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## THE SHORT GUIDE TO COPING WITH POST-PSYCHEDELIC DIFFICULTIES

*From the Challenging Psychedelic Experiences Project (CPEP)*



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### You are not alone and you're not broken

Psychedelic experiences can be powerful and meaningful. But sometimes, the effects don't stop when the trip ends. You may be feeling shaken, confused, overwhelmed or even frightened. Please know this: **you are not alone**, and **you're not broken**. Many others have gone through similar challenges – and found a way through.

52% of people who responded to [a survey](#) said they'd experienced at least one intensely challenging trip. 39% of people who had a challenging psychedelic experience [said](#) it was one of the five most difficult experiences of their life. In other words, a terrifying trip can be right up there with things like life-threatening illnesses, violent assaults, bereavement, divorce, war, and other truly challenging experiences.

Just as with these other sorts of extremely-difficult experiences, people can emerge feeling very shaken up or even traumatised afterwards. That's normal and human. For [around 9%](#) of people who take psychedelics, they lead to challenges that last beyond the trip itself.

What you're feeling right now may be intense or hard to explain – but it is a **normal reaction to an intense experience**, not a sign that you're losing your mind or something is permanently wrong with you.

Through [our research](#) at the Challenging Psychedelic Experiences Project, we have learned a lot from people who have faced similar struggles and come out the other side. This guide shares some of that knowledge, along with practices and coping strategies that others have found helpful.

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### What people often experience

Post-psychedelic challenges can look different for different people. You might be experiencing one or more of the following:

- **Anxiety or panic** – feeling constantly on edge, worried, or like something terrible might happen.
- **Sleep disturbances** – struggling to fall asleep, nightmares, or waking up feeling like you are tripping again.
- **Feeling disconnected from others** – struggling to relate to others, feeling alienated or like no one understands you.
- **Perceptual changes** (or Hallucinogen Persisting Perception Disorder/HPPD) – lingering visual disturbances like trailing lights, halos, or distorted shapes.
- **Derealisation or depersonalisation** – a sense that the world isn't real, or feeling detached from your body, thoughts, or surroundings.
- **Existential confusion** – overwhelming thoughts about the nature of reality, life, or death.
- **Feelings of depression or despair** – feeling hopeless, joyless, or emotionally overwhelmed.
- **Cognitive difficulties** – struggling with memory, concentration or brain fog.
- **Somatic or nervous system issues** – hypersensitivity to light or sound, strange sensations, exhaustion or tinnitus.
- **Memories or visions of past trauma** – feeling confusion after visions of earlier trauma, which you may not have been aware of and aren't sure is true.
- **Thoughts or attempts at harming oneself or others**
- **Psychosis or mania** - in very rare cases psychedelics can trigger episodes of hypomania, mania or psychosis. Sometimes this can then develop into a long-term disorder requiring medication, but this is rare.
- **Feelings of shame and self-blame** - especially if you acted in extreme or dangerous ways during the psychedelic experience, and perhaps were hospitalized.

Click on the symptoms above or check our website [here](#) for more information on possible difficulties after psychedelics. These experiences can be frightening, but the vast majority of people fully recover and some even feel they've grown through the process.

Whatever is going on, don't worry, others have gone through it, and found things that helped them cope.

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## What does it mean?

What does a bad or very difficult trip 'mean'? People can go through extreme and extraordinary experiences and have bizarre encounters or visions with demons or aliens, they can feel they have spent aeons in hell, or gone through many lives, or left their body, or confronted the ultimate meaninglessness of the universe. And when they emerge, they are naturally very shaken up and can find themselves obsessing over the meaning of that one experience for weeks or months or years. They can also feel intensely alone and feel like no one else in the history of humanity has ever gone through something quite as weird and awful as they went through, and therefore no one will ever understand. If psychedelics were an important part of their identity, values or spirituality, they can feel ruptured from their faith system or let down by their spirit-guide.

