

# Rough Rope

(Who ever said rope has to be soft and cuddly?!) 

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## Overview

Often, the rope marketed for use in bondage is soft and silky smooth. While it's great for sensual play, this rope isn't very intimidating! In this class, we'll take a walk on the other side of the tracks – using the raw, rough, scratchy, and harsh rope that your mother warned you about. We'll compare the pros and cons of different rope types and show how they can transform once-innocent ties into something a little more torturous. Whether you hate the soft stuff, are looking for a way to add some punishment to your bondage, or are just scratching the itch to try something new, you'll find plenty of new ideas!

## Bio

I'm a fun-loving rope geek and sex educator who has found a home in the Midwest kink community. When I'm not traveling to events, I contribute to the Iowa State University CUFFS group, and serve on the board of Minneapolis TNG group Min-KY. Although I'm a relatively new member of the scene, I've presented at numerous events across the country, including Kinky Kollege, Shibaricon, Denver Bound, and Beyond Leather.

As a presenter, I aim to provide a comfortable down-to-earth learning environment for all genders, orientations, and experience levels.

My long list of presentations, events, and class materials can be found at <http://www.kinkfriendly.org>

Lastly, I am not a medical professional. Evaluate your own risks before participating in any kink activities.

Enjoy yourselves!

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## Introduction

Most of the rope used for bondage is either made from soft, synthetic fibers, or began life as a much rougher natural-fiber rope that has been softened through a variety of finishing processes. One common method of finishing involves boiling the natural fiber ropes to expand and break up the fibers, drying it under tension, singeing off any stray fibers, then applying oil. While the details differ, the end result is a much softer rope that's generally considered more suitable for bondage.

By throwing the soft and sensual to the wind and embracing rougher ropes, you introduce an instant predicament to your bondage. When bound by rough ropes, the very act of movement brings with it the potentially torturous feeling of hundreds of prickly fibers. Sounds like fun, doesn't it?

## Rough Rope Materials

### *Natural Fibers*

- Sisal – (pronounced “s-eye-sul” or “size-al”) is a type of agave plant with stiff, brittle fibers. It is easy to find at hardware stores
- Manila – obtained from the leaves of the abaca (a relative to the banana) and is very durable and flexible, also easy to find at hardware stores in twine or cord form.
- Jute – Also commonly used for bondage, jute rope starts fairly rough but after enough use takes on a shiny, smooth finish.
- Hemp – Commonly used for bondage rope, it can be harder to locate in its raw/unfinished state. Hemp has been used historically in a variety of applications from theatres to ships' rigging.
- Coir – Made from coconut husks, coir is a rough fiber used to make everything from cording, floor mats, bedding, insulation, and brushes.

### *Synthetic Fibers*

- Polypropylene – Low density and very rigid and plasticky, polypropylene floats and is often used for marine applications, swimming lane markers, and water sports. (No, not that kind!)
- Unmanila – Also known as promanila, this synthetic fiber is often used for landscaping as it looks like it's natural counterpart. On its initial use, this rope is rough, but quickly becomes softer and has been used.

## Safety

While the same safety considerations apply to any rope bondage, rough rope has a few additional pitfalls.

### *Broken Skin*

The main characteristic of rough rope is that it's itchy, prickly, and otherwise abrasive. Over the course of your scene, these properties can lead to broken and abraded skin. Once the rope has caused or been in contact with an open wound it can be very difficult to disinfect. While synthetic ropes can generally stand up to harsher detergents, some natural fibers are essentially impossible to fully clean.

Aside from the inherent dangers in toy sharing where bodily fluids are involved, cuts should be fully cleaned as soon as possible after play to prevent infection.

### ***Slivers***

Many of the natural fibers listed are very brittle and can easily leave slivers. If this is a concern, stay away from sisal and manila ropes and use synthetic ropes or more flexible natural fibers. While tying on top of clothing would be counterproductive, the top might consider wearing gloves while handling the rope. (Though some bottoms might consider that unfair!)

### ***Allergies***

While those with grass allergies may not react to other natural fiber ropes, the added irritation and abrasion may have a greater chance of triggering an allergic reaction. If you aren't sure whether you'll react, a good test is to wear a bracelet made from the same rope for a while to see if it causes a reaction.

### ***Chemicals***

Generally not a concern with synthetic rope, natural fibers are often treated prior to being spun into rope. By the time conditioned rope undergoes the softening (and sometimes dyeing) process, many of these chemicals will likely get washed away. *(Please note: I don't have any evidence that this is actually the case. However, since most of the rough ropes I've suggested are for industrial/utilitarian use, it stands to reason that their manufacturers may not consider this particular use of their product.)*

### ***Cutting Tool***

Part of what makes rough ropes so scratchy is their very coarse fibers. Depending on the tool you choose, it may be harder to cut these ropes than those used more commonly. As always, test your cutting tool on the rope prior to a potential emergency. *(While I haven't yet needed to cut someone out of my ropes, I use my cutting tool all the time – to trim rope ends and cut new lengths. That way I know how it will feel in my hands when I encounter an emergency)*

## **Additional Considerations**

### ***Rough Rope Is Easy To Replace***

Most of the ropes listed here are cheap and easy to come by (insert bad “ideal bottom” joke here). With the relatively low cost and potential for broken skin, I consider much of this rope to be disposable. Obviously this won't always be the case, but it can open up the possibility for a lot of play that you may otherwise dismiss. Among these are: wax play, outdoor scenes, rainy/wet scenes, or anything else that might ruin your “nice” rope kit. For example, adding water to natural ropes will cause their fibers to expand and the bindings to constrict. Tie a little looser and be ready to cut your ropes or use a marlinspike as the knots may become almost impossible to untie.

### ***Twisted, Braided, and Abraded***

Just an aside here – Often the texture of twisted rope is harsher than that of smoother braided rope. While many of the natural fiber ropes are twisted, you will often see polypropylene ropes in a tubular braid. Though it will weaken your rope, abrading it by running it across a sharp object will expose more ends and loosen more fibers – creating even more opportunity to poke and prod your partner. (Just be careful not to cut all the way through your rope!)

## ***Knot Holding***

Stiff ropes are more difficult to tie and tighten, yet easier to untie. This leaves the intrepid rope top with a dilemma! You may need to explore new knots or get better at tying the ones you already know. For instance, in situations where a square knot or even a granny knot is good enough, you may need to use a water knot instead.

## ***Rope/Partner Handling***

Rough doesn't always have to refer to the rope's texture. Handled the right way, soft silky nylon bondage rope can produce dangerously blistering heat and a thin cord applied in just the right place becomes torturous in a very short time. Combine that with some rough body play (assisted by the convenient handles provided by a harness) and the very same toy you've used sensually takes on a whole new life as an accessory to some heavier play.

## **Conclusion**

In a world of soft and supple rope it's easy to dismiss the rough stuff as unfit for bondage, but as you've seen, grabbing a spool of sisal from the hardware store can add a whole new dimension to your play. Next time you're at the store, consider looking at all of that "other" rope that you may have ignored in the past, you just may end up with a new favorite toy!

Thanks for reading!

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