



PREPARATION GUIDE

for psychedelic facilitators

Developing Rapport & Relationship

As you get to know your client, listen to how they talk about themselves. Listen to how they relate to their suffering. Listen to how they relate to you and the environment you're creating.

You might ask about:

- How your client found you; What led them to this decision?
- Their current life circumstances: living situation, relationships, work/school, etc.
- Key life events, which might include traumas but could include other impactful events.
- Any other important details of their life experience, family of origin, intergenerational history.
- Any aspects of their identity that are important to them, that would help you understand and support them best, or that shape their life experience.

Exploring Expectations

- What do they know about this medicine? What have they heard about it?
- What are their feelings about embarking on this experience? Fears?
- How do they expect to feel during their experience?
- How do they expect to feel after?
- Normalize the humanness of having expectations and help them hold these lightly.
- Listen for, and provide education around, any concerning expectations (e.g. psychedelics will “fix” them, psychedelics are a panacea, they will definitely have [insert experience], etc.)

Education and Orientation

- Discuss mechanisms of action and mechanisms of change for the medicine(s) being worked with.
- Describe the range of potential effects and experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness - perceptual, emotional, cognitive, physical, somatic, mystical. Describe the typical arc of experience.
- Orient the client to relevant details of the setting, including use of music, eyeshades.
- Orient the client to the phases of the process: Preparation, Medicine, Integration.
- Provide education about your role as the facilitator: A monitor of their safety; A non-directive support, not the same as a traditional therapist or coach.

Tending to the Relationship

Your relationship will be a container through which healing can (or cannot) occur. If there is any disconnection in the relationship, consider addressing it directly and compassionately, and taking time to repair before sitting with medicine. It can be helpful to explore how they are feeling with you as you flow through preparation. Continue to check in on these things throughout the process.

- How are you feeling with me, so far?
- What is it like to talk about these things with me?
- What things can I do (or not do) to support you best?
- If there is ever a moment where you feel your comfort feels compromised, please let me know.

Client Skills for A Safe Psychedelic Experience

Psychedelics can present challenging subjective experiences of all kinds. At times, in the moment, and without preparation, these experiences can feel intolerable. If a client can tolerate, and even welcome, a challenging experience, the possibility for transformation can increase. Conversely, if they attempt to reject, fight or control the challenging experience, it can only heighten the tension. It is important that we discuss and practice tools together for the client to utilize during those moments.

- Curiosity: Introduce the client to the non-directive approach with open-ended questions. Model curiosity; ask thoughtful questions about themselves and their here-and-now experiences.
- Trust: Introduce the concept of inner healing intelligence. Model trust by remaining client-centered, following the client's inner-directed process, and remaining regulated and centered.
- Openness: Ask the client, what would it be like for you to have a challenging experience? What if your experience goes differently than you expected or desired? Practice rooting in openness and sitting with the unknown. Invite the idea of surrender or "turning toward."
- Presence: Throughout preparation, model a slow pace. Invite the client to pause and sit with their emotions, sensations, thoughts, and internal experiences as they prepare for the journey.
- Resilience & Self-Regulation: Practice self-regulation techniques together throughout preparation, which may include paced breathing, self-compassion, or mindfulness practices.

Client Support, Safety & Resources

- Review safety agreements and emergency plans, such as what would happen if they had a medical or psychiatric emergency. Review the agreement that they will stay with you throughout the duration of their psychedelic experience and they will not drive afterwards.
- Review lifestyle requirements such as stopping other substance use, medication plans with aid of their prescriber, dietary considerations including when and how much to eat.
- Ideally the client can set aside ample time for sessions, rest, and integration.
- Urge the client not to make major life decisions right after their experience.
- Assess for their level of social support. Explore how they might communicate (or not communicate) with others about their personal process.

Consent for Touch

Supportive touch, such as holding hands or placing a hand on the client's shoulder, can be a source of physical grounding and emotional reassurance during the psychedelic experience. As a facilitator, be honest with yourself about your comfort level and boundaries. *You do not have to offer supportive touch.* Safety touch refers to any necessary contact to ensure safety (e.g. client is falling over).

- First and foremost, affirm that the client's wishes around touch will be respected at all times.
- Establish the difference between safety touch & supportive touch. Safety touch may be required; client must consent to safety touch.
- Directly state that supportive touch will never be sexual in nature.
- Inform the client that they can decline or withdraw consent for supportive touch at any time.
- If the client consents to supportive touch, practice during preparation. Practice what touches will be used, how to ask for it, and how to decline or disengage. This may include nonverbal cues.
- If you do not offer supportive touch and/or if they decline, you might explore other alternatives they can practice, such as a soft blanket around their shoulders, holding a pillow, or a self-hug.

Setting Intentions

Intentionality is powerful and important. Intentions provide direction as the client navigates their change process. A client's intentions should align with what is most meaningful to them, and illustrate their vision of their desired way(s) of being. Some important aspects of intention-setting are below.

- Framing intentions as being purposeful in the process, rather than expecting an outcome.
- Reinforcing that the client is an active agent of change.
- Exploring their values and what is important to them.
- Exploring, how might they want to relate to themselves / others / the world differently?
- Discuss holding intentions lightly; Also being open to intentions changing over time.
- Intentions extending beyond the psychedelic experience; A frame through which to integrate.

As Facilitators - Checking in with Ourselves

Facilitators have unique responsibilities in holding space for intense experiences. Facilitators must take extra time in our own lives for self-care. If facilitators ignore themselves or their own internal processes throughout the arc of treatment, they can negatively impact the container that is essential to safe psychedelic experiences. Here are some questions to start with, for your personal reflection.

- Am I comfortable holding space for this client? What feelings am I having toward my client so far?
- Am I competent to work with this person's particular identities and experiences?
- Are there concerns I have about their suitability for a psychedelic experience?
- Am I staying true to my own boundaries? Am I pushing myself beyond my boundaries?
- Am I feeling pulled toward or away from my client in any noticeable way?
- What do I have in place to take care of myself through this process?