two Big Guys test? Does it consider every element of the system whose failure would result in a fall? When you ask them for more details, are they excited to share all the interesting technical minutia, or do they start to get defensive?

Risk Mitigation

If you feel any doubt whatsoever in the reliability of a hardpoint, consider what the consequences would be of a failure. Sometimes you may want to take steps to mitigate the risks—such as suspending low to the ground, avoiding

inversions, or putting a mat down. And of course the safest thing is to tie on the floor instead, and look for a better hardpoint (or better information about the hardpoint) for next time.

One risk mitigation strategy you should view with skepticism is partial suspension—a partial suspension off a sketchy hardpoint has the potential to be just as dangerous as a full suspension, not least because partials so easily turn into full suspension with the shift of a limb.

Another strategy to approach with caution is backing up one sketchy hardpoint with another sketchy hardpoint. It's actually quite technically complex to rig from multiple hardpoints in a way that provides meaningful redundancy. Two hardpoints used together are generally less than twice as strong as one; remember that you're looking for something that can support 10 times the expected load. Redundancy is never a bad idea per se, but if you feel that your hardpoint needs a backup, you probably ought to find one you have more confidence in.

Appendix B

Horror Stories

Warning: This section contains explicit, graphic, and gruesome content, including descriptions of fatalities. Read it at your own risk.

I don't want to scare you away from doing rope bondage, but it's worth knowing what can happen when you do incredibly risky scenes. Please take these tragic stories to heart and learn from them.

Also, these are only the stories that got media attention—and these are not even all of the ones reported in the media. (I didn't include any stories in which murder is being considered.) Anyone want to guess how many more incidents go unreported every year, especially involving autoerotic asphyxiation? I sure don't.

Paola Caputo was strangled in a bondage scene in which she and another rope bottom were counterbalancing each other's weight while being partially suspended from a rafter in a parking garage. The three (including the rope top, Soter Mule) had allegedly been drinking and smoking weed prior to the scene. (Source: The Daily Beast, September 15, 2011)

Christopher Martin, who helped found the legendary Saatchi and Saatchi ad agency, died after stripping naked, tying his ankles together and also his wrists behind his back, then lunging out from a ladder to hang 5 feet above water in an underground bunker/tank. The garden roller that his support line was tied to aboveground became dislodged, and Martin's face plunged into the 6 inches of water. He could not free himself and drowned. (Source: The Independent,

September 26, 1995)

David Carradine was found dead hanging from a support bar in a Bangkok hotel closet, with a rope connecting his neck to his genitals. (Source: ABC News, June 5, 2009)

Geoffrey Clarence Braunack was killed when Jean Margaret Meiers tied him to a concrete pole on their veranda using rope, tape, and a dog chain. She had wrapped his head and upper body in packing tape. Braunack had been drinking heavily. Meiers left him to take a shower, and by the time she returned, he had been asphyxiated. (Source: Sunshine Coast Daily, August 5, 2008)

Rev. Gary Aldridge died of “accidental mechanical asphyxia” after donning two complete wet suits (including a face mask, diving gloves, and slippers), rubberized underwear, and a head mask, and apparently hogtying himself. He also had a plastic cord tied around his lower neck and a dildo in his anus. (Source: The Smoking Gun, October 8, 2007)

Kevin Kirkland died after drinking heavily, stripping naked, tying his wrists and then tying himself to a tree, with the temperature outside being freezing. He cut his wrists while rubbing the rope up and down the tree trying to escape. He apparently died of blood loss and hypothermia even though someone cut him out and rushed him to a hospital while he was still alive. (Source: The Herald Sun, August 10, 2010)

An unidentified man ceased to be able to breathe after hoisting himself up off the ground by a rope wrapped around his abdomen. He apparently had a high blood alcohol content. The pressure on his abdomen eventually made breathing impossible. (Source: R.R. Hazelwood, et al., Autoerotic Fatalities, Lexington Books, 1983)

You can find a bunch more stories of fatalities involving self-bondage (not all with rope) at Openmindmedia.com.

