Excerpts from The ZENDO PROJECT TRAINING MANUAL

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PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHEDELIC HARM REDUCTION

Every year millions of people will use psychedelics, many for the first time. Some of these psychedelic experiences will be difficult ones. Even though society has termed these experiences "bad trips," a difficult psychedelic experience is not necessarily a bad one. The challenging situation can be seen as an opportunity for transformation.

A psychedelic experience is influenced by the set and setting. Set refers to the drug as well as the mindset of the person taking it. What is the dose, duration, and purity of the drug? What is the person's intention, their emotional state, and their previous experience with the substance? Setting refers to the physical environment: noise, lighting, other people, familiarity, safety. Changes in set and setting can radically shift a psychedelic experience.

There are four basic principles of harm reduction:

1. **Create a safe space** – Try to create a calm environment, most importantly, be being a calm presence. Ask what would make them most comfortable. Offer blankets and water. Ask permission before touching someone in any way. Keep personal information in confidence.

2. **Sitting, not guiding -** Be a calm meditative presence of acceptance, compassion, and caring. Promote feelings of trust and security. Let the person's unfolding experience be the guide. Don't try to get ahead of the process. Explore distressing issues as they emerge, but simply being with the person can provide support.

3. **Talk through, not down** – Without distracting from the experience, help the person connect with what they are feeling. Invite the person to take the opportunity to explore what's happening and encourage them to try not to resist it.

4. **Difficult is not the same as bad** – Challenging experiences can wind up being our most valuable, and may lead to learning and growth. Consider that it may be happening for an important reason. Suggest that they approach the fear and difficult aspects of their experience with curiosity.

HOW TO WORK WITH DIFFICULT PSYCHEDELIC EXPERIENCES

A true psychedelic experience, even a so-called bad trip, is sacred. In earth-oriented, shamanic cultures, even a psychotic breakdown, induced by a psychedelic, is part of the initiation. So remember the way of the ancients: this is a process, a process of awakening, healing, and ultimately celebrating life. To avoid psychologizing the psychedelic experience I have avoided medical or traditional therapeutic language.

1. Role of the Sitter or Facilitator

2. Varieties of Psychedelic-Induced Crises

3. Working and Being with Psychedelic Emergencies

4. Aftercare

5. Related Readings

1. ROLE OF THE SITTER OR FACILITATOR

The work with psychedelics, entheogens, and plant teachers is an area of the healing arts that is ancient and has been rediscovered in the last 100 years. There are many different ways to work with and understand the psychedelic experience. When we work and sit with a person going through a psychedelic-induced crisis, it is important to understand that in a certain way this is a dialectic relationship, a way of relating that is ancient.

Every person is a psycho-spiritual system, meaning there is no separation of body, mind, emotion, soul, imagination and energy. Therefore it is very important to see each person as a unique individual. There is always the tendency to overpower the other with our knowledge, wisdom, and insight. So let go of all knowledge regarding the experiences that the person is having. Just be with, listen, and observe. This brings us back to the dialectical relationship, paying full attention, allowing the other to express and communicate whatever they want. Just being, without a putdown or judgment.

It is important for the healer/sitter/helper to believe in her/his way of working. The belief in the method is important for the results. The healer/sitter therefore is someone who has had their own psychedelic experience and has had some experience sitting for people, guiding her/his friends. Without any experience, it is impossible to just be with someone having a psychedelic experience or

guiding someone having a psychedelic crisis. It is good to know that we all have blind spots and there is the danger that we might stop the experience if we have not explored this material or are afraid.

Rule #1, under any condition, is that we honor and respect the person having the crisis. Even if we don't understand what's happening (the person having the crisis might be much more developed than we are, lost in worlds unknown to us, or reliving a drama we can't comprehend), we serve as an anchor, a resting place, and a quiet center. We know that our presence is helpful. At this moment we don't have to solve all the problems and answer all the questions that the experience or the person's life presents. We have to remember that tens of millions of people have used psychedelics, in many different, sometimes not very supportive, environments, and returned home safely. With support, knowledge, and integrative work there is very little danger in the psychedelic experience itself. Even the most frightening and bizarre behavior, when explored and worked with, will turn out to be beneficial and enlightening.

As stated earlier, the positive outcome of our work requires trusting the wisdom of the ancients, trusting the wisdom of our modern teachers and healers, and trusting the built-in wisdom of our bodies, minds and souls. We frequently pick up emotions and feelings and energies from others. We will cover ways of clearing, cleansing, and purification.

2. VARIETIES OF PSYCHEDELIC CRISES

This is a vast area, so we will just touch on it. For a more in-depth study, see the reading list. There is no clear manifestation of any substance or mixture of substances. But there are some generalities. It is very important to know the active duration of the different substances. All psychedelics have a similar pattern: there's the doorway with different physical, mental and emotional manifestations. There is a buildup, then an extended stay on a plateau, then the coming down, re-entry.

The most common felt threat to sanity is the feeling/experience that one is going crazy, losing one's mind, or that this will never end. This feeling/experience is supported by changing mental states and powerful (sometimes) changes in perception. Major shifts in ego/personality structure, regarding one's belief and understanding of oneself, the world, and god, are common.

Old traumas can be remembered and relived. These memories can be of a physical nature (reliving one's birth, childhood abuse and/or illness, memories of famine and/or war, accidents, rape are some

of the possibilities of re-emergence). These memories can also be of an intellectual, emotional nature (reliving verbal abuse, a lack of basic emotions, body contact, love, nurture, or a disassociation due to a traumatic experience).

These traumas can also be of a transpersonal nature, meaning phenomena that go beyond our personal identity or biographical understanding of the universe. These could be experiences from another life, becoming one with the earth or other life forms, or experiencing the life cycle of an animal. One could leave one's body, have the experience of merging with an archetype, or experience the world of a god or a goddess. The memory of a violent death can be a most traumatic experience.

There can be many different, sometimes never experienced, sensory, energy, and body sensations. These can range from hearing colors to seeing music. It could be an extremely heightened sense of smell, taste, hearing and vision. Some of the most frightening manifestations of the psychedelic experience are energetic. People go through powerful releases, rendering their bodies out of control, shaking, twisting and vibrating. These energies, being activated by the psychedelic substances, could be related to birth, an opening of a frozen body pattern, bioenergetic, neo-Reichian type of release, or be a reconnecting with the universal life force. The life force is called the kundalini and it manifests in a powerful opening of the body's energy center. It could also be an intensive sexual or other emotional release. The body sensations also cover a wide range of sensations and feelings. This can be the feeling (for the first time in one's life) of coming home into the body.

Here's a small list of other possible experiences:

- Relieving birth (
- Remembering different deaths (
- Relieving accidents (
- Reliving illness (
- Reliving drowning, torture, and many other physical experiences from this and (

  other lives
- Reliving mystical states (

- Identifying with and reliving in detail the victimization of humans throughout (history. (
- Leaving the body and traveling in the spirit realm (
- Merging with rocks, animals, plants and experiencing the pollution and death of the (planet and different species (
- Merging with people, reading their minds, feeling their emotions (
- Being caught in a certain experience (
- Being overwhelmed by feelings and emotions (

In a psychedelic experience and crisis the person may react to the healer/sitter and project her/his own feelings and experiences onto the healer/sitter. This could be a sexual, demonic, godlike or fearful transference. When this takes place it is important just to be with, not to defend the transference.

3. WORKING WITH THE PSYCHEDELIC CRISIS

The experience of the person's crisis is, many times, one of letting go on all levels of one's being. So we have to create a space where it is possible to be open, a space that's quiet, warm, safe, and beautiful. This space is as important as the sitting/facilitating itself. If possible, have flowers, candles, art and writing supplies, blankets, quiet music and soft light.

Pay attention to the body language while you listen to what's being expressed verbally and emotionally. Follow the expression of the person. If they have a lot of energy, let the energy move, let it express itself (we provide a safe space) in whatever form: uncontrolled shaking, yoga postures, dancing, ritualistic type of movements, hyperventilation, kundalini type release.

If the person wants to speak, if sounds come out uncontrolled, support the expression. This might be: a different or dead language, prayers from the different spiritual traditions, far-out stories and memories, jibberish, animal sounds, looping sentences (repeating over and over the same words), lamenting, cries, or screams.

Respond when needed, do not take over - try to (if appropriate) engage in a calm conversation, responding to fear and anxiety. The most appropriate response to a powerful psychedelic crisis

might be to just sit quietly with the person, making them feel safe.

If the person is stuck there are several different ways to respond:

- Wait and calm them down through talk, knowing the duration of the substance taken
- Walk with them, talking or not, until they calm down (
- Have them express the experience through sound (
- Have them move through it, through a physical expression, holding a certain posture (or letting the body go (
- One could do some deep, focused bodywork, just hold someone (meeting their (needs) or gently massage them. Always ask for permission regarding any kind of (physical contact. (
- Have appropriate sitter regarding male/female, important when recall of sexual (abuse takes place. (
- The person could recline, eyes closed or blindfolded, being in a safe place, listening (to comforting music and grounding the experience. (
- If their emotions are overwhelming them, encourage their expression. (
- When the person is calm enough or has come back from their difficult psychedelic (experience, have art supplies and writing material available. (
- Reassure them: 1. This will pass, this is a process. 2. This is an experience other people have had. (There will be support afterwards.

