

Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Overview

Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Handbook

Introduction

This handbook (one piece of the [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Project](#)) is for anyone trying to make sense of their (or someone else's) experience recovering memories or having memory-like experiences during or after the use of psychedelics.¹

I include the phrase “memory-like experiences” here because some people may believe they are remembering real events that are actually distortions, and others may not believe that they are remembering real past experiences but they actually are. I use the phrase “during or after the use of psychedelics” because, while some people recover their memories or have memory-like experiences during a psychedelic experience (i.e., while they are still experiencing its acute effects), others have this experience in the hours, days, or weeks after the effects have worn off. If you attribute your recovered memories or memory-like experiences to your use of psychedelics, this handbook is for you.

The primary purpose of this handbook is to answer questions that typically come up after experiences like this, such as: **Is what I'm experiencing normal? Should I believe that these are real memories or not? Where can I find support in making sense of all this?**

It feels important to state here that I am not an expert on either psychedelics or recovered memories. I am just a person with some mental health training and strong research skills who unexpectedly recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse during and after a psychedelic-assisted therapy session in 2022. In my effort to make sense of my experience, I've read many books, articles, academic papers and Reddit posts, listened to podcasts and watched videos. I have also spoken directly to experts on this topic, some of whom have offered advice and feedback on this handbook.

One of the things I discovered in my research is that it is very hard to find trustworthy information on psychedelics and recovered memories because (a) very little formal research has been done on the intersections of psychedelics and recovered memories; (b) most psychedelics are illegal so people are wary to discuss their experiences publicly; (c) this topic is extremely personal and emotional (and may implicate family members or loved ones), which also makes people wary of discussing their experiences publicly; and (d) recovered memories has been a controversial topic on which people hold a variety of views (some of which are more reality- and science-based than others – more on this in the “Recovered Memories” section below).

¹ I am defining “the use of psychedelics” as any therapeutic, ceremonial, and/or recreational use of substances or plants (and their combinations) that can induce profound altered states of consciousness. This can include “classic psychedelics” like ayahuasca, DMT, LSD, mescaline, psilocybin/magic mushrooms, and 5-MeO-DMT, along with atypical psychedelics like cannabis, ketamine, and MDMA/ecstasy.

While this handbook will summarize some of the key takeaways from my research, I encourage you to peruse the [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Archive](#) that I put together which aggregates first-person accounts, academic research, and media on the topic of psychedelics and recovered memories so that you can draw conclusions for yourself.

I have no interest in persuading people in a particular direction around this topic, I am simply sharing the information I've come across in the hopes that it brings clarity and grounding to others in the way that I believe it would have for me when I was first trying to make sense of my experience. I am very open to feedback and will update this document as needed until the day it becomes unnecessary (i.e., when trustworthy experts publish accurate and accessible information on the topic).

Because of the risks involved in publicly sharing personal stories of recovering traumatic memories, I am choosing to remain anonymous. If you would like to reach out to me with questions, concerns, or recommendations about this handbook (or the [Archive](#)), you can reach out to me at: psychedelicsrecoveredmemories@gmail.com or fill out [this anonymous feedback form](#). I would love to know if there is research or information that I am missing.²

This handbook is split into the following sections:

- [What Are Recovered Memories?](#)
- [Research & Information about Recovered Memories and Psychedelics](#)
- [I Recovered Traumatic Memories During or After Using Psychedelics – Now What?](#)
- [I Want to Recover Memories by Using Psychedelics – What Should I Do?](#)
- [Concluding thoughts](#)

You can toggle to these different sections by clicking on the links above or using the “Outline” feature to the left of the document.

What Are Recovered Memories?

Defining the Term

Recovered memories are memories that a person has forgotten or not recalled for a significant period of time and then later recalls. Oftentimes this specifically refers to memories of traumatic events from childhood that a child's mind or brain prevents from being recalled in order to help them survive, such as sexual abuse, physical abuse, witnessing domestic violence, etc.

² I am based in the United States (and am only fluent in English) and much of the resources and information I share is centered on the U.S. — please reach out if you know of research/resources I can reference that go beyond this scope.

I am choosing to use the language of “forgotten” or “not recalled” rather than “repressed” throughout this document for a few reasons. First, the language of “repressed memories” was weaponized in harmful ways by the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (more on this in the “A Brief History of Recovered Memory Research” section below). Second, when it comes to inaccessible trauma memories, it is often unnecessary, confusing, and unhelpful to focus on the potential reason(s) the memories haven't been recalled, which can include unconscious repression, conscious suppression, habitual inhibition of recall, dissociation, and/or not encountering contexts or cues that trigger recall. Basically, conflating one potential mechanism, such as repression, with the well-established phenomena of forgetting and eventually recalling traumatic memories, is inaccurate and is sometimes done to confuse and manipulate people.

For the purposes of this document, the phrase “recovered memories” refers to *any* memories that a person did not recall for many years for whatever reasons and then, during or after the use of psychedelics, remembers. (This can even include positive and neutral memories. Some people have reported, for example, that their psychedelic experiences included recovering memories of pleasant interactions with deceased loved ones or of remembering relatively neutral experiences from childhood, such as playing on a playground.)

A Brief History of Recovered Memory Research

When people reach out to friends or create Reddit posts in order to request support in making sense of their experience recovering memories during or after the use of psychedelics, they are often met with the refrain that recovered memories don't exist or that, if they do, they are never or almost never accurate.

This orientation to recovered memories is a direct result of what some scholars refer to as “the memory wars” of the 1990s, when many of those in the fields of psychology and psychiatry divided into two camps: those who believe that most, if not all, recovered memories are “false” (such as Elizabeth Loftus and others associated with the False Memory Syndrome Foundation), and those who have researched and documented the occurrence of recovered memories in the cases of childhood trauma (such as John Briere, Constance Dalenberg, Diana Elliott, Judith Herman, Bessel van der Kolk, and Linda Williams).³

Those in the first camp (who believe that recovered memories are never, or almost never, accurate) often cite Loftus's “Lost in the Mall” study in the 1990s in which 6 out of 24 research subjects were rated by the investigators as falsely recalling that they had been lost in the mall

³ The memory wars are still alive today, as seen in *The New York Times* publishing [an op-ed](#) in September 2022 that argues *against* the validity of recovered memories and then, one month later, publishing [two responses](#) to that op-ed (including one written by Bessel van der Kolk) in *support* of the validity of recovered memories. This [New York Magazine article](#) from 2021 called “The Memory War” presents a thorough and nuanced history of the memory wars.

as children after a researcher suggested they were (and after an older relative corroborated the story).⁴

Those in the second camp (who have encountered real cases of accurate recovered memories, including with perpetrator confessions and other proof), have, for decades now, raised concerns about the research of Loftus and others who deny and attack recovered memories. Those critiques include the following:

- These studies generally enlist an older relative to falsely claim having directly witnessed the false event, which (a) creates added pressure on a person to believe the fabricated memory (with the only other alternative being that their relative is lying to them), and (b) does not replicate the experience of someone spontaneously recovering memories, in the context of therapy or otherwise.
- These studies generally require that participants repeatedly try to imagine and recall the event, which creates the conditions for false memory creation and, again, is not the case for memories that emerge spontaneously and without directions or demands from others.
- Being lost in a mall as a child and the other events used in false memory implantation studies are significantly less traumatic than experiencing abuse, and may therefore be easier for people to accept as having occurred when they did not. In a variation on the “lost in the mall” study conducted by Pezdek and colleagues in [1997](#), researchers presented subjects with two different false memories: being lost in the mall and receiving a rectal enema. While 3 of 20 subjects “remembered” having been lost in the mall, none of them remembered the enema. (As the researcher reported years later [to a journalist](#), “The typical response was ‘No fucking way. That didn’t happen.’”).
- Investigators have used their own ratings, not those of study participants, to classify whether participants experienced false memories, but those ratings depend on assumptions and methods that are not supported by (a) memory research, (b) the actual data collected in their studies, and/or (c) participants’ own ratings of whether they actually recalled the false event (as noted in Andrews and Brewin’s [2024 paper](#)).
- Loftus herself published a [1994 study](#) (conducted by a student of hers) in which 19% of subjects who reported childhood sexual abuse also reported completely forgetting the abuse for some period of time and recovering the memory of it later.

⁴ Similar false memory implantation studies have been conducted since then, as referenced in [this 2017 research review article](#) from Alan Scoboria et al.

In addition to Loftus's 1994 study, a wide variety of research has been conducted and published confirming the occurrence and validity of recovered memories.⁵ Here is a short and incomplete list:

- In Linda Williams's [1994](#) and [1995](#) studies, 38% of the 129 sexual abuse survivors who participated did not recall sexual abuse that landed them in the emergency room 17 years earlier (when Williams herself interviewed them as a graduate student). Sixteen percent of participants said that they had forgotten the abuse and then later remembered it. Twelve percent even said that they were never abused as children.
- In Constance Dalenberg's [1996](#) study of 17 people who recovered memories of sexual abuse (some of whom also had continuous memories of the abuse, or memories they always had access to), the memories of abuse were found to be equally accurate whether recovered or continuously remembered. Seven of the subjects had at least one recovered memory confirmed by the perpetrator.
- In Diana Elliott's [1995](#) and [1997](#) studies, she mailed a questionnaire about traumatic experiences to a random sample of 724 Americans. Of the respondents who reported some form of trauma, 32% reported delayed recall of the event (meaning they forgot and then recovered the memory of it later). Of the respondents who specifically reported childhood sexual abuse, 42% reported delayed recall.
- In John Briere and Jon Conte's [1993](#) study, 59% of a sample of 450 adult clinical subjects with sexual abuse histories reported having a period in their lives (before age 18) when they had no memory of their abuse.

Despite all of the empirical evidence on the validity of recovered memories that has emerged over the past 30 years, many people still doubt their existence. I spoke to an expert in the field who said one reason the idea that most recovered memories are false endures is that abusers who have enough money hire expert witnesses to attack the validity and credibility of their victims' memories in court. Some of these "experts," perhaps based on the financial benefits of such work, have also influenced the media, psychology textbook writers, etc.

It is important to note here that the memory experts and researchers who are critical of the false memory movement all agree that it *is* possible for recovered memories to be false. Many of the memories that people "recovered" under hypnosis or in other suggestible states during the "Satanic Panic" in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, were proven to be false. See the section on "Determining if a Recovered Memory is Real or Not" below for more information on what conditions might contribute to the construction of a false memory.


⁵ You may notice that the studies in this list are all from the 1990s. The reason for the lack of large-scale studies on this topic over the past few decades is, according to an expert I spoke to, because (a) amnesia and delayed recall are not diagnoses, therefore there's little research money for such studies, and (b) researchers who worked on this in the 1990s feel like they have proven the existence of accurate recovered memories and therefore do not need to study the phenomenon further. That said, some important case studies have been published since the 90s, such as [Efrati 2018](#) and [Colangelo 2009](#).

If you want to learn more about the scientific research on recovered memories, I recommend reading the following:

- [This page](#) of Dr. Jim Hopper's site
- [The Body Keeps the Score](#) by Bessel van der Kolk (2014)
- [Trauma and Memory: The Science and the Silenced](#) edited by Valerie Sinason & Ashley Conway (2022)
- ["Tilting at Windmills: Why Attacks on Repression Are Misguided"](#) by Chris Brewin (2020)

The Mechanics of Recovered Memories

One of the best primers on a way that amnesia and recovered memory may occur is this 4-minute video from [Dr. Jim Hopper](#).⁶

 [Recovered Memories of Sexual Abuse Explained](#)

As Dr. Hopper explains, the basic mechanics of traumatic recovered memories may happen in the following way:

1. A child experiences one or more traumatic events
2. The child's mind or brain⁷ voluntarily and/or automatically inhibits the memory of said event(s) from entering conscious awareness because remembering them would do more harm than good (i.e., with the memory out of consciousness the child can continue on with their normal life, rather than being distracted by disturbing memories or overwhelmed by associated feelings of fear, anger, pain, shame, etc.)⁸

⁶ I highly recommend looking through Dr. Hopper's [website](#), especially the [Recovered Memories of Sexual Abuse](#) section. Dr. Hopper is a nationally recognized expert on recovered memories (with a focus on sexual abuse) and also has experience with psychedelic-assisted therapy, both as a therapist in the FDA-approved phase 3 clinical trial of MDMA-Assisted Therapy for PTSD and as a practitioner of ketamine-assisted psychotherapy in private practice.

⁷ I am using "mind or brain" here, but there are many different theories on what exactly prevents someone from accessing their memories. Neuroscientists might cite certain neural pathways in the brain being shut down, psychoanalysts might say that your ego is keeping you from accessing your unconscious mind, somatic therapists might say that your nervous system is on too high alert for your body to feel safe enough to receive the memories, and Internal Family Systems therapists might say that there is a "protector" part of you keeping you from knowing the truth.

⁸ For decades, Michael Anderson and colleagues have conducted research on such "retrieval inhibition" and its neurobiological mechanisms. See for example, [Engen & Anderson 2018](#) and [Benoit & Anderson 2012](#).

3. Later, when the person's mind or brain encounters the "right" (for them, as a unique person) set of circumstances or combination of factors that causes recall of what happened, it brings the memory back into consciousness.⁹

In the video, Dr. Hopper focuses on one particular reason that someone's memories might to return to conscious awareness: when a specific stimulus encountered in a particular context triggers a memory (such as seeing the bed on which they were abused while visiting the house where the abuse occurred, or their child reaching the age they were when they were abused). Another reason that memories might return to awareness is because a person is safe enough, finally, to remember them (such as remembering abuse after an abuser dies or accessing a newfound sense of safety while using MDMA or another psychedelic).

