

# Psychedelic Safety Flags

*A color system to help assess underground practitioner ethics and safety*

## Introduction

### *What is this?*

Psychedelic Safety Flags is a guide inspired by Art of Consent UK's website and their guide *Consent, Power and Abuse*. Both Art of Consent UK and *Consent, Power and Abuse* are reputable resources for information relating to consent, specifically in sex education, kink, and BDSM spaces.

Similar to *Consent, Power and Abuse*, *Psychedelic Safety Flags* uses four simple color flags (red flags, orange flags, yellow flags and green flags). These flags distinguish between the degrees of appropriate and inappropriate consent, power dynamics, and duty of care participants and practitioners should be aware of.

The creators of this resource have gathered virtually and asynchronously to envision and co-create this guide. We aim to thoroughly cover consent, safety, and ethical considerations applicable to psychedelic sessions, practitioners, staff, participants, and clients who are present together during sessions.

Although psychedelics are regarded as powerful and mystical healing agents, harm occurs in psychedelic sessions. Psychedelic facilitators have harmed clients both intentionally and unintentionally. This harm can range from financial to emotional, physical, and/or sexual.

Unfortunately, many psychedelic communities are not equipped with the tools and experience to discern ethical behavior, support survivors of abuse, and hold accountable the people who have caused harm. Nor are funds readily available to access professional care in these areas.

**We would like to stress the importance of institutions coming out in support of survivors, and taking a stand against abuse and unethical psychedelic practices.**

*We offer this as a draft. The intention is for this to be a living document, welcoming of additional opinions and viewpoints. To join in the conversation please reach out VIA WEBSITE OR EMAIL ADDRESS*

### *What is this not?*

There are various important questions and ethical aspects of the use of psychedelics– and indeed all drugs– that will not be addressed by this document. Among others, these aspects include:

- How a community should deal with “red flag” behavior.
- Psychedelic exceptionalism, and the violence of the war on drugs, which has disproportionately affected communities of color.
- The sustainability of psychedelic substances, especially sacraments such as peyote and iboga which are currently endangered and widely used by non Indigenous people, limits the

access of the Indigenous peoples who use these substances as part of their culture, cosmology and wellness.

- The interests of big business and corporations into psychedelics for the profit potential.
- The reality of our communities and world at large, with many of us living in a violent context of racism, colonialism, classism, cisheteropatriarchy, transphobia, ableism, etc.

### ***Who is this for?***

Anyone can use Psychedelic Safety Flags to help them reflect on the ethics and safety of underground psychedelic therapy and ceremonies. We hope that this guide can serve as a tool for harm reduction, practitioner self-reflection, peer supervision, and to stimulate conversation and reflection about the ethics of altered state sessions. We especially hope to empower those seeking healing and other kinds of experiences in these spaces to know what to look for and how to increase safety.

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## **Glossary**

**Abuse** - Harm committed by a person who has power over another.

**Boundary** - Boundaries ask to be considered when your clear and confident YES starts to become anything less. Boundaries are encountered before limits.

**Ceremony** - A word sometimes used to describe a setting for the consumption of psychedelics. Often refers to taking psychedelics in a group with a spiritual or focused intention, and oftentimes within the context of a specific cultural context or syncretism of cultural practices.

**Consent** - Freely given, Reversible, Informed, Enthusiastic, and Specific permission discussed in a sober mindset that defines appropriate behaviors and boundaries related to mental, emotional, sexual, and physical safety.

**Cult Dynamics** - Often include a charismatic authority figure(s), transcendent belief system, systems of control, and systems of influence. Often present in spiritual psychedelic communities.

**Facilitator** - The person expected to be supporting another person in a psychedelic state. Other terms for this may be: shaman, guide, therapist, sitter, ayahuascaro/a, practitioner, provider, doctor, anesthesiologist, nurse, midwife, coach, apprentice, medicine holder/carrier, or harm reduction/peer support person.

**Facilitator's Dose** - Within the cultural context of the facilitator and their training, a non-transcendent and socially functional dose of a substance may be taken in order to work on a psycho-spiritual or energetic level with the participant. A facilitator's dose is not inebriating and they maintain the ability to respond appropriately to the participant.

