

Using Throwlines in a Sheltered Water Environment

What is a Throwline?

A throwline is a bank based rescue option that can be used to give assistance to someone in the water to help pull them to a safe place to get out.

It is a bag of rope which typically consists of the following parts:

- The bag that contains the rope
- A closure to secure the rope in the bag
- An attachment point at the base of the bag

Why would you use one?

In many situations, when someone is in the water and needs assistance, instructing them to swim to the side is the simplest option and lowest risk option. There may even be someone else paddling on the water that can offer assistance to help bring the person to the shore. If this isn't an option, then throwing a rope from the bank could be an effective way to offer help.

Another option if you are on the bank

Sometimes the person you are trying to help is actually really close to the side, but cannot get out of the water. By using a paddle, you can reach out to them with the paddle and move them to shallower water or a place where they can get out. This rescue is lower risk than throwing a rope and may be a preferable option. If the person you are helping is pulling too much, you can always let go to avoid falling into the water.



Before you use your throwline

Consider the risks

Throwing a rope to someone in the water does introduce some risk. Is there a simpler option that you can use, such as encouraging them to swim to the side on their own, or maybe trying to reach them with a paddle if they are not too far away?

Where will you throw from

Is this a good place to throw from? Will you slip when you throw? Is it helpful to pull the swimmer to this position?

Distance

Is the rope you have long enough and can you throw far enough to reach the swimmer?

Clean line principle

Having a "clean line" is recommended and means that there are minimal things to get caught on your rope.

At the bag end of the rope, it is possible that the throwline has been sold with a large loop at the bottom of the bag which could pose some risk to the swimmer should they get their hand caught in it. This is typically very simple to remove by untying the rope from the bag and retying it to create a much smaller loop. Some throwlines also have a loop or handle at the thrower's end which is easily removed to make the rope "clean".

You should also check for knots in the rope after you have used it, as these could form in the line unintentionally. This is easily done when you are repacking the rope to get it ready for its next use.



An important point!

Whenever you are using a rope you should always have a knife available and close to hand. It is possible that the rope could become caught in some way and having a knife with you to allow you to cut the rope is essential. Make sure that your knife is stored in a pocket securely, can be obtained and opened with one hand and that the blade locks in position when you are using it. Remember to check your knife when you check all your equipment to ensure it is not rusting and still functions as you would want it to, it's part of your safety kit!



Using your throwline

If you have decided that using your throwline is the right rescue option, you can go through the following steps:

1. Attract the swimmer's attention to tell them you are going to throw a rope,
2. Open the bag, take a handful of rope and throw it behind you,
3. Hold the bag tight in your throwing hand and the rope in the other,
4. Shout to the swimmer to let them know you are going to throw the rope and throw it so that it lands within reach (it doesn't matter if you throw it past them, they don't need to hold the bag, just the rope),
5. Tell the swimmer to get hold and to turn onto their back, head first to the bank,
6. Adopt a strong stance and pull the rope in towards you, hand over hand, until they are at the side,
7. Once they are at the side, help them to get out. Rather than offering your hand, you can reach them with a paddle which lowers the risk to you as a rescuer and reduces your chances of being pulled into the water. If they do pull the paddle too hard, it is easily released by letting go if you need to.



What if you miss?

With a bit of practice you will find that your accuracy with a throwline really does improve, as it is a skill that can be learnt by anyone.

If, however, you do miss...

Can you ask the person in the water to swim to the rope, if your throw is only just out of reach?

Can someone else throw a rope? Is there another rope you could throw? Would it be better to get on the water and paddle over to give assistance?

It is also possible to retrieve your missed rope and to throw it again using a different technique:

- Pull the rope back into the side
- Make small coils in your throwing hand (keep them as neat as possible)
- Throw the rope to the person in the water again

Packing

Once you have used your rope, packing it ready for next time is very important:

- Make sure all the rope is knot/tangle free and in a pile on the floor
- With your dominant hand, trap the rope onto the bag to make it easier to feed it in neatly
- Keeping your other hand in the bag, grab small sections of the rope and feed it into the bottom of the bag
- Once you have fed all the rope into the bag close the bag, ensuring that all the rope is stored inside the bag



Caring for your throwline

Once you have used your throwline, it is really important that you take the time to dry it out. This should be done with all the rope out of the bag, out of the sun and away from direct heat.

Once the rope is out of the bag and drying, this is a good opportunity to check if the knot is still securely tied inside the bag and that the condition of the rope still seems good. Look for any excessive wear, cuts or abrasion to the rope and also the bag.

Once the rope is dry, repack the bag and store out of direct sunlight.

How to improve your throwline skills

Take time to practise some different throwing techniques, some people prefer an overarm throw, some an underarm throw, The most important thing is that it is on target!

Whilst the best practice is always throwing to someone in the water, setting up a target in your garden, or at the water can also be a great way to develop your skills. You can try placing a kayak/canoe/SUP about 10 metres away and seeing if you can throw to hit it, throw over it and throw to land on it. Once you can do this, why not try changing the distance to be closer or further away, or change the position you are throwing from to be higher or at an angle.

Don't forget to practise your rethrow too! Being able to do this quickly and effectively is a great back up plan should you need it.

If you learn to love packing your throwline, you won't mind using it, so why not see how fast you can do this after you have thrown all the rope out.

Why not challenge your friends to have a throw bag race, the first one to throw, hit the target and then repack wins!