Firstly, you're not alone. The chances are that someone *has* gone through something, if not precisely the same, then similar. Hell experiences, for example, are quite common, as are bewildering encounters with demons, entities or aliens. Feeling like you're dead, in the afterlife or in a fake reality is also surprisingly common. However weird your experience, someone somewhere has probably gone through something quite similar. Secondly, you don't have to do psychedelics again, there are many routes to altered states, and altered states aren't the be-all-and-end-all of spirituality. If you do want to do psychedelics again, be careful, wait until you're stabilized.

But what does it *mean*? Well, your trip could be a metaphor, or it could be a projection of your inner state of mind at that time, or some aspect of your psyche. It could just be random noise provoked by a drug and weaved into a narrative by your mind. Who knows if it is the 'Ultimate Cosmic Truth' – people experience an infinite range of mind-states on psychedelics so it's impossible to say any particular state is the 'Ultimate Truth'. Why did this happen to you? Everyone who goes through an intensely-adverse experience asks themselves that, it's a deep philosophical question ('the problem of suffering') without a clear answer. You could say 'it was meant to be' or you could say 'shit happens', who knows for sure. It might be more helpful to try and accept that something very difficult, strange and even traumatic happened to you, but it's now in the past and ruminating over it obsessively doesn't really help. What helps you go on with your life now, in the present?

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## How could I have been so stupid?

[Self-blame is very common](#) after traumatic situations, and people can be especially prone to shame and self-blame if the traumatic situation involved drugs which a person freely chose to take (even more if they spent thousands of dollars to do so!). So, again, it's normal and human to blame oneself after an adverse event, however, it doesn't help matters, it only makes a difficult situation worse.

What happened, happened. You're not the only person to try psychedelics, they're increasingly popular and enthusiastically promoted by the media, celebrities and even some politicians. Psychedelic culture and industry tends to amplify only the most positive stories, and to dismiss, silence or minimize negative stories, so the public has not always got the full picture of the risks. While it's true that most people have either positive or neutral psychedelic experiences, it's also true that around 40% of people who take psychedelics regularly say they've had at least one truly awful experience, up there with the worst experiences of their lives. The most helpful and useful thing you can do now, rather than beat yourself up, is accept the situation and practice self-compassion. You're going through something very hard and you deserve kindness and encouragement as you go through it.

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## How long do post-psychedelic difficulties last?

The answer is, it varies. Very often, post-psychedelic difficulties last just a few days and then naturally clear up. For example, in [one of our studies](#), 30% of participants after a psilocybin

retreat reported challenges afterwards, but in this small study, the challenges largely cleared up after two weeks. Sometimes the difficulties can last longer - perhaps a few weeks, or in rarer cases a few months, or in rarer cases still a year or longer (we still don't know how rare such cases of very extended difficulties are but it's likely around 1% of all psychedelic experiences). In most cases we have come across, symptoms diminish and gradually disappear over time. In some cases, symptoms can endure but become easier to live with. We are here to help support you as you recover at your own pace, and can provide information, advice and referrals to specialist therapists.

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## What helps?

Below are practices that many people in our research found helpful. Not all will work for everyone – but many people found that over time, and with support, they began to feel better.

### Talk to someone

- Speak with a trusted friend, family member, or peer who can listen without judging.
- Support groups (online or in person) can be especially validating. CPEP runs a fortnightly [online peer support group](#).
- **Do you need to talk to someone urgently?** You can email us at [contact@challengingpsychedelicexperiences.com](mailto:contact@challengingpsychedelicexperiences.com) or call/text the [Fireside Project Hotline](#).

### Seek therapy

- A therapist who understands psychedelic experiences can help. [Reach out](#) and we can offer suggestions if you're not sure where to start. You can also find lists of psychedelic integration therapists [here](#).
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can help with panic and anxiety. Somatic therapies can help calm the nervous system.
- Be cautious – some therapists or coaches deeply invested in psychedelics may not understand or validate harm and might proffer spiritual explanations like 'the medicine knows what you need' which might not always be appreciated!
- Typically, the most important thing in therapy is the truth and empathetic bond between therapist and client.

### Try cognitive or spiritual practices

- **Compassionate self-talk:** remind yourself that healing is possible.
- **Meditation or prayer:** even short moments of stillness can help.
- **Cognitive distancing:** practice observing your thoughts without identifying with them.