4. AFTERCARE

There are many ways to integrate the experience and to continue working with the opening that took place. It is important to complete any unfinished gestalt. Further reading should be encouraged, and the person should work with a trained practitioner to complete the experience. This could be: (

- Transpersonally-oriented psychotherapy (
- Holotropic Breathwork (
- Shamanic Integration work (
- Different forms of bodywork (
- Different forms of energy release work (

- Work with archetypes (
- Different art forms, making music, dancing, painting, sculpting (
- Meditation and other spiritual practices (following the images or insights of the (experience) (
- There are certain medical conditions that should be treated by the medical management. There can be medical pre-existing conditions that are adverse to the taking of psychedelics. Some of the most common are: pregnancy, mental illness, cardiovascular problems like abnormal blood pressure or other heart problems, recent surgeries and/or accidents, and epilepsy

INTEGRATING A PSYCHEDELIC EXPERIENCE By Sara Gael Girón

A psychedelic trip does not end after a substance wears off, rather it continues on through the process of integration. Integration is the phase within which an individual assimilates and incorporates an experience into their psyche, body, and life. In psychotherapeutic terms integration is a process of making the subconscious conscious. After a psychedelic experience, integration is the process of reorganizing the self to include the material experienced during the altered state.

The integration phase has no definitive time frame. In fact, it can be said that once one has ingested a psychedelic substance, they will be integrating the experience for their entire lifetime! Some Guests stay in the Zendo until after they come down from a trip and are with us through the acute integration phase. Some people come seeking support with the integration of a previous experience. In either case, helping an individual process and integrate their experience can be hugely helpful, especially if the experience was difficult, extremely mind altering, or disruptive to their life or relationships. The following tools can be used to support the integration process:

INTENTION

The psychedelic experience really begins when we choose to ingest a substance. Intentions for taking a psychedelic medicine affect the entire experience, all the way through integration and are the threads that tie the whole experience together. Having a clear intention (ex. to access my creativity, to help heal my relationship with my family, to explore stuck life patterns, to connect with others, to play, etc.) sets the stage for a positive experience. When possible, we encourage people to develop clarity around intentions before taking a substance. However, in the Zendo we most often see people after the fact. Intention is still just as important during integration as it is in the pre-journey phase.

Helpful questions you can ask include:

- Now that you have had this experience, what would you like to remember/carry forward/complete? (
- What visions/information are you bringing home to your community? (
- How can you manifest these visions on the physical plane? In your life? Work? (Relationships? (
- What was your intention before taking the substance? (There is always some (intention, even if it wasn't consciously considered at the time). How did your (experience reflect your intention? (
- How does your experience affect your identity? Who is the person you want to become in your life and how can this experience contribute to your growth and expansion? (
    - What are your intentions in life and how did this experience contribute to your larger goals and desires?

Focusing on the experience as a positive life-changing event (even if it didn't feel like one) can help the Guest focus on potential outcomes and help them connect with how to use the experience as a catalyst for change and transformation in their lives. Intention setting helps an individual use what they have learned during the journey to manifest change in their lives.

COMMUNITY

One of the most difficult aspects of integration is returning to a society that doesn't understand or support psychedelic exploration. In fact, re-entering society can feel like a stark contrast between the interconnected, transpersonal state of the psychedelic experience. Therefore, one of most important tools for successful integration is a supportive, understanding community. The Zendo is a community space where Guests can come to feel this supportive connection with others who can hold their stories with respect and reverence.

Listening, mirroring, and reflecting someone's story helps them feel seen and understood and incorporates the experience into their psyche and life. Stories are sacred. Remind an individual that their stories are important, not just for them, but also for the collective. Creating a community culture where we share our visions and revelations with each other is profound and necessary not just for the individual but also for their community. We encourage our Guests to connect with and build supportive communities around themselves when they return home from the event.

We support them in seeking professional help if necessary.

EMBODIMENT

It is relatively easy to ingest a substance and have a mind-altering experience. The real work begins when we try to carry what we have learned back to our daily lives and communities. Embodiment is the process of integrating knowledge, wisdom, and experience into the fabric of one's being. It is the process whereby ideas become actual beliefs, practices, and behavior. One thing that can be helpful is to remind the Guest that the ego mind cannot possibly comprehend and make sense of the totality of a peak experience. When we try to mentally understand every aspect of the experience, we can become anxious, depressed, etc. The body and the heart have the capacity to hold our most intense life experiences including the grief, trauma, ecstasy, overwhelming emotions, and revelations that can come with psychedelic use.

Tools for embodiment include: art, movement, talking, music, dance, poetry, writing, the language of symbols and archetypes, spending time in nature, bodywork, somatic therapy, etc. It is never too late to begin this process.