

Integration Guidelines

(Extracted and condensed from: *The Psychedelics Integration Handbook* by Ryan P. Westrum and Jay P. Dufrechou, 2019)

Stages of Integration:

Stage	Name	Time
0	Pre-Session	Counting down
1	Immediate	1 to 6 hours after
2	Grow Slow	6 to 24 hours after
3	Next Steps	1 to 5 days later
4	Moving Through	4 days to 2 weeks
5	Embodying IT	2 weeks to 6 months
6	Ready again?	5 to 6 months?

Stage 0. Pre-Session

Even from the wise place of "not knowing," it can help to have an intention to integrate whatever happens with the intentionality you are bringing in to the session. Consider having a serious intention that you will honor what emerges through a commitment to integrate.

You also want to prepare practically for your comfort and sustenance after your session.

Stage 1. Immediately After

- Affirmation of Safety.
- Emotional-physical reassurance.
- Basic essentials-Water, Food, Warmth, Security.
- Balancing the desire to extend and the need for grounding.
- Working with what is still happening and going through it.
- Identifying emotions and connecting.

Aftercare is something slightly different from integration. In the period just after a psychedelic session, aftercare is extremely important. Here is where it is necessary to have compassionate support for your physical, emotional and mental self from someone or a group you trust. This is particularly true if you have had a challenging experience.

One of the gifts sometimes received in nonordinary state work involves a body-sense of how it would feel to be in the world (or to deal with a particular problem, trauma, relationship or issue) from a different felt-bodily sense than usual. Sometimes this felt-sense involves how it would feel to be in the world having moved past a certain belief about yourself, the world, the universe, etc. and into another form of being. Often a felt-sense of knowledge and trust is present.

For some people, as they come back from some experiences, there is a deep processing (even catharsis) of strong emotions. Staying with these emotions can be important. Just as in the psychedelic session itself, you might follow these emotions with your awareness and attention into where they lead in your biographical history, your psychological work, or what you have been shown or taught about yourself or the universe. You will want to remember insights that are coming (maybe take a few notes) but not move too quickly into an analytical mode, that might disconnect you from your continuing openness to the experience.

One way to work with these possibilities is to breathe into what feels present and perhaps "make it bigger." If something is emerging, then let the physical or emotional process play itself out. Support from a guide or facilitator can help, but it is very important that you own the process.

Pitfalls in Stage 1:

1. Coming back too soon-rushing re-entry.
2. Not coming back at all.
3. Acting out when you are not yet grounded.
4. Leaving energetic blocks unprocessed.
5. Resisting guidance to stay safe and in yourself.
6. Paying attention to someone else more than yourself

Stage 2. Grow-Slow and Reentry - 6 to 24 hours afterwards

- You're still in it or close to it, so don't be afraid of continuing the process with questions inside yourself: asking how, what, where, when, and why?
- Stay with your emotions and let them flow, but please find help if you feel yourself overwhelmed.
- As you are reentering, you may want to keep track of your emotions (for example, on a scale of 1 to 10) - checking in with how "back" you are mentally, emotionally, and physically.
- Pay attention to your extended sense of safety and security; you may think you are back but you are probably still very vulnerable.
- Try to either have someone with you who has an eye to your safety or create a separate sense of yourself watching for your safety.
- Continue to explore direct aftercare needs-this involves your individual desires around Food, Hydration, Rest, Support, and Mental Health.
- Consider using stabilizing and grounding techniques (see below) to help you reenter your ordinary world.
- Stay mindful that you are probably not ready to jump full force back into the world, particularly with any new decisions or activities.
- Begin to understand your pace of integration.
- Nurturing - Cultivating - Patience.
- Be gentle.

In the reentry stage, the most important task is to continue grounding yourself without losing what happened. Rather than jumping into life, stay with your internal sense of yourself and with

what is coming up. The information is probably still coming even though you are not in the depths of the experience.

What grounds you is unique to you, but we find the most grounding things involve the senses and not the mind. some examples:

- a cup of tea.
- a warm or hot bath.
- walks in nature.
- massage.
- touch from a loved one.
- gentle music.

In the 6-to-24-hour period, **pitfalls might be:**

- Getting back to your ordinary routine too quickly.
- Acting out emotions rather than processing them.
- Sharing (or over sharing) with people not able to honor your experience.
- Neglecting basic needs (e.g., letting yourself become dehydrated, weak from lack of food, or manic from lack of sleep).
- Getting thrown off by a crash. We talk about this in depth in the "general pitfalls" section of this chapter. For now, by crash we mean a variety of experiences that feel negative, such as physical, mental or emotional symptoms, or even just a simple exhaustion or disappointment of expectations not being met.

Consider exploring creative expression. Creative expression is not about drawing or painting well, but about expressing your experience in ways that hold onto and continue the actual experience - without an analytical or narrative-based colonization of your experience.

Art is very important in helping the brain reach its full potential . . . It introduces the brain to diverse cognitive skills that help us unravel intricate problems. Art activates the creative part of our brain - the part, that works without words and can only express itself non-verbally.

Additional guideposts:

- Remembering to include your emotions and your physical body.
Noticing (with compassion but some objectivity) the narratives you are developing.
- Catching yourself when old patterns or beliefs start to come back and possibly negate your experience or transformation.
- Remembering to make it your own.
- Controlling how much interaction you want with others (and the outside world in general) about your experience.

Stage 3 - Next Steps - 1 to 3 days post experience

During Stage 3, we encourage reassurance from yourself to yourself or from others to you. This can include:

- That, you are back, you are here, and you are ok.

- That, you will continue to have support for your experience (continuation of what helped you feel safe).
- That whatever you experienced is okay and can be unpacked over time - you don't need to figure it out all at once and you don't need to judge it.

Days one through three are still a time of collecting and not a time of judging or evaluating. The meanings and memories from your experience will have time to incubate and settle in on their own.

Pitfalls in Stage 3:

1. Getting back to your regular life as though nothing happened. This is the time when we might tell ourselves, "Wow, that was fun..." and just leave it at that - as though we went to a party and got loaded and just let it start to fade away.
2. Not listening to your body about what you may need-you may still need more sleep than usual, different kinds of foods, a slower pace.
3. The "New Year's Resolution" syndrome-we have an intention to integrate and begin a process but when it, comes down to commitment, we keep putting it off and putting it off and then it all fades away. If you intend to create integration structure, it is important to have taken some steps during days one to three.
4. Letting ourselves be derailed by people in our lives who don't want, us to change. This can be subtle, but if people who do not want you to change intuit that you have had a profound and possibly transformative experience, now is the time they may take conscious or unconscious efforts to keep you where you have always been. This maybe a comment from them here or there - or a withholding of affection or connection. If this is happening, you will probably need to deal with the issue eventually if the person is important in your life - but you are still too close to the process to allow yourself to be pulled into something challenging. So, if this happens, please just notice it, be compassionate for yourself for the reactions you are keeping inside yourself, and be compassionate for them around how they may be feeling. Or, if this happens, it may not signal any long-lasting problem, so you may simply want to reassure them and it will be okay.

Stage 4 - Day 4 to 2 weeks

This stage is when you consolidate what happened. You are pulling together what happened. and starting to look at it. This can be like stepping away from a dream and. beginning to understand how you will work with it.

- Explore what integration means to you.
- Consider how much engagement you want with the outside world.
- Find your integration pace.
- Identify the most, important take-aways from your experience.
- Now that you have more distance from your experience, take another look at your mandala, artwork, expression, or any other notes or information from your session.
- Explore themes with a guide or integrative therapist who understands this work.
- Find the integration and. grounding exercises that work best for you and fit into your life.

- Remember to gently avoid, destructive thoughts or negative judgment.
- Extend your creativity and exploration of experience through activities you may not yet have included - dance if you have done art, do art if you have danced.
- Consider practices that are not strictly focused on integration but give you general space for your spiritual, psychological or physical unfolding, such as meditation, physical exercise, or other types of reflection.
- Revisit any themes or goals that were intentions.

Pitfalls in Stage 4:

1. Shutting it all down. To be honest, this is the time when most people return to their ordinary life and their psychedelic experience fades away. Maybe there are some lingering memories and maybe even some lasting healing or shifts. But ordinary life takes over and there is no space for conscious continuation of the experience.
2. Going back to your usual pre-session narratives. This would most likely happen unconsciously or semi-consciously. For example, if you live your life with a background of shame, and had an experience of "being completely okay" in your session, now is the stage when the usual narrative "I'm not okay" may slip back into your life. Therapy can help!
3. Delaying reaching out to a therapist or integrative guide specializing in the work. If you don't do it now, you may never do it.

Stage 5 - Embodying IT - 2 weeks to 3 months? 6 months? Next time?

In Stage 5, you have moved into your intentional methods for integration. Only you will know what you are called upon to embody within you internally and what you will begin to include or transform in your external life as part of your integration. Some examples of where many people find themselves focusing through integration work:

- Working through unresolved traumas.
- Healing or separating from family of origin problems.
- Releasing addictions or addictive behaviors.
- Facing and working through relationship issues, particularly those that might be labeled codependent.
- Forgiving yourself and/or others for past occurrences.
- Letting go of dependencies or habits that no longer serve you.
- Placing importance on improving your physical health (e.g., adding exercise or eating habits more beneficial to you).
- Gravitating towards a spiritual community; or releasing attachment to a spiritual or religious community that no longer serves.
- Shifting toward employment (or volunteer work) in synch with who you are becoming.

Notice the difference between having an experience and embodying the experience into your body and life. Also, notice the difference between forcing yourself to do something or work on something and following transformational energies that arose in your psychedelic work. This can feel like the difference between responding to a stick ("I know I should work on my relationship

with my mother...") and following a carrot ("I felt that sense of love and compassion for my mother for the first time in years and I want, to see if I can follow that...").

As you move through this stage, you might end up with one or more symbols that are impossible to explain but connect you with your integration. You might keep thinking about some part of your experience or an image or an archetype that was part of your session. Such symbols tend to feel sacred or numinous.

Synchronicities often come to help move you along. You may find new people, activities and things coming into your life - and perhaps some aspects of your prior life falling away. We suggest you do not force any of this, just embody what is happening, incrementally.

Pitfalls in Stage 5:

1. Starting to believe what happened was an event (with a story, or a meaning that you will create) and not the beginning of a process that you need, to follow.
2. Not staying open enough to surprises or synchronicities.
3. Fear that if you really change you will lose more than you gain (and we firmly believe you will gain more than you lose - but that is your decision and your choice). For instance, we know a woman who stopped doing experiential work because she had recently married and she realized if she kept doing the work, she would lose her marriage. This was not because her husband disapproved but because she realized the work was starting to make her change and that she would probably leave the marriage behind. She didn't want to do that. Her decision, her choice.
4. Being unrealistic about the reality that you may need to face some loss (or leave some things or people behind) if you really follow your process. In other words, denying the fear we mentioned just above but probably acting it out in some way.
5. Falling back into the Western habit, of analysis or thinking about something (and giving it an explanation) rather than staying in a place of not knowing and following your process. Another way of saying this: thinking you can control your process rather than feel into it and follow it. Remember: explore-surrender. Let it continue to work you.

Stage 6 - Ready yet? 3 to 6 months? Next experience?

The rule of thumb is the more profound the experience, the longer you should. wait before doing it again.

Chasing the high almost never works. The numinosity may lessen if you climb the mountain again too soon. If we feel we "absolutely must take a psychedelic again as soon as possible," there may be something that we're avoiding. You might be avoiding doing the hard work of integration.

Our rule of thumb is waiting three months, though with a strong caveat of it depends. What factors are involved in it depends?

1. Know your own relationship with addiction. (See the addictions chapter). This does not mean you should not follow your instinct for another session but that you might be honest

with yourself about the role of addiction or simply "wanting to get high" that, is playing itself out in your process.

2. Consider your intention. Are you doing energetic work and staying on top of your process? Are you participating in a community? Or are you hoping to heal deeply rooted traumas that you might need to face on your own time. Might it be wise to sample more slowly and carefully?
3. The particular medicine is an important factor. Factors here are the intensity of the medicine, the duration of the experience, and how easily you come back to your life.
4. Consider exactly what you are working on. For instance, one of us cancelled our participation in a medicine workshop because we realized we were working on being able to stay present, during difficult communications. We realized that the embodied insight from three months before had not fully settled into our body - and knew, even more that another dive could have helped avoid the difficult feelings that were being worked through.
5. Do not be afraid to give yourself more time.

Pitfalls in Stage 6:

1. Taking the "waiting period" too literally-if you are still in month two and a friend wants you to eat some mushrooms and walk in nature or go to a concert, give yourself a break and maybe do it (but do check in with yourself and make sure you're following a positive invitation and not returning to addictive behavior you want to leave behind).
2. Waiting too long - depriving yourself as some kind of masochistic act or "control thing."
3. Forgetting that you can keep your process going with non-psychedelic modalities (or less potent psychedelics).
4. Turning the decision of "when to go again" into more of a head-trip than it needs to be.