Sometimes recovered memories will come back into consciousness as relatively complete and detailed scenes but, more often than not, they will return over time in pieces and fragments. This, too, is consistent with how all memory researchers know recall works, as documented by studies of "reminiscence," that is, recall of additional information over time.¹⁰ They may involve random images of a room where the abuse occurred, or they may just be feelings and sensations. For some, they may show up not as details but rather as knowledge expressed in words (i.e., semantic memory), such as "My uncle abused me when I was ten."

Traumatic memories may be particularly fragmented due to dissociation, a survival strategy in which a person experiencing something traumatic disconnects from some or all of the experience in order to cope or survive. (This is why some people remember watching abuse happening to them from outside of their body.)

It is important to understand that it is *not rare* for people who were abused or who witnessed violence in childhood to go for many years (even decades) without remembering these traumatic experiences (as seen in the studies cited above). That said, people often have *implicit* memories of the abuse, i.e., memories they did not realize were memories, such as emotional or bodily responses triggered by encountering things associated with the abuse.

Implicit memories include not wanting to be around an abuser (or people who share traits with an abuser), getting triggered by being touched in a certain way, not wanting to visit certain places (such as a certain room in your childhood home or an abuser's house), etc. These are common and well-studied symptoms of PTSD, which a person may not recognize as implicit memories until they connect these symptoms to memories they already have (which often happens in therapy) and/or they recover an explicit memory of the same event(s) associated with implicit memories.

⁹ That memory retrieval or recall is a function of "contexts and cues" that facilitate retrieval was long ago established in memory research, and is understood and accepted by all memory researchers as a fundamental description of how recall works (e.g., see [Tulving 1973](#)).

¹⁰ See, for example, [Gilbert & Fisher 2006](#) and [Oeberst 2012](#).

Determining if a Recovered Memory is Real or Not

Claims of recovered memories usually or always being false are highly exaggerated, and research indicates that recovered memories are no more likely to be inaccurate than regular memories.¹¹ (In fact, if you haven't recalled an event much or at all in the past, then there haven't been opportunities for the memory to be modified.)

That said, the content of what people experience as recovered memories can, in some cases, be imagined or untrue. Research (like the false memory implantation studies described in the section above) suggests this is more likely to happen under *specific conditions*, such as when a person in a position of authority or power suggests, pushes, or coerces someone into repeatedly attempting to “remember” a specific experience or type of experience. A psychedelic user, for example, could be at risk of recovering false memories if an unskilled therapist or psychedelic “guide” insists that they were abused, possibly even providing some details in the process. In suggestible states, such as when someone is under hypnosis, doing a guided visualization, or using psychedelics, people are more at risk of “recovering” false memories *if someone is guiding them, explicitly or implicitly, to remember something that never happened*.

In the case of recovering traumatic memories during or after the use of psychedelics, it is also possible that one's mindset (one component of the “set and setting” that greatly determine the effects of psychedelics), regardless of how directive a therapist or guide is, may cause the emergence of false memories that seem totally real and true. “Set” (short for “mindset”) can include how strong your intention is to discover “what happened” that caused symptoms and suffering, or to find a specific sort of memory, for example sexual abuse. (For more information on how to assess if your memories are real or not, see the section [Recovered Traumatic Memories During or After Using Psychedelics – Now What?](#) below.)

It is important to note that, even if a psychedelic user is encouraged by a guide to recover a particular sort of memory (or if they have a strong intention to locate such a memory themselves), the memories they access may still be accurate (at least for their gist and central details, which are harder to distort than peripheral details, especially for stressful or traumatic memories).¹²

Research & Information about Psychedelics and Recovered Memories

Most of the information referenced above about recovered memories comes from research related to recovering memories while in a relatively ordinary state of consciousness. Research

¹¹ See [Williams 1995](#) and [Dalenberg 1996](#).

¹² See [Dalton & Daneman 2013](#), [Heath & Erickson 1998](#), [Herten et al. 2017](#), and [Paz-Alonso et al. 2013](#).

and media on the topic of recovering memories or having memory-like experiences during or after the use of psychedelics is harder to find.

There are many reasons for this, including the fact that institutions, researchers, and clinicians may fear that any public conversation linking psychedelics with the “controversial” subject of recovered memories could jeopardize their reputations and careers, and possibly jeopardize the legalization of psychedelic therapy.

That said, some scholars, organizations, and media outlets are beginning to raise awareness about this experience, and people are starting to share their first-hand accounts more publicly (such as on Reddit).¹³ Scholars are also revisiting research from the 1950s before psychedelics were criminalized. In this section, I explore five key takeaways from these various sources:

1. Recovering memories while using psychedelics is not rare
2. There are different theories about why psychedelics bring up previously unrecalled memories
3. Set and setting can affect the recovery of memories on psychedelics
4. People relate to their recovered memories in different ways
5. The healing process varies across people and over time

Recovering Memories While Using Psychedelics is Not Rare

One of the most important takeaways from my research is that it is not rare to recover memories or have memory-like experiences during or after the use of psychedelics. In other words: if you are going through this right now, you are not alone. There are a number of first-person accounts, research reports and media available online, much of which I have documented in the [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Archive](#).

The academic article that explores the history and present of this phenomenon most thoroughly is CJ Healy’s 2020 article in the journal *Psychopharmacology* titled “[The acute effects of classic psychedelics on memory in humans](#).” In this article, Healy reviews dozens of studies on DMT, LSD, psilocybin, and ayahuasca from the 1950s through 2010s, and concludes:

Qualitative studies and clinical case reports suggest that psychedelic experiences **frequently** involve the recall and/or re-experiencing of autobiographical memories, often

¹³ Peer-reviewed academic articles and Reddit posts are not equally valid sources. In this particular moment, because information is so limited, I am pulling from as many different sources as I can, but please keep in mind that I am not a formally trained researcher (although I have received such researchers’ advice on collecting and describing the resources that I provide). I encourage you to approach this document with healthy skepticism and to review the links that I’ve shared in the [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Archive](#) for yourself.

memories that are affectively intense (positively or negatively valenced) and that had been avoided and/or forgotten prior to the experience.

The 200+ first-hand accounts in the [Archive](#) suggest that people are recovering memories while using other types of psychedelics, such as MDMA, ketamine, and more.

There Are Different Theories About Why Psychedelics Bring Up Previously Unrecalled Memories

Because scholars are just beginning to investigate the effects of psychedelics on the psyche and brain, there is not one clear answer about why the use of psychedelics can bring previously inaccessible memories into conscious awareness. It is generally accepted that psychedelics bypass certain defensive barriers – that is, disrupt “retrieval inhibition” functions in the brain – but the neural mechanisms behind this are up for debate.