**Gaslighting** - Intentional, misleading, provocative, manipulation which disrupts a person's intuition or knowledge, leading to questioning, doubting, and/or rewriting what they know for the benefit of the [gaslighter](#).

**Green Flag** - Best practices. Facilitators who are working with the best practices available to them, and are open to improvement where feedback is given. Awareness of power dynamics, including systemic and cultural marginalization and oppression, trauma-awareness, gold-standard consent practices, and a clear ethics and accountability process.

**Holding Space** - A facilitator's skilled application of neutrality, witnessing, and support for a participant's psychedelic session or ceremony. Held space is often referred to as a "container".

**Identity Power** - Increased power accompanying dominant identities including: age, disability, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, national origin and language spoken, gender, etc.

**Integration** - Within psychedelic work, integration refers to the use of different creative, reflective, or therapeutic practices for meaning making and applying insights about oneself, community, the world, or a belief system to everyday life.

**Narcissism** - A psychological trait common to all people, but in excess causes relational harm. High degrees of narcissism are exacerbated by psychedelic use and therefore contraindicated. Consists of varying degrees of grandiosity, need for appreciation, difficulty receiving feedback, weaponization of cognitive dissonance and feigning of empathy.

**Orange Flag** - Major Issues. Their way of working might be okay for some people if they know what they're getting themselves into, and might be upsetting or traumatizing for others. Could lead to red flag territory. Avoid, or approach with caution.

**Participant** - The person who is taking the psychedelic. Other terms for this may be: client, journeyer, pasajero, patient.

**Projection** - A psychological concept credited to Sigmund Freud that describes when a person unconsciously or consciously puts emotions, behaviors, or other internal experiences onto someone else. They misinterpret that those aspects of themselves are coming from an external force- usually another person.

**Psychedelic Exceptionalism/Molecular Elitism** - Popular niche cultural construct regarding the prioritization and elevation of psychedelic and/or organic psychotropic substances over non-psychedelic drugs or synthesized psychedelics. Often accompanies spiritual bypassing, love'n'light language, ignorance or minimizing of the drug war, subtle racism, and classism.

**Red Flag** - Avoid. These are signs of deeply concerning, unsafe, and/or potentially abusive practices.

**Role/Status Power** - Increased power that comes with a professional or authoritative role. The facilitator carries status power with the participant.

**Session** - The setting and circumstance in which a person is taking a psychedelic in the care of a facilitator. Other terms for this may be: psychedelic therapy, ceremony, ritual, or gathering.

**Shadow** - Aspects of personality that are unconscious, repressed, or hidden that can be either positive or negative. A term that is credited to the psychologist Carl Jung but has been expressed in stories throughout cultures and history.

**Substance** - The psychedelic substance or combination of substances, often referred to as "medicine" by facilitators and inside of ceremonial or spiritual psychedelic communities.

**Transference** - A psychological concept for the unconscious projection from the participant to the facilitator, including feelings, thoughts, and narratives. Can be positive, negative, sexual, parental, etc. Often amplified in psychedelic states.

**Transgression** - The violation of laws, social norms, or ethics, and can be both implicit or explicit. Often used to describe inappropriate conduct of facilitators who are engaging in behaviors that violate client boundaries and put mental, emotional, sexual, or physical safety at risk.

**Yellow Flag** - Room for improvement. Many well-meaning teachers and schools operate within a 'murky' zone of vague agreements, lack of transparency, and unclear boundaries, which if left unchecked, could develop into orange/red flags.

***A note on subjectivity:***

This guide is intended to assist in a personal evaluation of one's participation in psychedelic sessions, relationships, and communities. It has a focus on psychedelic facilitators, however it could be adapted for assessing behavior in any community member.

A red flag to one participant may be an orange or a yellow flag to another, and vice versa. There are no definitive answers here, although we believe that this resource is a good starting point for folks to engage with their own judgment and intuition.

For some people, one red flag may indicate an impermeable boundary. For others, a facilitator who has one or two red flags might be considered acceptable. Multiple red or orange flags is probably cause for concern, regardless of the participant.

