

Chokers

by Loren Woerpel

Illustrated by Mark Ford

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Figure 5. Parents or teachers might need to help small children with this step.

The remaining bone, beads, and thong are used to make dangles that hang from the center spacer as in Figure 6. Different arrangements of bone and beads along with shell discs or conchos might be used according to your liking.



Low Dog, Hunkpapa Dakota, wearing a dentalium choker with medal bead spacers. Photographed in 1904 at Standing Rock, North Dakota.

Written Heritage Collection

Photo by Joe Kazumura



Choker necklaces made of beads and bones have become a universal cultural expression through out Indian Country. While today many are made of plastic beads, plastic bone, and commercial tanned leathers, the materials have their roots in natural materials of long ago.

This project is a good starting experience for all ages in making a bone and bead necklace. The younger choker makers may need some help with tying good sound knots with the waxed sinew cord, however.

Materials needed:

- Fourteen 1 inch plastic or bone hairpipe
- Optional shell discs, concho, or ribbons
- Up to 35 crow beads
- 1 yard of waxed sinew cord
- 3 leather spacers
- A soft leather thong of at least 40 inches.

For tools, all you need are scissors.

Steps:

Lay out the bone and the beads in the order shown in Figure 1. Place a spacer at each end and one in the middle. For small children, this might be shortened by using only 8 bones and place the extra 4 beads in the center or at the ends as in Figure 2.

For right handed people, start at the right side of your layout and begin stringing the items in order, starting with the leather spacer (Figure 3). String both strands at the same time. For left handed people, start at the left of your layout.

When all of the beads and bone are strung, string on the last leather spacer. Before tying the knot, check the length by tying around your neck. It should come no closer than 1 inch in the back to leave room to tie the thongs. If it turns out to be too long for you, remove some beads from your pattern. You might have to strip out all the way back to the start to get the right length and a symmetrical pattern.

When everything is OK, wrap each end of sinew cord around the spacer through the holes as shown in Figure 4 and tie the ends together. Use at least three overhand knots. Pull the knots good and tight.

Cut the soft leather thong into two 10 inch pieces, and one 18 to 20 inches long. Tie one 10 inch length on each end of your choker as in

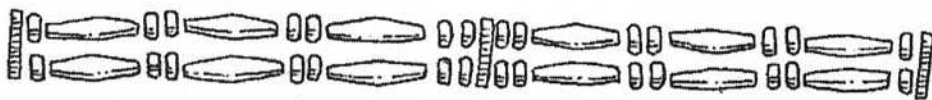


Fig. 1

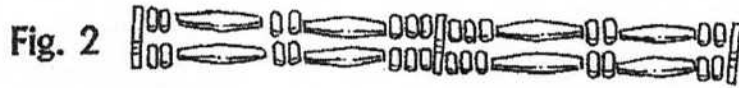


Fig. 2

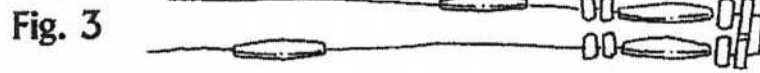


Fig. 3

Fig. 4

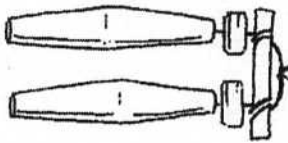


Fig. 6

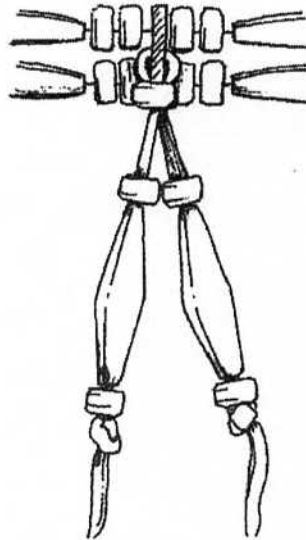
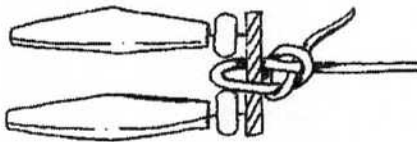


Fig. 5



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