Swim Guiding with a Tether

For recreational swimming we use the one behind the other system as used by swimrun teams. There is a video here of how this works video link.

Basically, both swimmers wear waist belts and are attached together by a length of bungee cord, like a long umbilical cord. The guide swims in front with the cord passing from their waist belt under their body to the VI swimmer behind. The cord remains under the water between the VI swimmer's arm stroke under their face and on to their waist belt. To begin with the VI swimmer may catch their hands on the cord but you soon get the hang of it and only catch occasionally. If the VI swimmer has some sight they may be able to see the cord in front of them, but it works fine without this.

This system is ideal for recreational swimming and non-elite triathlon as it is very easy to do and doesn't require any special skill on the part of the guide (apart from the ability to swim in a straight line!). For wild swimming it is safest to have the VI swimmer behind the guide as it is much easier for the guide to prevent them from swimming into underwater obstructions such as rocks this way.

Tether length is personal preference, but for event swimming where you might be swimming in a crowd it is best to have it as short as possible to prevent other swimmers accidentally swimming between you. This can be achieved in practice by incrementally shortening the tether by tying a loop knot in it, until the VI swimmer is almost touching the guide's feet.

Where to get a Swimming Tether

You can make one as we have done (see below) or buy one ready-made.

The ready-made ones are marketed as swim run tethers. A couple of examples are:

From Decathlon you need 2 of Decathlon belt and 1 of Decathlon bungee

OR

From Orca wetsuit makers you can buy a complete Orca Swimrun Tether

How to make a swimming tether

You will need

2 belts – towfloat belts are ideal

Many swimmers will already have one as part of their towfloat or they can easily be bought online eg.

Decathlon belt

Lomo Towfloat Belt

Bungee Cord

We use 8mm. Again widely available online. If you have some sight you may want to buy the colour you find easiest to see in the water (we have some white and some bright yellow).

You can buy one ready made here

Decathlon bungee

Joining it all together.

The simplest method is to tie an overhand knot (creating a loop) in each end of the bungee and thread a belt through each loop.

If you want to make it easier to detach from each other then use a small carabiner type clip on each end of the bungee.

Safety

As with any activity involving cord and water, entanglement is always a danger. This system is only for use where both swimmers are competent, strong swimmers. You should practice in standing depth water until you are both happy with the system.

The system should not be used in moving water.

There is a danger that if one swimmer should panic they could pull the other swimmer under. Both swimmers should practice and be confident to remove themselves from the system by undoing the clip or their belt.

Disclaimer

The above is an aid for competent swimmers to make and use a tether guiding system. However, each pair is responsible for the safe use of their own system and should satisfy themselves that they are safe or seek specialist training.