

If you have had—or think you might have had—a near-death experience (NDE), you probably have at least some interest in talking about it. Although some experiencers’ desire to talk is to proselytize—to try to convert the listener to a particular point of view or belief system—most experiencers’ desire is to process the experience—understand it and integrate it into one’s life. Some of the most common issues experiencers want to talk over with someone else are the question of whether their experience actually was an NDE; the desire to review the experience itself to try to describe it and to express the frequently powerful feelings, thoughts, and insights associated with its content; and the need to understand what the experience means for oneself and one’s future life.

Many near-death experiencers (NDErs) consider their NDE to be the most profound experience of their lives. Because of the unique nature of NDEs, finding a knowledgeable and helpful listener may present a challenge. Although a medical, mental health, or religious professional is probably more likely to be helpful, professional preparation is not a guarantee of suitability. A family member or friend might be extremely supportive; on the other hand, if they feel threatened by or judgmental about the NDE itself or the changes it inspires in the NDEr, they might have difficulty listening with an open and supportive attitude. Likewise, talking with another NDEr may or may not be helpful. In fact, the best listener might be someone completely unexpected. The following discussion will offer some points for the NDEr to consider when seeking a caregiver with whom to discuss the experience.

1. You deserve to find one or more people who can help you process your experience and its meaning for your life. Beginning with this sense of appropriate entitlement can support you through the sometimes trial-and-error nature of finding someone who truly facilitates your integration of your experience.
2. You deserve to protect yourself and your experience from misunderstanding, discounting, or abuse. Be discerning about the person(s)

in whom you confide! You can exercise this discernment by initiating discussion only with someone who displays helpful qualities and by exercising your right to end any discussion that turns in a direction that seems irreversibly unhealthy. How do you recognize a health-promoting helper?

- a. While talking with the helper, you feel safe, understood, and accepted. You do not feel judged. Your helper seems interested in your experience. Your helper seems to be able to “relate to” your experience, through their own similar experience(s), their knowledge of NDEs or NDE-like experiences, and/or their empathy. Your helper seems committed to your welfare. Your helper rarely misinterprets what you’re saying and accepts your corrections of any misinterpretations. Your helper refrains from imposing meanings onto your experience or onto you that do not fit your own interpretations. In your process of finding your way in the aftermath of your NDE, you feel consistently supported, perhaps occasionally guided, rarely directed, and never forced or coerced by the helper.
- b. After talking with the helper, you feel benefited. The benefit often involves positive feelings, such as relief, joy, and/or optimism, and new insights. You are not left feeling ashamed, guilty, or manipulated into thoughts or actions that contradict your sense of what is right or best for you. You might, for example, feel empowered to be more positive and to behave in more loving ways. The benefit also can involve temporarily distressing feelings associated with growth. For example, in the aftermath of an NDE, experiencers sometimes feel the need to make difficult and important life decisions that affect both themselves and others. Ultimately, beneficial change involves a sense of moving forward in an overall constructive direction that really “fits.”

- c. If you are uncertain whether a particular person will be truly helpful to you, put out “feelers,” such as, “Have you ever heard of people having unusual experiences during [surgery, an accident, an illness]? What do you think of such experiences?” Beginning with the person’s response to your feeler, and throughout an ongoing exchange with the potential helper, check inside yourself to notice how safe and beneficial the exchange seems to be for you. Believe in, and act on, your right to choose whether or not to continue discussing your NDE based on your own sense of safety and benefit. You and your experience are precious; you deserve to nurture and to protect both yourself and your NDE.
3. Don’t give up. Expect that you might experience a few “flops” before you find someone whom you experience as truly helpful to you. Also, consider that some people may be helpful in a limited way and/or for a limited time. Cultivate an attitude whereby you receive what is useful and you move on without blame from the less-than-helpful encounter.

One final point is to become familiar with other sources of support:

- ◆ Visit the IANDS website at <http://www.iands.org>. Social resources include contact information for the approximately 50 local Friends of IANDS support groups that meet usually on a monthly basis, as well as IANDS’ message board. Media resources include brief articles on various NDE-related topics, an *Introductory Bibliography of Near-Death Experiences* that lists recommended readings, and a list of audiotapes of presentations from past IANDS conferences that can be purchased.
- ◆ If you’re trying to find a counselor or other mental health professional, contact the Center for Psychological & Spiritual Health (formerly the Spiritual Emergence Network) at <http://www.cpsph.org> or by phone at (415) 575-6299. Information about how to choose

a psychotherapist is detailed in the *Experiencer's Guide to Psychotherapy*, available at <http://www.iands.org/therapist.html>.

- ◆ If you would like to do in-depth reading on specific NDE-related topics, contact the IANDS office or web site to purchase the *Near-Death Experiences Research Bibliography*. This bibliography enables you to generate a citations list of every *Anabiosis* and *Journal of Near-Death Studies* article published through 2001 that addresses a particular topic related to NDEs, and, if desired, to purchase reprints of the listed citations from the IANDS office.
- ◆ If you still have questions, please feel free to contact the IANDS office using the contact information that appears on this brochure.



**For More Information, write . . .**

**IANDS**

**2741 Campus Walk Avenue  
Building 500  
Durham, NC 27705**

**telephone . . . (919) 383-7940;**

**or visit . . . our web site at  
[www.iands.org](http://www.iands.org)**

Incorporated in Connecticut in 1981 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization according to Internal Revenue Service regulations, the International Association for Near-Death Studies, Inc. (IANDS) mission is to respond to needs for information and support concerning near-death and similar experiences. IANDS' goals are:

- ◆ To encourage thoughtful exploration of all facets of near-death and similar experiences;
- ◆ To provide reliable information about such experiences to experiencers, caregivers, researchers, and the public;
- ◆ To serve as a contact point and community for people with particular interest in near-death and similar experiences.

IANDS maintains no "party line" on the interpretation of near-death or similar experiences and is open to the presentation of varying responsible points of view. The Association is committed to scholarly investigation of the NDE and to providing accurate information based on those findings.

IANDS publishes two quarterly periodicals, the scholarly *Journal of Near-Death Studies* and the newsletter *Vital Signs*, in addition to other informational materials. It sponsors a national conference in North America annually and other conferences occasionally.

If you found this brochure helpful and would like to help others have access to such information, you can support IANDS through

- ◆ ongoing membership,
- ◆ donations of money, and/or
- ◆ donations of your time and talents.

Please use the contact information that appears on this brochure.

## *Caring for the Near-Death Experiencer:*

## *Considerations for Experiencers*



International Association for  
Near-Death Studies, Inc.

2741 Campus Walk Avenue  
Building 500  
Durham, NC 27705  
(919) 383-7940  
[www.iands.org](http://www.iands.org)  
[services@iands.org](mailto:services@iands.org)

*Written by Janice Holden, Ed.D., and the  
IANDS Board of Directors  
© 2002 IANDS*