We invite you to continuously engage with yourself and your body, so that you may know your boundaries. Even if you are new to drugs, ayahuasca circles, or psychedelic psychotherapy, you are still the only one who knows your **YES** or **NO**. This takes practice. Indeed it is a lifelong process to stay in tune with our inner knowing of what is okay and what isn't. A skilled and ethical facilitator will help you find this for yourself in an embodied, grounded way before they support you in imbibing any substances.

This guide is in large part intended to apply to underground facilitators, but may also be used to assess aboveground, legal facilitators. Ideally, regardless of position, the facilitator will aim to serve the highest ethic.

Psychedelic states can bring up complicated or traumatic material from one's past. It is so important to work with a trustworthy person while in this vulnerable state. We cannot overstate how common transgressions and abuse are by psychedelic facilitators, and how grave this harm can be for participants. *Even in a sober state*, a participant could project their unresolved wounding onto their facilitator, blaming them for their experience of harm. Psychedelics can intensify these projections. How well a facilitator navigates this transference may be a green, yellow, orange, or red flag. Power dynamics are complex and predominantly in the favor of the facilitator. A good facilitator can skillfully work with projections. They will recognize and respect these dynamics by taking steps to support the participant, honoring their voice and choice.

Some facilitator behaviors under the orange and yellow flags may be better categorized as a red flag for a person with more severe trauma. Even a practitioner with nearly all "green flags" may still not be a good fit for everyone. These flags are likely to be subjective, and may vary from context to context, person to person.

***A note on the authors' positionality and identities:***

The majority of collaborators who adapted this document for the psychedelic space are Europeans/North Americans, and are predominantly white. We recognize that there will inherently be bias in this document, from our cultural context and various lived experiences with unearned privileges imparted through this colonial, white-supremacist context.

We represent various economic/class backgrounds and age groups. Some of us are queer, autistic, neurotypical, disabled, able-bodied, middle class, cisgender, nonbinary, transgender, Jewish, settlers, trauma survivors, survivors of psychedelic therapy abuse, and many more identities. We are underground and aboveground practitioners, educators, parents, therapists, coaches, healers, and activists. This document will grow and change, as more diverse perspectives come together to contribute to it.

***Self-screening considerations:***

When entering into transpersonal and psychedelic sessions with a facilitator, it is helpful to first screen yourself. You may find it generative to ask yourself open-ended questions like:

- Who am I?
- Why am I doing this now?
- What are my intentions? I.e: mental health, healing, novelty, optimization, change, it sounds cool, spirituality, fun...
- What is my belief system, and how is it/has it been influenced?
- Do I have substance or psychiatric/prescription drug sensitivity? What can I share with my facilitator about my substance use, past and present?
- What is my history with mental health diagnosis? Am I trying to “fix” something?
- What’s my relationship like with psychotherapy, reflexivity, and change? Do I have a skilled support person who supports my exploration with psychedelics?
- Who is in my support system? Who wouldn’t I talk with about my psychedelic experience?
- What am I willing and unwilling to do to support my integration process?
- Do I have the time and resources to commit to unpacking my psychedelic experience?
- What do I expect is going to happen? Have I already made some decisions about the process or outcome?
- What parts of me want to have this experience? What parts of me don’t want to have this experience?
- Are there parts of me that don’t want to change?
- What don’t I want my facilitator to know about me?
- Do I have time to rest after my experience, or do I need to go back to work right away? If I need to go back to work right away, should I postpone this experience until a time where I can have the space to process it?

# Flag color system

## Green Flags

**Best practices. Facilitators working with the best practices available to them, and open to improve where feedback is given. Awareness of power dynamics, including systemic and cultural marginalization and oppression, trauma-awareness, gold-standard consent practices and a clear ethics and accountability process.**

### *Consent and Boundaries*

#### The facilitator:

- Discusses boundaries and consent with participants before anything else and consistently maintains the agreements.
- Gives timely notice of risk.
- Describes that consent can only be given before the psychedelic substance has been consumed. Ex: a “yes” can become a “no” during the session, but a “no” can’t turn into a “yes”.

