



If you are trying to find a counselor or other mental health professional, you can contact the American Center for the Integration of Spiritually Transformative Experiences, at www.aciste.org NDErs who want information about how to choose a psychotherapist can consult the *Experiencer's Guide to Psychotherapy*, available at www.iands.org/support.

If you who would like to do more in-depth reading on NDEs, IANDS suggests:

Lessons From The Light: What We Can Learn From The Near-Death Experience. (2000). Needham, MA: Moment Point Press. Or 2006 edition, the authors wrote this book primarily for non-NDErs., and provided a good summary of NDEs and aftereffects based in solid empirical research.

The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation. Holden, J. M., Greyson, B., & James, D. (Eds.). (2009). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO. Each chapter provides a comprehensive, critical review of all scholarly publications from 1975, when the field of near-death studies opened, through 2005 on a specific subtopic of NDEs.

The Big Book of Near-Death Experiences: The Ultimate Guide to What Happens When We Die - PMH Atwater (2007). A comprehensive, encyclopedic resource of useful information about NDEs and related phenomena.

For additional information about IANDS

www.IANDS.ORG

E-mail: services@iands.org

call (919) 383-7940

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 NDEs and providing accurate information based on those findings.

IANDS publishes two quarterly periodicals — the scholarly *Journal of Near-Death Studies* and the newsletter, *Vital Signs* — as well as other informational materials. IANDS 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.

Caring for the
Near-Death
Experiencer
Considerations
for
Experiencers



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If you have had—or think you might have had—a near-death experience (NDE), you probably have 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 their life. Some of the more common issues experiencers want to talk over with someone 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 contents; 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 spiritual/religious professional is probably more likely to be helpful, professional preparation is not a guarantee of suitability. A family member/friend might be 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 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, and 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, 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: 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.

For more information you can visit, the IANDS website, www.iands.org. Resources include social support, contact information for the IANDS group meetings, articles on NDE-related topics, an *Introductory Bibliography of Near-Death Experiences*, recommended readings, and a list of audio and video presentations from IANDS conferences.

If you feel preoccupied or emotionally upset or you are having trouble functioning reasonably well, find a mental health professional who is equipped to provide NDErs with intensive and ongoing assistance. One source is the American Center for the Integration of Spiritually Transformative Experiences, www.aciste.org If you want information about how to choose a psychotherapist, you can consult the *Experiencer's Guide to Psychotherapy*, available at www.iands.org/support