Theories about why the use of psychedelics can lead to the recovery of memories include the following:

1. Classic psychedelics (i.e., ayahuasca, DMT, LSD, and psilocybin) decrease activity in the “default mode network” (DMN) in the brain, which may allow previously inhibited material to emerge. This theory is centered on the idea that the DMN is responsible for the construction of a person’s narrative and experiential self and that, when the DMN is less active, its constraints on the parameters of self-related beliefs and experiences are weakened or removed, which allows material the brain has kept from awareness to come back into consciousness.¹⁴
2. Classic psychedelics activate the 5-HT_{2A} receptors in the brain, which play a role in memory consolidation (aka storage) processes and fear extinction (inhibiting conditioned fear responses). This may be why people using psychedelics are able to re-enter and re-consolidate previously inaccessible traumatic memories with manageable or no fear.¹⁵
3. Some psychedelics increase connectivity and communication between neurons, as well as increase neuroplasticity, which may enable the retrieval, re-encoding, and re-storage of old information in the brain, which may be associated with recall of long-forgotten memories.¹⁶

¹⁴ See the “Discussion” section of [Healy 2020](#) for more information on this theory, with links to other research on the topic.

¹⁵ See [Nutt 2020](#), [Curran 2018](#), and [Zhang 2015](#).

¹⁶ See [Aleksandrova 2021](#), [Inserra 2021](#).

4. Some psychedelics decrease activity in the amygdala — a part of the brain involved in fear-based responses to trauma-related information — which may help a person to feel safer and thereby allow traumatic material to re-emerge.¹⁷
5. Some psychedelics increase activity in the brain's parahippocampal region, which aids in memory retrieval.¹⁸
6. Psychedelics can soften or dissolve self-protective “defense mechanisms” (such as suppression, repression, and dissociation), leading memories that had previously been defensively warded off to become available to consciousness.¹⁹

Different psychedelics have different actions so it's hard to generalize about psychedelics as a whole. If you are interested in understanding the mechanisms of a particular psychedelic, I recommend looking through the “Academic Research” tab in the [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Archive](#) and doing more research from there. Research on this topic is constantly evolving and I will be updating this handbook with new information as it comes in.

Set and Setting May Affect the Recovery of Memories on Psychedelics

Many people who have used psychedelics have heard the idea that “set and setting” can have a big impact on a person's psychedelic experience.²⁰ “Set” refers to a person's mindset — including expectations and intentions, hopes and fears — that they bring to the use of psychedelics. If a person enters the experience feeling sad, lonely, or hopeless, or if they have high expectations or too-rigid intentions, their experience will be different than if they feel safe, supported, and open to the experience.

“Setting” refers to the actual space in which a person uses psychedelics. In psychedelic-assisted therapy clinical trials, for example, people tend to engage in psychedelic use in an indoor space set up to make them feel comfortable and safe (with a bed, blankets, and supportive music), and they have at least one therapist present with them throughout. An ayahuasca ceremony may have a completely different setting, with a large number of participants and/or a space with more ritualistic adornments. Some people use psychedelics with friends in party environments, others use them alone in the woods. Most settings are not

¹⁷ See [Mueller 2017](#), [Berrett 2020](#), [Sottile 2022](#).

¹⁸ See [Inserra 2018](#).

¹⁹ See [Healy 2020](#).

²⁰ For a thorough history of the concept of “set and setting,” see [Hartogsohn 2017](#).

inherently “better” or “worse” for using psychedelics, they simply influence people’s experiences in different ways.²¹

Some *possible* risks around set and setting that may lead to the recovery of inaccurate memories during the use of psychedelics include:

- The user setting too strong and rigid of an intention/expectation related to recovering traumatic memories
- A therapist or guide exerting unhealthy or undue influence on the client before or while they are in a psychedelics-induced suggestible state (such as encouraging a client to remember specific details about abuse or even suggesting what might have happened)
- External stimuli that may trigger specific images (such as a fellow participant in a group psychedelic session audibly narrating memories or images of traumatic memories that *they* are re-experiencing)

At present, all of these are anecdotal observations and theories about what might influence a person to have false memory-like experiences during the use of psychedelics. To my knowledge, no formal empirical research has been done on this topic, likely in part because trying to “implant” false memories while someone is in a vulnerable/suggestible state raises a lot of ethical questions.²²

Importantly, even if some of these elements of set and setting were present in your experience, it’s still possible that the memories you recovered are accurate, at least with respect to their gist and some central details. For example, a client with an intention to access explicit traumatic memories during a psychedelic-assisted therapy session (or one being guided to do so by a therapist) may be approaching the session that way because they may have always had an inner knowing (and/or implicit memories) that something happened to them in childhood that they have not been able to remember. Suggestive influences like these do not inherently negate the validity of the memories someone may have recovered in a psychedelic session.

²¹ It is worth noting here that settings in which people are unsafe can definitely impact a person’s experience (such as in situations in which a person using psychedelics is criticized, rejected, sexually assaulted, arrested, or otherwise harmed by the people around them).

²² That said, there is an opportunity for researchers to do observational studies where people who have recovered memories during or after the use of psychedelics complete surveys and/or are interviewed about (a) their expectations or intentions going into their psychedelic experience, and (b) whether someone (i.e., a therapist, guide, family member or friend, Youtuber, Redditer, etc.) suggested or imposed ideas about recovering memories before their experience. My hope is that researchers will soon undertake these sorts of studies.

People Relate to Their Recovered Memories in Different Ways

One of the first questions that typically comes up after people recover memories or have memory-like experiences during or after the use of psychedelics is: Is what I remembered real or not?

I have read through hundreds of experiences of people recovering memories and/or having memory-like experiences during or after the use of psychedelics (as well as case studies in academic research and reports in media), and have noticed that people tend to relate to their recovered memories or memory-like experiences in one or more of four ways:

1. **Believing that the memories are partially or entirely accurate because of external evidence**, such as a perpetrator or witnesses validating the memory, the person discovering documentation of the abuse (diary entries, art, photos, etc.), another victim coming forward about being abused by the same person, etc.
2. **Believing that the memories are partially or entirely accurate because of internal evidence**, such as psychological or bodily issues/patterns being explained by the memories (and/or going away after facing the memories), more memories returning to them after the acute effects of the psychedelic have worn off, etc.
3. **Believing that the memories are entirely *inaccurate* because of a lack of internal and/or external evidence**, such as the memories not feeling right or true when in an ordinary state of consciousness, the memories seeming like one of the symbolic or non-literal images that can emerge from the hallucinogenic nature of a given psychedelic, or strong evidence that the experiences could not have happened.
4. **Accepting that they may never know if the memories are accurate or not because of a confusing mix of what they consider to be evidence and non-evidence.**

While people going through this experience tend to land in one of these four places, it is also evident that many people spend a fair amount of time moving back and forth between these different states or progressing through them in a particular sequence. For example, someone may initially believe a memory to be completely accurate and then realize later that some parts of it weren't, and someone else may begin with a lot of doubt and eventually land on strong certainty.

It's important to keep in mind that it is *very common* for an abuse survivor to move between believing and not believing traumatic memories that they have recovered, whether or not psychedelics have been involved. Periods of denial and doubt can allow the survivor to have times when they aren't flooded with flashbacks, terror, anger, etc., which enables them to keep up with the tasks of daily life.

Denial and doubt are especially common in cases where the material and emotional risks that come with someone believing the memories are high, such as when survivors are still reliant on or in contact with abusers (or loved ones who are close to the abuser). More information on how

to find support in processing your recovered memories is in the [I Recovered Traumatic Memories During or After Using Psychedelics – Now What?](#) section below.

It is worth noting that, while research has not yet come out about the accuracy of memories recovered during and/or after the use of psychedelics, some publicly available first-hand accounts include mentions of finding external evidence and corroboration for such memories. In his 2023 book [Coming Full Circle](#), for example, Shannon Duncan describes recovering memories over the course of many psychedelic sessions of his grandfather sexually abusing him when he was a young child. After months of doubting the memories, Duncan brings the subject up with his mother who tells him that her brother accused the grandfather of the same thing years earlier. Duncan concludes, “It was then that I knew everything that had come up in my sessions around this was absolutely true and that there was no need to doubt myself any longer.” First-hand accounts that include mention of external evidence are noted as such in the “Notes” column in the [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Archive](#).

One other nod to the accuracy of memories recovered during and/or after the use of psychedelics appears in [this 1959 study](#) about psychedelic therapy. In it, the author writes, “One of the striking things about LSD treatment is the way in which the majority of the patients regress into childhood and appear to remember things which were apparently forgotten. In a number of cases it has been possible to ascertain from other sources that the events described by the patient did, in fact, happen, and this has been confirmed by some of my colleagues.”

The Healing Process Varies

Research and first-person accounts indicate that some people who recover traumatic memories during or after the use of psychedelics may leave the experience feeling unburdened or like a weight has been lifted, while others may experience new or increased – and potentially severe – distress and PTSD symptoms (or other mental and physical health challenges) for days, weeks, months, and even, in some cases, years. Some people may experience a wide variety of emotions, moving between a sense of freedom and a sense of fear. (After recovering my own memories, I simultaneously experienced the clearing up of a chronic health condition and a severe increase in PTSD symptoms like flashbacks, panic attacks, and nightmares.)

It is important to keep in mind that, while the process of integrating previously inaccessible traumatic memories is different for everyone, it is very common for there to be a fair amount of fear, rage, grief, and shame that comes up. Children block out memories because those memories would disrupt their daily lives and functioning, and because they can’t bear the feelings associated with them, which means that integrating those memories can require feeling, sharing, managing, and releasing the long-buried emotions that go along with them.

There is no one-size-fits-all model for healing from this experience, but certain forms of trauma therapy and peer support seem to be particularly helpful. More on this in the next section.

I Recovered Traumatic Memories During or After Using Psychedelics – Now What?

A Piece of My Story

I want to start this section by saying that unexpectedly recovering memories of childhood sexual abuse during a psychedelic-assisted therapy session was simultaneously the most destabilizing and restabilizing moment in my life.

It was destabilizing in ways that I don't have language for — the flashbacks, panic attacks, nightmares, rage, pain, loss of family relationships, and constant questioning upended my everyday life and almost destroyed me. At the same time, these memories were restabilizing in the sense that suddenly everything made sense about why I was the way that I was. The way that I created distance from the abuser, my shame spirals, my mysterious chronic health issues that no treatments could touch (chronic fatigue, migraines, TMJ, IBS), my struggles in intimate relationships — suddenly all of these things made sense (and some even started to go away).

It has been years since I recovered my first memory of the abuse in a psychedelic-assisted therapy session (in 2022). In that time, I have healed more than I ever thought was possible and am happier and more whole than I've ever been. In the weeks after my first session, I connected with someone from Reddit who shared about his own growth after recovering memories of sexual abuse while using psychedelics and told me, "The healing process is nonlinear but trends positive." This has undoubtedly been the case for me.

I'm sharing these pieces of my story because, if you are going through this challenging experience, I want you to know that I have been exactly where you are. And I not only survived it, but healed through it. There were periods when I wasn't convinced that I would survive, let alone get real healing, but I did. And you can, too.

Finding Therapeutic Support

As I shared in the previous section, there is no single model for how to process the challenging experience of recovering traumatic memories during or after the use of psychedelics. One of the options you might consider (if you haven't already done so) is finding a competent and experienced trauma-informed therapist or counselor — ideally one with knowledge of (or openness to learning about) recovered memories and psychedelics — who can support you in working with your experience.

Not all therapy is created equal. Not all therapists are a good match for you. When searching for therapists, you might consider looking for people who call themselves "trauma-informed." Some

specific modalities that people have found to work well with processing recovered memories include: Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Internal Family Systems (IFS), Somatic Experiencing, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, and psychodynamic or psychoanalytic therapy. I recommend avoiding therapists who only use one modality and identify themselves as just one type of therapist (i.e., “IFS therapist”), because they may lack the variety of models, skills and interventions that you may need in your healing process, including how you work with and integrate (potentially) recovered memories.²³

For those experiencing an increase (or, perhaps, initial occurrence) of PTSD symptoms – such as flashbacks, nightmares, self-destructive behavior, and heightened anxiety, aggression, and/or despair – it may be especially important that you seek professional support.

Therapists hold a wide range of views on the topic of recovered memories and it is important that you find someone who will treat you with the respect and care that you deserve as you navigate this challenging experience. Therapists who assume that recovered memories are false (see the section [What are Recovered Memories?](#) above) are not safe people to work with when trying to discern the accuracy of your memories. Likewise, therapists who automatically assume that the memories are real — even if you are not convinced of this yourself — are also not safe. The ideal trauma therapist would affirm that recovered memories can be both valid and invalid, and they would support you in coming to your own conclusions, in your own time.

It is also important to discern if a therapist has some knowledge of psychedelics.²⁴ Some therapists have been following the research and advances in psychedelic-assisted therapy closely (even participating in clinical trials or underground offerings) and some have not. Some have helped others integrate challenging psychedelic experiences and others have not. [ICEERS](#) offers up to five free sessions with a psychedelic integration specialist for people processing challenging psychedelic experiences, and MAPS maintains [a list of psychedelic integration specialists](#) who should have experience supporting people with processing all types of psychedelic experience.

Be aware that anyone can call themselves a “psychedelic integration specialist” regardless of their training or expertise — for example, some people on the MAPS list are licensed therapists, while others are non-therapists who have participated in different kinds of training. It is very important to look into an integration specialist’s credentials and also ask questions in your outreach to or consultation with them about their experience working with people with (potential)

²³ Books that have been particularly helpful to me in understanding how to integrate memories in a gentle and trauma-informed way are [Trauma and Dissociation Informed Internal Family Systems](#) by Joanne Twombly and [Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors](#) by Janina Fisher.

²⁴ While working with a therapist unversed in psychedelics might pose some challenges, it is not dangerous in the way that working with a therapist unaware of the validity of recovered memories would be. In general, I’d recommend finding a therapist who specializes in trauma and recovered memories rather than in psychedelics.

recovered memories of trauma (of which very few people outside of licensed therapists have deep knowledge).