- Is specific about what kind of touch they might offer, and they get consent beforehand to offer it. Ideally they'll role play offering and getting consent to touch in advance.
- Educates participants about where any practices originate, the lineage of the techniques, and teachings and modalities.
- Works together with participants to determine appropriate and trauma-informed schedule, dosage, and frequency for psychedelic sessions.
- Offers session descriptions that are clear about what will and what won't happen, in advance.
- Uses everyday words to explain teachings and uses very little jargon or buzzwords.
- Has a grievance reporting protocol and support available, with an option for anonymous reporting. There is a clear and transparent accountability process with named individuals separate from the organization who can be approached in case of any transgression or rupture.
- Is consistent. They do what they say they are going to do and "walk their talk".
- Reminds participants regularly throughout the relationship that they have a choice about how and whether to participate.
- Provides assurance that there will be no sexual contact before, during or after the session.
- Is clear about sexual boundaries.
- Discusses the possibility that they might take a facilitator's dose, and seek the participant's consent and agreement to do so.

### ***Duty of Care***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Screens for the appropriateness of the participant-facilitator match in terms of their capacities and skill to work with the participant.
- Has assistants available for participants to process the experience afterwards.
- Respects the participant's belief system and cosmology, even if it differs from their own.
- Works to manage expectations regarding the outcome of psychedelic experiences and emphasizes the importance of integration.
- Provides time with participants for both preparation and integration, and agrees upon an integration plan before beginning psychedelic sessions.
- Has a written, comprehensive code of ethics that they make available to participants.
- Knows and can succinctly explain their own scope of practice; what they will and will not offer. Includes mention of modalities, conditions, and diagnosis.
- Makes appropriate referrals when a participant's goals or needs are outside of their scope.

### ***Power Dynamics***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Is open about the inherent power differential when a participant is experiencing a non-ordinary state of consciousness, and the shadow aspects of their position.

- Is approachable, welcomes, and actively asks for feedback from participants and community members.
- Concedes upon making a mistake, apologizes, and follows through with sincere attempts to correct it.
- Has current testimonials like, “I had this valuable insight”, or “I noticed this about myself”.
- Is humble and doesn’t claim their offerings will work best for everyone.
- Empowers participants to ask questions and to disagree.
- Directly addresses participants who are insulting or causing trauma for others in group environments.
- Makes use of trauma-aware, invitational language.
- Recognizes the “silent no” and practices awareness of when participants may not be speaking up for themselves and their needs.
- Practices self-care within and outside the psychedelic sessions, as do their assistants.
- Is aware of their own subjective perspective, lens and worldview, and can help identify those of the participant

### ***Credentials, Training, and Supervision***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Is trained and proficient in consent and trauma-awareness.
- Engages in regular supervision with a more experienced, active facilitator.
- Participates in regular peer consultation.
- Continues to learn alongside teachers or mentors.
- Acknowledges where their teachings originate from, quotes sources, and clarifies where their teachings end and others’ begin.
- Is spoken of highly by other schools, teachers, former participants, and community.
- Is part of a wider organization or community known for high standards and skilled facilitators.
- Provides information about if they are insured and who their insurers are.

### ***Business and Money***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Responds to issues due to systemic injustice and disparities by providing sliding scale and pro-bono services.
- Practices financial reciprocity with traditions and Indigenous people from where they learned skills or ways of being.
- Is transparent with fee structure, sliding scale availability, and offers information about the rates of similar services in the geographical area.
- Has rates informed by their experience, training, and years in practice.

### ***Group Journeys***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Ensures that agreements and boundaries are honored by all people present, including assistants.



- Accepts and encourages participants' need to sit out of exercises or leave if they choose.
- Offers alternative exercises for participants with accessibility needs or who feel overstimulated by the exercise.
- Gains the consent of all group participants before changing group agreements.
- Compensates assistants fairly for their time, energy, and work. Compensation can be financial or educational.
- Employs assistants who model skill, presence, and consent agreements.
- Employs assistants who can laugh at themselves and utilize humor effectively.
- Models and discusses boundaries with assistants and participants, including intimate relationships between assistants and participants.

### ***Inclusivity***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Has an active policy of anti-racism, and owns the limitations of their positionality. For example, being white and/or cisgender.
- Has co-facilitators, assistants, and participants who represent different social backgrounds, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality and compensates them fairly.
- Doesn't present life choices, experiences, or backgrounds as more special or evolved than any others.