~

The patterns in these stories point to some major warnings:

- Don't do solo bondage. If you want to self-tie, have another person present.
- Don't drink or use drugs before or during a tying scene.
- Don't let anyone leave you alone when you are tied up.
- Don't do extra-risky tying scenes involving inexperienced people, even if you're experienced yourself.
- If you do an autoerotic asphyxiation scene, you are literally playing with your life no matter how many fail-safes you think you've set up.
- Be extra careful when you are combining rope with any kind of breath play. For more on breath play, see two great articles on StefanosandShay.com: "BDSM Bullshit: Risk Stratification for Breath Control Play" and "Breath Control—A Long and Technical Outline of Practices and Risks."

Appendix C

Rope Bottoming Resources

KinkyClover.com: Clover shares a wealth of knowledge and her personal experiences of rope bottoming through articles, interviews, and blog posts, plus there are gorgeous photos. She also offers a downloadable PDF called “A Guide for Rope Bottoms and Bondage Models.”

RemedialRopes.com: Focusing on risk awareness and aimed at tops and bottoms, this site was created by Stefanos and Shay, both well-known and longtime BDSM educators in the San Francisco Bay Area. Shay is also a registered nurse. A must-visit site for rope bottoms (and tops) of all skill levels.

Rope-Topia.com: Has an article by Bendyogagirl called “Yin Yoga for Bondage” as well as the same downloadable PDF as on Clover’s site. Rope-Topia.com was created by WykD Dave, who, as I write this, is partnered with Clover. The educational offerings are aimed mostly at rope tops, but they’re valuable for bottoms too.

“The ‘Good Rope Bottom’ Guide: A Pep Talk” by -Yua-, on FetLife. This is worth reading for both the “You can do it!” positivity and the practical information that will make tying a better experience for you.

FetLife groups: Rope Bottom’s Roundtable, Ask a rope bunny, Riggers and Rope Sluts, Rope Incident Reports, and Rope Bondage

“Advice for Rope Tops and Bottoms ,” an article on Naturallytwisted.co. I especially like the Buddhist philosophy applied to rope relationships here.

“The Art of Rope Bottoming: DeLano,” an interview by Midori on edenfantasys.com. Lots of insight here in the form of a Q&A with DeLano (www.DeLanoBound.com), a longtime instructor on both sides of the rope as well as a performer and model. Midori and DeLano co-teach rope skills for tops and bottoms throughout North America via weekend intensives (see www.RopeDojo.com).

SubmissiveGuide.com. Not rope-specific, but this website has lots of good info on pain processing, relationships, staying safe as a bottom in general, and more.

Acknowledgments

Thank you most of all to Kanso, True_Blue, and Danarama for their incredible teaching, support, and friendship, as well as for the confidence boosting without which this book wouldn't exist. (And an extra shout-out to True_Blue for the thorough read-through and terrific insights.)

Thank you to David Delp for his wonderful cover design and for putting up so graciously with my myriad requests. And to Mr. D, The_Silence, Michael Sundin, and Cryptocat for their great photos.

Thanks to Clover and Tifereth—modern pioneers of sharing information on rope bottoming—for their writings and classes and for being empowered, beautiful role models for rope bottoms everywhere. To HoneyCat and DrtyBird too, who have shared their enormously helpful perspectives with me and others time and again.

Thank you to Shay and Stefanos, not just for creating Remedial Ropes but for being champions of all aspects of BDSM education—their tireless efforts can never be appreciated enough. (And an extra shout-out to Shay for the thorough read-through and great additions.) And to Vanessa Veronique for doing so much to create a thriving rope community in the United States, bringing rope artists from all over the world to teach here and helping organize rope events.

Thank you to riggers like Cannon who co-teach rope bottoming classes, and Topologist, who shares handouts at his classes and posts information to keep rope bottoms safe. And to Andra Poloutropon for the illuminating conversations full of marvelous insight, and the helpful additions. And to ModusVitaeSF, who fosters a love of rope through the Katthaus events and makes every rope bottom feel like a precious jewel. And to every rope top who makes the safety of their bottoms a priority.

Thanks to Peter Acworth, who brought hard-core rope play out of the shameful shadows through Kink.com and now through Kink University.

Thanks to everyone who has shared their experiences and insight in response to my FetLife posts and at our San Francisco rope bottoming meet-ups. And to all the rope bottoms whose efforts have created a world where getting tied up is more understood and accepted than ever. And to all those who have taught or shared information on rope bottoming whose work I haven't yet had the pleasure of discovering.

And thank you to Mr. D, of course, for more than would ever fit here.