

TH Activity Plan – Cordage with Plant Fibers

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Photo by C. Thorbes



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will make cordage from natural materials.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Acquire new skills or improve existing ones; increase levels of concentration & focus

Physical: Activation of hand fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, spatial learning & development

Psychological/Emotional: Improve behavior; experience positive emotions from participation; build confidence from creative activity; increase levels of calmness, relaxation & mindfulness

Sensory: Connect more fully with nature; activate tactile sensation

Social: Expand understanding & appreciation for nature, trees & woodland management; gift cordage friendship bracelets

Materials

Fibers of rushes - [bulrush](#)

Damp cloth &/or
container with water

Scissors

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Grow plant materials ahead of activities. Gather materials. Make a sample. Practice verbal instructions.
2. Facilitator begins session by introducing cordage activity & demonstrating the technique which may take participants a few attempts to understand. Distribute plant material.
3. Participants separate/cut plant material that will be used to make cordage into uniform strips. The wider the strip, the thicker the cordage will be. Facilitator may want to provide width specifications.
4. Participants dampen the strips in water. The thicker the plant material is, the longer it will need to soak in water to be pliable.
5. Two strips of plant material are tied together into a knot/looped knot. This should be long enough for intended completed cordage.
6. Holding the knot or loop with the non-dominant hand between thumb & forefinger, the dominant hand twists one strip to the right.
7. Bringing twisted strip towards you, cross it over the hanging strip.
8. Adjust the grip with thumb & forefinger of non-dominant hand to cover where the strips overlap. Then take the strip that was not twisted in step 6, & use it to repeat the steps in 6 & 7.
9. Alternate between strips each time it is twisted & flip them. Be sure to twist the strips individually always in ONE DIRECTION, then flip them together in the opposite direction. Watching the facilitator demonstrate, or the video listed below may be helpful.
10. Repeat steps 6-9 until all the strip is used. Tie a knot at the end making sure to include some of the cordage in the knot so it doesn't unravel.
11. Adaptations: use different tensions in the cordage; make a friendship bracelet by creating a knot in one end that can be threaded through an initial loop; hook beginning loop on a window latch or doorknob as an assist.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Making cordage from natural materials as a TH activity provides many options with possible therapeutic goals. Of note are ones related to [triphasic model's three phase concept used in counseling](#) – safety and stabilization, reconnection and reintegration psychological stages (Psychotraumatology, 2025). When used with populations who have mental health challenges, these can be important, and have been used in conjunction with [Dialectical Behavior Therapy](#) (DBT). These can integrate mindfulness, emotional regulation, distress tolerance and interpersonal effectiveness into the TH activity.

Other populations have used cordage TH activities including school children who have the maturity, attention span and cognitive ability to understand the spatial and sequential steps. These can be addressed in the activity—reinforcing concentration and problem-solving skills, sense of confidence, practicing prosocial behavior working in pairs, and gifting friendship bracelets to others. Senior populations can be assisted if necessary, using hand over hand technique and perhaps slower or repeating auditory directions. The cordage activity will be challenging for people with hand or hand-eye coordination deficits but accommodations can be made (working with a partner/volunteer, using sense of touch primarily).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Some may find the plant material strips rough or sharp – gloves can be worn. Some people may have sensitivity to cedar and the oils it contains (certain types). Facilitator can pre-cut strips if use of sharps is a safety issue.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: This ancient art form of cordage, a technique used for rope-making, basket making or weaving, utilizes plant material including daylily, flax, willow, cattails, and cedar. Some materials like willow and cedar will require more preparation than others. The plant fibers will need to be flexible, so soaking/rehydrating plant material before use will help prevent cracking while twisting them. Don't oversoak the fibers though, since they will swell up and shrink once dried. While making the cordage, keep the plant material to be used moist by wrapping them in a damp towel. But don't leave them wrapped for more than a day otherwise it can go moldy.

Linda Lemieux uses [cordage activities with students in the UK](#), and offers videos and impact reports related to health outcomes from these activities. These include nature connections, traditional skills, woodland management, and development of entrepreneurial opportunities. She partners with The Woodland Trust, Heritage Crafts Association, Devon Guild of Craftsmen and Devon Arts in Schools Initiative.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Lemieux, L. (2021). [Making a rush cordage friendship bracelet with Linda Lemieux – Old skills new ways – For teachers](#). [YouTube].

Lemieux, L. (2021). [Rush cordage friendship bracelet with Linda Lemieux – downloadable package](#) (materials, tools, vocabulary worksheet, curriculum links).

Lemieux, L. (2021). [Where and how to find bulrush with Linda Lemieux](#). [YouTube].

Thorbes, C. (n.d.). Horticultural therapy. <https://cliffthorbes.com/>

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2025.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2025.