## **Yellow Flags**

**Room for improvement. Many well-meaning teachers and schools operate within a murky zone of vague agreements, lack of transparency, and unclear boundaries, which if left unchecked could develop into orange or red flags.**

### ***Consent and Boundaries***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Unskillfully or experimentally utilizes methods to increase the psychedelic, dissociative, or cathartic nature of the experience with unnecessary overstimulation or chaos.
- Offers workshops or sessions that contain micro-inconsistencies: they say one thing and do another, like straying from time agreements without receiving participant consent.
- Playfully cajoles or pushes participants into taking part in workshop activities.
- Invites participants back to fix or correct another facilitator's work.
- Only provides information on consent and boundaries at the beginning of the event and doesn't repeat those points during the event. May appear performative or insincere.

### ***Power Dynamics***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Is unclear about their participation in supervision, peer support group, or ongoing education.
- Tells you what you should feel. For example, "This next exercise will open your heart".

- Provides a method supposedly for everyone, inherently excluding the idea that everybody is different, and has different needs.
- Uses exaggerated claims for their offerings like, “This will totally change your life” or “Completely transform who you are.”
- Clearly has favorites or makes cliquy inside jokes with certain persons.
- Is impatient with people when they make mistakes.
- Frequently uses the word “don’t” rather than providing things to do.
- Uses subtle affirmations of status like furniture dynamics (high versus low seats) or indications of experience level with theirs presenting as highest.
- Projects an air of mystery combined with a charismatic and enigmatic teaching style.
- Uses jargon or buzzwords rather than teaching using clear, everyday words.

### ***Duty of Care***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Lacks positional and cultural awareness of the participants they choose to accept.
- Takes on participants outside of their scope of knowledge and practice. Willing to accept all participants.
- Does not provide information such as: referrals to other practitioners, if a case is outside of their scope and/or if they aren’t accepting new clients.
- Does not provide what is or is not in their scope.

### ***Abuse***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Is known as someone who pushes boundaries in social situations.
- Has a reputation that includes one or two stories of minor consent violations, but no consistent pattern.

### ***Credentials, Training, and Supervision***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Offers no transparency about who their teachers are or were.
- Had a teacher who was abusive, and they gloss over this fact or do not mention it at all, perhaps even continuing to work with them.
- Has no background in trauma-informed care.
- Refers to themselves as an expert.
- Doesn’t put their own teachings into practice. Doesn’t “walk their talk”.
- Makes use of other peoples’ work or ideas without crediting them. Is appropriative.
- Doesn’t declare or pay taxes on their earnings from workshops or other above ground work.
- Takes an amount of the psychedelic substance during the session that does not impair their judgment, but is outside of their cultural context or applicable practice.

### ***Business and Money***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Charges a fee that is disproportionately higher than their skill and experience warrants, but the value of the experience may make this appropriate. Ex: the modality is rare for the geographical area, there are fancy accommodations and/or food, etc.
- Offers no cancellation policy and charges large sums of money for cancellations.
- Does not provide fee comparisons to similar work in their geographical area.

### ***Group Journeys***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Offers few guidelines for the group, imbuing a sense of weak boundaries and lack of container. Ex: the assistants are chatting with each other during exercises and not paying attention to the participants.
- Employs assistants who are not appropriately compensated for their work.
- Employs assistants who appear much younger and of the sexually preferred gender of the facilitator.
- Allows inexperienced participants into the event without addressing their readiness to participate in the group.
- Doesn't make appropriate accommodations for the safety or inclusivity of new participants as well as other group members.
- Offers activities or substances that the participants were not physically or psychologically screened or prepared for.
- Supplies substances or offers activities that were not part of the original event.

### ***Inclusivity***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Appropriates traditional practices and elements from cultures they do not belong to and it is unacknowledged.
- Does not discuss the presence of systemic power dynamics (such as white supremacy, patriarchy, misogyny, ableism, discrimination, etc.) in the ceremony or workshop container.
- Expresses willingness to learn but is otherwise ignorant of culturally systemic power dynamics.
- Makes reference to people or practices as spiritually or otherwise superior, with the implication that other people or practices are inferior.
- Uses language exclusive to heteronormativity, such as only using she/her or he/him pronouns.
- States the equality policy as something like, "Everyone will be treated the same".

