

Self-Care after the Holotropic Breathwork Workshop¹

The workshop you have just experienced will have dropped a stone into the waters of the unconscious mind, and there will be many more ripples that come to the surface. The ripples go on for some time. They are especially strong during the first week after the group ends. We recommend that you give yourself as quiet a time as you can for integration and do not schedule anything extra beyond your regular tasks.

Your experience is to be honored, so do not talk about it lightly or you may feel diminished by the telling. Be careful with whom and how you discuss the experience. Remember that other people's experience is confidential and not yours to relate. Please respect this.

During the group there is a generalized opening and expansion of the feeling realm. As with any opening that is beyond the usual range, there is a reflex contraction to act as a balance to the expansion before the feelings settle into a more consistent mode. What this boils down to in terms of experience is that you may have mood swings for a few hours or a day or so after the group ends. These feelings may include increased energy and openness or vulnerability and rawness. You may be a little oversensitive, quarrelsome, or reactive with others, especially those close to you, at first.

Some of you may feel "little" at times, reacting to the world as if you were a young child rather than your real age, a form of regression. Do watch out for this, because it can be confusing. It does settle down in time. If you are worried by this, make sure communication is clear and precise especially with your intimate partner.

Body symptoms

It is normal to feel quite exhausted emotionally and physically after a period of such intensity. This could be followed by a temporary feeling of flatness. Your body may jump or twitch at times. Such movements are part of the muscular and energetic releasing that is completing its work of resetting the postural tone of the body.

Memories

Memories can be triggered during and after this process and they may continue to trickle up to consciousness in the form of flashbacks, body memories, and dreams for a while after the group has ended. If they disturb or confuse you beyond your coping range, seek help to sort out the content clearly.

Avoid making major decisions

Make no major decisions for a few weeks after the group (*e.g.*, divorce or changing jobs).

Things to do

Write in your journal

You do not have to read what you have written. You can close the books and leave it for as long as you wish, forever if you like. Just start writing, don't worry about grammar, jump subject mid-sentence, write whatever you want until the energy has abated and you feel calmer and feel that you have done enough for now.

Drawing

Keep a drawing pad handy and use it freely. It is a good idea to follow difficult drawings with a positive or hopeful drawing of the resolution you would wish or a calming image.

Meditation and *Metta*

Sitting meditation can help to create a feeling of safety while the feelings or images pass through. Just follow the breath as best you can or use the feeling of the body sitting, touching the cushion or chair, as the anchor. If the images are overpowering when you have the eyes closed, open them and pick a visual focal point, something pleasant, such as a flower or leaf perhaps, and keep the vision softly focused there while breathing slowly.

Stay sitting until you feel better. If you are too restless to sit, do the walking meditation, one step and breath at a time. *Metta* phrases repeated either in sitting or walking or lying in bed can help restore equilibrium. Examples of *Metta* phrases are:

May I be safe and protected from inner and outer harm.

May I be happy and peaceful of heart just as I am.

May I be strong and healthy in mind and in body.

May I be at peace.

Exercise

Walking, running, swimming, or exercise classes help to change the body chemistry towards more positive energies. Often you will not actually *want* to do this, but the doing can change the feelings, especially anger and depression.

Baths and showers

Warm baths with oils and other delights are wonderful for comfort and relaxation. Take as many as you want.

Taking care of the body

Getting a massage, doing Qigong, yoga or Tai chi helps coming back to the body softly.

Dancing

By yourself or with others, using the music to complete emotional release.

Naps

Listen to your body who may need rest.

Listening to calming music

There could be a need for calm and for being gently rock by gentle music. This can help being more present to the subtle signs of the psyche and the body.

Good grounding food

It may sound evident but this is a way to honor the body that is integrating a lot of felt senses and information.

Time alone

Time by yourself is essential at times. Be sensitive to when you really need to nourish yourself by stopping the action for a while.

Going in nature

Walking in nature, concentrating on trees, plants, and animals or simply being there, present, creates balance.

Sharing with fiends

Talking to a good friend someone close to you and that can listen can make a real difference.

Therapy

Make an appointment with your therapist as a follow-up sometime soon after the group. Call her or him as necessary if memories are disturbing you. Do remember that however intense the memory, *you have already survived the experience*; nothing can arise that you have not already lived through.

Support

Not everyone has a therapist. Perhaps you can ask for and receive support from the group members. Make phone or email contact by mutual arrangement with each other. In many cities there are groups to support integration of psychedelic experiences. Often these integration sessions are offered online. It can be a place where you can be heard and connect with others.

Be as clear as possible with your partner at home about your emotional and sexual boundaries asking for support when necessary. Remember that your partner will be reliant on you to bridge the gap between this emotionally intense experience and your regular life. This recommendation about boundaries and connection also applies to the various relationships you have.

¹ Ingrid Pacey and Wendy Barrett designed this self-care handout to be given to participants at the end of a Holotropic Breathwork workshop. Robert Décarie made a few edits.