Here are some questions to consider asking potential (or current) therapists or integration specialists to assess if they are the right fit for you:

- **To assess their knowledge:** What are your thoughts on recovered memories? Do you believe that people can go for years without recalling traumatic experiences? Do you believe that recovered memories are always or mostly accurate or inaccurate? What do you know about psychedelics and psychedelic therapy? *(Ideally, your therapist would understand that not remembering for years and then recovering memories is not a rare experience and is, in fact, a well-documented response to trauma. If they have some experience with psychedelics or psychedelic therapy – or are aware of how it works – that is also a plus.)*
- **To assess their experience:** Do you have specific training in working with abuse survivors? Have you worked with clients who have recovered memories of abuse (either during the use of psychedelics or otherwise)? *(Ideally, your therapist would have experience working with other abuse survivors who have recovered memories and/or have some training on the topic.)*
- **To assess their approach:** How do you support clients who have (or may have) recovered memories of abuse? *(Ideally, your therapist would follow your lead in how you are making sense of your memories rather than encourage you to fully believe or disbelieve them. They would understand that traumatic memories can be fragmented or distorted and that, because of this and other reasons, it can be a long road to arriving at a clear conclusion.)*
- **To assess if they are safe:** What does being a “trauma-informed” therapist mean to you? How do you respond to receiving critical feedback from clients if they don’t feel safe or supported by you? Has a complaint ever been filed against you? *(Ideally, your therapist would embrace and embody the principles of connection and empowerment at the heart of good trauma therapy. They would encourage feedback from you if you feel uncomfortable or unsafe in their presence and would not have any complaints filed against them (or would be able to offer a reasonable explanation for any complaints they may have). You should also notice if you feel safe with them during this conversation — even if they give satisfactory answers, how you feel in their presence is the most important thing.)*
- **To assess if they are the right fit for you:** How much experience do you have working with people of color and/or queer people and/or male abuse survivors [or whatever important identity or identities may apply to you]? *(Ideally, your therapist would share your identities, have experience working with people with your identities, or demonstrate commitments to cultural competence and humility, such as knowing how to use they/them pronouns or respecting the use of AAVE. Feeling safe/seen in these ways will likely help you to feel safe/seen as you explore your traumatic memories together.)*

For those in the U.S.: It is also important to check if a therapist accepts your health insurance (and how much your copay per session would be) if cost is a critical factor for you. Some therapists have sliding scale options for people without insurance or who are unable to pay out of pocket. There are also some state-specific organizations that provide free and affordable therapy for trauma survivors.

Finding Peer Support

In addition to finding an individual therapist, you might consider finding a peer support group online or in your area. These spaces can offer community and are often free or sliding scale.

Peer support for people with childhood trauma: [Adult Children of Alcoholics and Dysfunctional Families](#) (ACOA)²⁵ and [Survivors of Incest Anonymous](#) (SIA) are two free twelve-step groups with virtual and in-person options.

One virtual option for those with recovered memories of sexual abuse is [Hidden Water](#), an organization that offers free “circles” (peer-led support groups) for all members of a family affected by childhood sexual abuse.²⁶ [1in6](#) also offers a free and anonymous chat-based support group every weekday for male survivors of sexual abuse and assault.

Peer support for people integrating psychedelic experiences: If you are looking for a space in which you can process the psychedelic elements of your experience with others who have also used psychedelics, you might try looking for psychedelic peer support or integration.

[The Fireside Project](#) runs a peer support hotline you can call or text if you are in crisis during or after having a challenging psychedelic experience.²⁷ There are also in-person psychedelic integration groups led by local psychedelic societies and other organizations that you can find through Meetup. Virtual integration groups are being started all the time, like the Challenging Psychedelic Experiences Project’s [virtual support group](#). Do your best to assess how trauma-informed a given psychedelic integration group is by asking questions like the ones above in the section on finding a therapist.

²⁵ I have years of experience with ACOA and can attest that people with all varieties of childhood trauma attend, whether their parents were alcoholics or not, and many have experienced emotional, sexual, and physical abuse. This can be a great option for people who cannot afford individual therapy.

²⁶ I have participated in two different Hidden Water circles and met several other people in those groups who recovered memories while using psychedelics.

²⁷ I called the Fireside Project once in the midst of processing the memories I recovered during psychedelic-assisted therapy and happened to connect with someone who *also* recovered memories of sexual abuse during a previous psychedelic experience. I think this was the luck of the draw, but it’s nice to know that people with this experience are on their volunteer team.

Peer support for people who have recovered memories during or after the use of psychedelics:

As of now, the only resource like this is the [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories subreddit](#) that I created.²⁸ While this subreddit is *in no way* a replacement for therapeutic or formal peer support, it can be a place for people with this unique and challenging experience to anonymously share their stories and offer support to each other.

I encourage anyone reading this who has recovered memories during or after the use of psychedelics to consider sharing about their experience on the subreddit, whether you are looking for support or not. Reading your story could help other people feel less alone, less “crazy,” etc., and could help them have a sense of how they might be able to survive this oftentimes destabilizing experience. I especially encourage those who have found evidence or corroboration for their memories to post on the subreddit, as your stories can help counter the (untrue) narrative that recovered memories are always false.

If you do post to the subreddit, please leave out identifying information (such as your name, any potential perpetrator’s name, the name of a psychedelic therapist or guide, etc.). This is to protect you from any potential backlash (both legal and interpersonal).

Deciding How to Relate to Your Memories

Given the oftentimes fragmentary nature of recovered memories, the harmful legacy of the idea that all recovered memories are false, the mystical and hallucinogenic nature of some psychedelics, and the possible emotional and interpersonal repercussions of believing their memories to be real, people who have recovered memories during psychedelic therapy may, understandably, find themselves wondering if the memories they’ve recovered are real or not.

As I mentioned in the section above, the current research and information on the topic indicates that some people who have recovered memories during psychedelic therapy end up believing the memories are essentially or fully accurate (including based on confirmation from the perpetrator or other witnesses), others believe *some* details are accurate, others end up deciding that the memories are fully untrue, and still others conclude that they will never know the truth.

I encourage anyone struggling with this question to grant themselves, at a minimum, time and space to be with the underlying feelings and emotions related to their memories before deciding if they are true or not. These feelings may include fear, dread, pain, anger, disgust, sadness, and shame. Whatever feelings are arising are real, and it can be helpful to view them as having

²⁸ I imagine that, down the road, as more and more people have the experience of recovering traumatic memories while using psychedelics, there will be peer support groups specifically geared toward this experience. If you learn of anything like this, feel free to email me at psychedelicsrecoveredmemories@gmail.com and I will add it to this document.

come up for a reason: to be felt and healed. If, after processing some of these feelings (ideally, with therapeutic and/or peer support), it feels important for you to figure out if the specifics of what you remember are true, then that is something you can definitely pursue.

One common response I see in Reddit posts in which people are looking for support in determining if their memories are real or not is the advice to fully let go of needing to know what really happened and just be with the images, emotions, and sensations that the “memories” are bringing up. While I agree that the first step after recovering traumatic memories should be to feel the underlying feelings (so long as one can do that safely and manageably), there are many reasons that a person might want to then take steps to try to determine the validity of their memories, such as:

- Wanting to protect children from possible abuse at the hands of a given perpetrator (*this is relevant if the perpetrator is alive, and especially if they have regular access to children or other vulnerable populations*)
- Wanting to figure out if they should report to the police or consult with an attorney about potentially filing a civil suit or trying to hold the perpetrator accountable in some other way (*which would be hard to do without evidence*)
- Wanting a solid sense of reality so they are not stuck in a loop of self-doubt
- Wanting to know how they became the person they are (since that could help them understand what sort of healing and/or processing might be required to become the person they want to be)

Here are some options you could consider if you are trying to determine how to relate to your memories:

Seek external evidence: Once you are emotionally stable enough to do so (and ideally once you have therapeutic support), you might consider seeking external evidence for your memories. This could include reading through old diary entries, looking through old photos and videos, or otherwise finding documentation.

You could also consider reaching out to people who may have witnessed or known something (or even experienced abuse themselves) to see if they remember something. However, it's important to consider the experiences, wishes, and wellbeing of anyone you might approach in this way, because asking them could cause them distress or harm, such as by triggering recovery of memories (and it may be difficult or impossible for them to consent to potentially being triggered or harmed in such ways).

Contacting the potential perpetrator is also an option, though I recommend having safety precautions in place and thinking through what kind of emotional support you would need before, during, and after such a conversation. It is very common to receive negative reactions from potential perpetrators (as well as witnesses, family members, etc.) and professional support may be helpful in preparing for and processing these sorts of reactions.

It is important to state here that, while some people have been able to corroborate memories they recovered while using psychedelics, it is also possible that they will never find external evidence. Perpetrators almost always deny accusations of abuse (both to protect themselves and, in some cases, because of [perpetrator amnesia](#)), and other people who were present in a victim's life during the time of the abuse may have their own reasons for wanting to deny the reality or possibility of such things (e.g., to protect themselves from shame, from losing the perpetrator from their lives, and even from being sued or criminally charged).

Notice internal evidence: For those who don't find external evidence for the abuse they remembered experiencing, you can also notice if there is *internal* evidence for the abuse having occurred. You might consider asking yourself the following questions (while keeping in mind that your answers still may not provide solid confirmation):

1. Do these memories explain things about myself that I never understood (such as mental or physical health issues, emotional triggers, relationship patterns, etc.)?²⁹
2. Am I resisting the potential validity of my memories because it seems unlikely that they are true or because I don't want to and/or am afraid to believe they are true?
3. Were there aspects of my mindset or setting that could have led to the creation or exaggeration of these memories? (*See the section on "Set and Setting" above for more context for this question.*)
4. How did it feel when the memories came back into consciousness? Did I have a deep sense of knowing they were true? Did they feel like random images or words? Did they feel metaphorical or symbolic in some way?

It is important to remember that, no matter where you are in your process of deciding what you believe about your memories, you are allowed to create distance between yourself and your potential perpetrator(s) or loved ones who are denying abuse that you believe happened or condemning you for remembering, disclosing, and/or inquiring about it. And, while many people in your life may share their opinions on what you've remembered, *you* are the one who gets to decide what is true or not, and what steps you need to take to feel safe.

While providing advice on legal matters is outside the scope of this handbook, I will note that some people who are able to corroborate their memories do decide to pursue legal action, including suing perpetrators (or institutions that enabled and protected them), and others do not. Dr. Ross Cheit has created [an archive](#) of corroborated cases of recovered memories of sexual abuse, many of them adjudicated in courts of law, that it might be worthwhile to peruse.

²⁹ [This article](#) about the adult manifestations of childhood sexual abuse is an excellent resource for those trying to determine if there is internal validation for their memories of sexual abuse. Keep in mind that a person can also experience the symptoms listed in this article without having experienced abuse.

Other Resources

In addition to finding therapeutic support and figuring out how you want to relate to your memories, those who have recovered memories during or after the use of psychedelics may consider the following:

- **If you are in a state of crisis:** You can call the [RAINN](#) hotline (which offers support to survivors of sexual abuse) and/or call or text the [Fireside Project](#) hotline (which offers emotional support during and after psychedelic experiences).
- **If you feel alone in your experience:** I recommend reading through the stories in the [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Archive](#) (if they don't feel too triggering, and taking breaks as needed) and posting on the [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories subreddit](#). There are many people who have been exactly where you are now and have gotten through it.
- **If you are trying to figure out how to talk to family and friends about your experience:** I recommend sharing this document with them, as well as the [Resources for Family and Friends](#) page of Dr. Jim Hopper's website. That page does not address memories recovered during or after the use of psychedelics, but it does advise people on how to support their loved ones who have experienced abuse (with and without the recovered memory aspect of the experience). You could also share the [Recovered Memories of Sexual Abuse](#) section of his site for more context on this experience.

I Want to Recover Memories by Using Psychedelics – What Should I Do?

A Word of Warning

One thing I have noticed while searching Reddit for posts about psychedelics and recovered memories is that some people are searching for information about how they can use psychedelics for the *purpose* of recovering inaccessible memories. These posts are usually centered on some version of the question: *I have a feeling that there are traumatic memories that I've blocked from conscious awareness – can I use psychedelics to get them back?*

My number one piece of advice here, based on the research I've done, is to be very cautious when approaching psychedelics this way. This is because:

1. If memories are being kept from your conscious awareness there is likely a reason for that (i.e., your mind or brain may be protecting you because you're not yet sufficiently prepared and supported to face the memories)
2. Searching for a specific type of trauma in a suggestible state (like when one is using psychedelics, under hypnosis, etc.) poses a significant risk of creating false or distorted memories

To the first point: Your mind or brain may be keeping certain memories out of your awareness to protect you from confronting them before you are ready. Perhaps the perpetrator is still in your life and keeping the memories protects you from losing that relationship (or other relationships that may be tied to that one). Perhaps this is because you need to be able to go to work or school most days and, if the memories came back into consciousness, you would have a period of emotional instability or incapacitation which would threaten the stability that you need to survive or move forward in your life.

There is no way to know exactly why or how your mind or brain is keeping such memories locked away, if they exist. As someone whose life was derailed for over a year after unexpectedly recovering memories during psychedelic-assisted therapy, I strongly suggest that people with PTSD or signs of having experienced severe trauma go slowly with their psychedelic experiences, and have as much therapeutic and personal support as possible, both during and after.

To the second point: One of the main ways that people construct false memories is by going looking for something specific. The research suggests that a non-directive approach is paramount in ensuring that a person's psychedelic experience, especially with respect to memories, is authentically coming from them. As noted above, if a psychedelic user and/or their therapist, sitter, or guide is searching for specific memories or insights during the psychedelic experience, the risk of distorted or untrue memories increases. This approach can also tamper with any significant experiences and/or insights the psychedelic user might have arrived at organically.

Dr. Jim Hopper expands on the topic of searching for forgotten traumatic memories in the [Personal Questions](#) page of his website and I recommend reading that before pursuing psychedelics for this purpose.

A Few Tips

While I am not an expert on using psychedelics to recover memories—and, as I shared above, do not recommend people approach psychedelics this way—in the spirit of harm reduction, I offer some suggestions here for minimizing the likelihood and severity of harms that could happen to someone choosing that approach.

Start by trying gentler forms of accessing and integrating traumatic memories: While using psychedelics can lead to deep healing, entering psychedelic-induced altered states for the purpose of processing trauma can be overwhelming in the moment and difficult to integrate after. Trauma therapy modalities such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Internal Family Systems therapy (IFS), Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, and Somatic Experiencing – competently provided – all offer gentle ways of accessing trauma from the past. If it is financially possible for you, you might consider finding a trauma therapist who has training

and expertise in one or more of these modalities and sharing with them your intention to recover traumatic memories. See the section “Finding Therapeutic Support” earlier in this document for questions you can ask a therapist to see if they are the right fit for you.

Give yourself time to prepare: A lot of people who have experienced trauma or are living with PTSD (myself included) feel a sense of urgency when it comes to wanting to heal. This can be especially true for people who do not remember much of their childhoods, and/or have a felt sense that there are things that happened to them that are outside of their conscious awareness. *Wanting to know what happened to you is normal and understandable.* While having a sense of urgency makes total sense, it is important to act with intention, go slow, and have careful plans when it comes to engaging with powerful substances like psychedelics. Do research beyond this handbook. Talk to people about their experiences. If possible, work with a therapist who is open to doing “preparation” sessions with you (something they are legally allowed to do). Preparation sessions typically involve talking through hopes and fears related to a psychedelic experience so that you are able to enter the experience with as much groundedness and serenity as possible.³⁰

Pick the psychedelic you want to use carefully: As the [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Archive](#) suggests, people have recovered previously forgotten memories while using a wide variety of psychedelics. Though there is no empirical data about which psychedelics might be best for recovering memories, research does point to MDMA being particularly helpful in memory recall and integration due to the fact that it is not very hallucinogenic and can instill a deep sense of safety. Because ketamine is short-acting and can be easily titrated — and at lower doses can allow people to witness their memories without emotional overwhelm — it might also be worth considering for the purposes of accessing forgotten memories. Psychedelics like psilocybin and ayahuasca can be very powerful tools for memory recollection, too, though their hallucinogenic qualities can sometimes make it hard for people to discern what is “real” and what is not. In addition to picking the psychedelic you use carefully, be sure to test anything you are using (with a drug kit or otherwise) and use an appropriate dose. Dosage recommendations are outside the scope of this document but there are many helpful resources online (such as Psychedelic Support’s [Substance Guides](#)).

Develop an after-care plan: Before using psychedelics for the purpose of recovering memories, it is wise and prudent to create an after-care plan. What sorts of support might you need if you access upsetting or destabilizing memories? Can you schedule extra sessions with a therapist ahead of time? Are there friends or loved ones who can be on-call to support you in the hours and/or days after your psychedelic experience? Is it possible for you to take time off of work if you need to? I recommend telling safe and supportive loved ones what you are planning

³⁰ An Internal Family Systems approach to preparation for a psychedelic experience like this would be to get to know the “parts” of you wanting to locate traumatic memories by using psychedelics, as well as the parts resisting this approach. You would listen to all of their various worries and concerns (ideally with the support of a therapist) and only engage in psychedelic use when all of your parts agree to it.

to do and when, the risks involved, and what sort of support you may need from them in the days or weeks (or months) following your psychedelic experience.

Set a loose intention: Rather than setting an intention to discover what traumatic memories you are hiding from yourself, a better way to approach a psychedelic experience is to set a looser intention like “I want to see what is at the root of my depression” or “I want to know what it’s like to feel safe and loved.” (My memories, by way of example, emerged completely unexpectedly during a psychedelic-assisted therapy session that I approached with the simple intention of opening up to self-love.) If you can’t help but have a part of you that wants to recover memories, it’s best to acknowledge that and to find a way to respect that wish while not getting too attached to it before or during your psychedelic experience.

Use psychedelics in a safe setting: I recommend only using psychedelics for trauma processing in a setting that feels safe for you. Some people feel safe in a ceremonial or group space, some feel safe engaging in psychedelic-assisted therapy with one or two therapists, others feel safe with a loved one acting as a sitter or guide, and still others feel safe when using psychedelics alone. The underground nature of much psychedelic use — combined with many people’s desperation for healing — can lead to people using psychedelics in unsafe ways.

The healing you could potentially experience in using psychedelics in unsafe settings is *not worth* risking the potential harm you could experience. If you are in the U.S. and are interested in using psychedelics in a legal way, you might consider finding a ketamine-assisted psychotherapy practitioner,³¹ participating in [a clinical trial](#), and/or staying on top of the ever-changing legislation about which psychedelics are legal in your city and/or state (such as via [this site](#)). If you decide to pursue using psychedelics illegally, consider vetting sitters, guides, and/or therapists as best as you can (by asking questions about their approach, learning if they have experience working with people who have recovered traumatic memories, requesting references for people you can talk to who have worked with them, etc.).

Take integration seriously: Whether new memories emerge during your psychedelic experience or not, there will likely be aspects of your experience that it will be helpful to talk about (or express in other ways) and integrate. If you *do* end up recovering memories, I recommend reading through the section of this document called [I Recovered Traumatic Memories During or After the Use of Psychedelics – Now What?](#)

³¹ Ketamine-assisted (psycho)therapy is different from “ketamine infusion therapy” that most “ketamine clinics” offer. Ketamine infusions typically do not involve therapeutic support at any point, whereas ketamine-assisted (psycho)therapy is centered on building a trusting relationship with a therapist who will offer support with preparation and integration, as well as act as a guide during sessions. You can read more about the difference between these options [here](#).

Concluding Thoughts

I want to end this handbook by restating that I am just one person sharing research takeaways and personal thoughts on this topic (with support and feedback from a few experts). I encourage you to think critically about everything I've shared and discern what is true and right for *you*.

If you do not agree with some of what I've shared, think that I'm missing important research or resources, or have other feedback or questions you want to share with me, please feel free to reach out to me at psychedelicsrecoveredmemories@gmail.com or fill out [this anonymous feedback form](#). This project is one of many things in my life, so I may take some time to get back to you.

I started the [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Project](#) because I noticed that there was a huge gap between the scholarship on this topic (which normalizes the experience of recovering memories during or after the use of psychedelics) and the way that people going through this often understand their experience (as invalid, abnormal, or a sign that they are "crazy"). I have also written this and shared it with you because I saw people turning to many different subreddits and parts of the internet with the same questions and experiences, occasionally receiving informed support but, more often, receiving the familiar (and false) refrain that recovered memories are not based in reality.

My hope is that, by reading through this handbook, you end up feeling more knowledgeable on this topic, more empowered to acquire whatever additional knowledge you may need, and more prepared to take whatever the right next step is in your process/healing.

Quick Links

- [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Project website](#)
- [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories Archive](#)
- [Psychedelics and Recovered Memories subreddit](#)
- [Offer anonymous feedback on this document](#)
- To share questions/concerns: psychedelicsrecoveredmemories@gmail.com