## **Orange Flags**

**Major Issues. Their way of working might be okay for some people if they know what they're getting themselves into, and might be upsetting or traumatizing for others. Could lead to red flag territory. Avoid, or approach with caution.**

### ***Consent and Boundaries***

**The facilitator:**

- Cannot or will not describe the style, practice, and orientation from which they work.
- Is evasive or dismissive about their participation in supervision, peer support group, or ongoing education.
- Presents conspiracy theories as part of their teaching or cultural orientation.
- Rates a participant's intention as more worthy or less worthy. Ex: intentions to heal psychological wounds are less worthy than intentions to heal global consciousness.
- Pushes or convinces people to buy future workshops or sessions. Ex: "This is what you need."
- Chooses substances and/or dosage with little or no input from the participant.
- Takes a facilitator's dose without seeking participant's consent, agreement, or understanding.
- Has a history of engaging in dual or layered relationships by having clients work for them or live with them.
- Mixes sexual, energetic practices with psychedelic work. Ex: tantra, kink/BDSM, sexological bodywork.

***Duty of Care*****The facilitator:**

- Minimizes or disregards the importance of integration.
- Does not offer integration.
- Is not available for integration directly or only offers integration with assistants.
- Invites participants back without discussing integration or their personal intention.
- Minimizes or glosses over confidentiality and privacy.
- Shares identifying information about other participants or peers.
- Does not conduct a thorough medical and psychological screening.
- Discourages work with other practitioners without reasonable explanation.
- Supplies or facilitates with substances they have little or no direct experience or relationship with.
- Does not discuss the inherent risk involved when working with psychedelics.
- Does not include a safety plan as part of participant preparation. Ex: what to do in case psychological destabilization and/or spiritual emergency, bringing necessary or emergency medications, etc.

***Power Dynamics*****The facilitator:**

- Disavows, minimizes, or disregards the inherent power dynamics present in facilitator-participant relationships. Ex: statements like, "We are all consenting adults here", or "Only men abuse, so you shouldn't question anything if the facilitator is a woman".
- Only dates people much younger than themselves.
- Asks participants to perform chores, whether special or mundane.

- Surrounds themselves with people over whom they hold systemic power, presenting as peerless.
- Practices or encourages spiritual bypassing. Ex: saying things like, “Everything happens for a reason,” “you create your own reality,” “you signed a soul contract,” etc, without acknowledgement or discussion of shadow.
- Requires participant secrecy about what happens in their sessions (with the exception of reasonable cases of respectful withholding, such as regarding cultural practices).
- Claims to “diagnose” or “fix” participants, and/or teaches secret techniques.
- Expects the participant to adhere to their belief system or cosmology, and does not respect or permit them to work within their own belief system.
- Appoints family members or friends to positions of authority without merit, relative to other candidates.
- Travels from community to community with no apparent home base of accountability.
- Implies benefitting from a psychedelic experience is not possible if the participant chooses to journey without the facilitator, or if the participant sources substances elsewhere.
- Uses psychiatric diagnosis, disability, or neurodivergence to disregard the participant’s voice and/or preference, in favor of their own presumed preference or expertise.
- Centers their own needs or feelings when they are asked to participate in an accountability process.
- Demonstrates erratic or confusing behavior.

### ***Abuse***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Cannot provide peer references who support their work with people. They seem to work in isolation.
- Offers teachings that leave participants feeling confused, drained, or continually trying to grasp something incomprehensible and unnecessarily abstract.

### ***Credentials, Training, and Supervision***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Is unable or unwilling to speak about the shadows of their lineage or teachers.
- Copies workshops, event titles, or texts from others without consent or credit.
- Speaks disparagingly about other facilitators, schools and teachers (not to be conflated with naming or confronting injustice, speaking out against abuse or harmful practices).
- Refers to themselves as an expert and cannot reference their professional or traditional ethics training, or lived experience.

### ***Business and Money***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Appears to be seeking fame and fortune or is perceptibly concerned with their status and wealth.
- Shows no awareness or willingness to engage in reciprocity with the money they earn.

- Has a website that insinuates they provide illegal services or products.
- Provides services that are financially inaccessible to the majority of people, and they offer no sliding scale or pro-bono work.
- Markets retreats directly to their therapy clients as if they are customers.
- Implies or discusses the participant's need to achieve higher, secret, or further teachings, thus retaining their financial investment.

### ***Group Journeys***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Does not offer participants the option to pass on or take a break from activities. Ex: states that "We are all doing this now."
- Is unavailable for contact or questions before, during and/or after the session, or leaves this role to the assistants.
- Does not compensate their assistants.
- Employs assistants who don't contribute information, present with much personality of their own, and never contradict or question the facilitator or teacher.
- Has assistants who don't seem skilled or experienced in the role they have, or there aren't enough of them present.
- Utilizes an intervention that wasn't consented to or makes an example of at the expense of a participant in front of the group.
- Performs interventions that center their ability as a healer, appears showy or superfluous.
- Focuses on participants who have very positive or "love and light" experiences, while feigning little interest for those who have had a difficult or unflattering experience.

### ***Inclusivity***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Claims their event or offering is an "inclusive" or "safe" space while lacking efforts towards inclusivity.
- Has public text or community statements of inclusivity that do not match their behaviors or observed social interactions.

## **Red Flags**

**Avoid. These are signs of deeply concerning, unsafe, and/or potentially abusive practices.**

### ***Consent and Boundaries***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Rejects the ideas of consent and boundaries as irrelevant, counterproductive or distracting.
- Implies that they know what the participant needs, saying things such as, "You don't need any boundaries, because I will tune in and feel exactly what you need," or "I know what you need, better than you do yourself."

- Offers substances or booster doses once the ceremony has already started, without prior conversation, as if participants can consent while under the influence of a substance.
- Does not discuss touch while the client is sober and has time to give consideration and make agreements with the facilitator.
- Touches the participant during the session without asking permission.
- Invites, initiates, or attempts to engage in sexual intimacy whether verbally or through physical action.
- Insists that sexually explicit language is not sexual.
- Encourages the participant to relax and allow the facilitator's actions to occur for the participant's own good. (When a person in power uses their position of power for sexual gain, that is sexual abuse!)
- Undresses during ceremony or session.
- Invites or instructs the participant to undress.
- Invites clients to workshops or events they are attending where they will be nude, for example a sweatlodge, when not culturally normative.
- Is inconsistent in following and/or upholding the agreements they make.
- Promises change on past mistakes and doesn't follow through.

### ***Duty of Care***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Conducts no intake whatsoever.
- Does not offer preparatory sessions with participants.
- Doesn't require that participants undergo preventative medical testing where commonly indicated, such as EKG before ibogaine.
- Refuses to provide information or claims ignorance regarding the source of the substance, purity or test results, or the dosage; they say you should just trust them.
- Supplies a magical yet dismissive explanation when asked direct questions.
- Disregards privacy and confidentiality in text and/or spoken conversation.
- Doesn't discuss contraindications and any other dangers of participating in the session or ceremony.
- Uses intense emotional release exercises without awareness of, or support for, participants who may be traumatized.
- Takes substances with their participants in an amount that impairs their judgment and is outside their cultural context or lineage.
- Fails to inform and prepare participants ahead of time about the importance of integration, how it works and how to access it.
- Allows their own personal process to become the focus of the session, leaving the participant's needs unattended.
- Is completely unavailable for care and questions before, during and/or after the session.
- Suggests or prescribes sleep deprivation or food deprivation outside of a lineage of practice, and/or in a way that is medically/psychologically unsafe.
- Refuses to tell participants the dosage of the substance.
- Can't provide reasonable evidence that substances were tested for purity.
- Requires physical contact and does not offer alternatives to touch.

## ***Power Dynamics***

### **The facilitator:**

- Claims that sexual activity with them will provide participants with a direct connection to God or spirit, bring healing, or raise frequency or vibration.
- Completely centers their own ideas or agenda for a participant's healing or outcome.
- Takes advantage of psychedelic transference, for example allowing themselves to be deified by participants.
- Is a teacher or leader of a community or school known for cult dynamics.
- Positions themselves as superhuman and doesn't own up to having any faults.
- Shows no awareness of their own power, privilege, or believes themselves to be above positionality or bias.
- Has refused to address or respond to any invitations to accountability, call-ins, or call-outs about their behavior.
- