

# Integrating a psychedelic experience

A study from The University of Sydney, Australia described that a minority of participants who attended a psilocybin truffle retreat spontaneously reported a **post-experience integration challenge**.

These integration challenges were transient; they occurred in the days and weeks following the retreat, and resolved with time. The reported **post-experience integration challenges** align with existing literature that describes the 'spiritual emergency' phenomenon. Spiritual emergency is defined as a difficult developmental process, whereby an individual passes through a state of crisis and emerges "to a higher level of psychological organization with an enhanced sense of spirituality" (Evans & Read, 2020, pp. x–xi)

What kind of integration challenges may occur?

1. (perceived) Lack of support
2. (perceived) Disconnection from community
3. Post-ecstatic blues
4. Mood fluctuations
5. Spiritual bypass
6. Re-experiencing symptoms

Study suggests that integration challenges in the context of a therapeutic or mystical psychedelic experience are not uncommon and in some cases are an integral part of the transformative potential of such experiences.



Challenging experiences are more likely to become an issue if you are isolated and **lacking social support**.

Sometimes, after a wonderful psychedelic experience, you might find yourself left all alone to understand it, process it, and try and incorporate the insights into their lives. You might feel that you need more one-on-one support after your psilocybin experience. Maybe you long for support to put the experience into context.

Do not hesitate to reach out and consider one of the following options:

- Confide in a good supportive friend/trustee
- Reach out to someone who has also experienced a psychedelic trip
- Contact us (by mail or WhatsApp) for additional integrative coaching sessions
- Contact us and let us refer you to a psychologist for supportive integrative therapy
- Contact us and let us refer you to a psychiatrist for follow-up and counseling



Feeling **disconnected from community** after an ecstatic experience is a relatively common phenomenon.

On the one hand, this feeling stems from a lack of support and understanding from one's social environment. On the other hand, some people may see themselves as different, special or even superior to others who have not had a similar experience.

This is the main reason why we recommend confiding in a supportive person who is close to you or someone who went through a similar psychedelic experience. It is really important to be able to talk about your experiences with people who can relate, and not people who are going to look at you skeptically and make you question your own experience.



Immediately following an ecstatic psychedelic experience, you can feel that you have transcended mundane reality and your previous psychological concerns and issues. The ecstatic experience is characterized by overwhelming feelings of love, euphoria, gratitude and a deep understanding of the meaning of life.

Low mood or sadness can occur when this high inevitably wears off and you return to your previous baseline state. Mundane reality can feel 'ordinary', 'ugly' and 'fake,' and you might experience a **post-ecstatic blues**. A participant that underwent a challenging return to ordinary reality described it as *"falling from the sky and hitting the pavement hard"*.

Some people experience an afterglow from their psychedelic session that lasts for weeks or a month that suddenly fades away when they return to business as usual. They experience a **delayed post-ecstatic blues** when confronted with their day-to-day reality.

This low mood can last for several hours up to a few days. In the days following the psilocybin experience some individuals occasionally feel "dips" in their mood and it takes them a few weeks to integrate the experience and return to a normal baseline mood.

This is why different spiritual traditions suggest that one should not get attached to ecstatic experiences, remind oneself they are temporary and not of value in themselves, and even lean into the disappointment and mundanity that often follows such experiences.



**Emotional volatility and mood fluctuations** have been reported in the days and weeks following a psychedelic experience.

It is quite possible that you experience mood fluctuations, such as feelings of overwhelming sadness and cathartic crying, immediately following the psilocybin session. However, elevated mood and high energy are equally possible. These effects are usually transient and disappear within hours or days.

Meditation, breathing exercises and visualizations can help you regain a stable mood.

Your brain was in a state of "hyperconnectivity" under the influence of psilocybin. As a result, you are currently more receptive to changing old thinking and behavior patterns and

even deeply entrenched beliefs. This period offers you an opportunity to plant new seeds in this sense.

If you find it challenging to bring substance and shape to this post-experience phase we can offer you help or guidance in the form of integrative coaching sessions.



In rare cases, participants manifest signs of '**spiritual bypass**'. This is a term that is used to describe situations where an individual seeks to evade or ignore their psychological issues by immersing themselves completely in a spiritual worldview and avoiding the important (albeit often difficult and painful) work at the other levels, including the cognitive, physical, emotional, and interpersonal.

Common problems emerging from spiritual bypass include compulsive goodness, repression of undesirable or painful emotions, spiritual narcissism, spiritual obsession or addiction, blind faith in charismatic leaders, abdication of personal responsibility, and social isolation.



Another rare phenomenon is the Hallucinogen Persisting Perception Disorder (HPPD), where people report persistent 'flashbacks' or ongoing **re-experiencing symptoms** after their psychedelic experiences.

If you believe you are suffering from HPPD, please contact us by mail ([info@tripcoach.be](mailto:info@tripcoach.be)). We can refer you to a specialist.

Source:

ANNA LUTKAJTIS (The University of Sydney, Australia) and JULES EVANS (Centre for the History of Emotions, Queen Mary University of London, United Kingdom), Journal of Psychedelic Studies; *Psychedelic integration challenges: Participant experiences after a psilocybin truffle retreat in the Netherlands*.