### Move your body

- Walking in nature, yoga, dancing, or other movement practices can help restore grounding and regulate your system.

### Create or express

- Writing, journaling, painting, music – these can help you process what happened, especially when words are hard to find.

### Find reliable information

- Books like *Breaking Open* by Jules Evans and Tim Read can help make sense of the process.
- You can read and watch people's Stories of Recovery on the CPEP website [here](#).
- You can also find a summary of findings on psychedelic risks and harms [here](#), and [here](#) is all of CPEP's research on post-psychedelic difficulties and recovery.
- If you are dealing with previously-unrecalled visions of childhood abuse and you're wondering if they're true and what to do about it, you might find [this handbook](#) useful.

### Medication (if needed)

- Some people find short-term medication helpful, especially for anxiety or sleep.
- Always consult a medical professional, and don't make changes without guidance.

### ⚠ Be cautious with further psychedelic trips ⚠

- Some people report that another psychedelic experience helped them resolve things. But this approach carries significant risks. Seek guidance and be honest with yourself about your readiness.

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## If someone you know is struggling

If you're worried about someone after a psychedelic experience, here are some things to watch for that may indicate they need immediate support:

- Extreme distress or acting very out of character
- Talking about suicide or self-harm
- Signs of psychosis: paranoia, hallucinations, or delusions
- Aggressive, disruptive, or risky behaviour
- Being unsafe to themselves or others, and not having enough support

In a crisis, contact local emergency services or see global crisis support lines here:

[International Crisis Lines](#)  
[Crisis Text Line](#)

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## Interpersonal harm and abuse in psychedelic settings

Some post-psychedelic difficulties are caused or worsened by **the actions of others** – such as facilitators, guides, therapists, friends, or groups. People may be manipulated, coerced, harmed or even assaulted while under the influence. This is unfortunately not uncommon in psychedelic spaces.

You have a right to name what happened and to seek justice and support.

- [SHINE Collective](#) and [PsyAware](#) offer support for those harmed in psychedelic contexts.
- [CPEP hosts peer groups](#) for those recovering from post-psychedelic psychological or interpersonal harm.
- If the person who harmed you is a licensed therapist, you can report them. You may also leave a review on sites like [Retreat Guru](#) or share your story anonymously on Reddit or Facebook.

It takes courage to speak up. Your voice can help make this space safer for others. But your healing always comes first.

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## Final reminders

- **You are not broken.** What you're going through is hard, but it doesn't mean something is wrong with you.
- **Take things one day at a time.** Focus on small steps that restore stability – rest, food, connection, self-soothing.
- **You can do this.** We know post-psychedelic difficulties are extremely hard, they can be one of the hardest things you go through in your life. You can do it, especially if you get the support and resources you need, and you can come out the other side.
- **You don't have to do it alone.** Reach out. There are people who understand what you're going through.

Visit our website for more information, community, and resources:

 [challengingpsychedelicexperiences.com](https://challengingpsychedelicexperiences.com)

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For further information and support, we recommend the following support services and web resources:

- We run a free monthly [online peer support group](#) for people experiencing post-psychedelic difficulties.
- [Psychedelic Clinic in Berlin](#): Clinic at *Charité* – Universitätsmedizin Berlin offering immediate online support with the initial sessions free. Click [here](#) to get in touch.
- [Psychedelic Support](#): Connect with a mental healthcare provider trained in psychedelic integration therapy and find community groups that can provide support.

- **Fireside Project:** The Psychedelic Support Line provides emotional support during and after psychedelic experiences.
- **Psychedelic Integration:** Includes information and contacts for integration therapists and coaches
- **Institute of Psychedelic Therapy:** The Institute for Psychedelic Therapy offers a register of integration therapists.
- **The Spiritual Crisis Network:** Offers resources, an email support service and peer support groups for people going through spiritual crisis.
- **The Perception Restoration Foundation:** A charity dedicated to helping people experiencing Hallucination Perception Persistent Disorder.

[www.challengingpsychedelicexperiences.com](http://www.challengingpsychedelicexperiences.com)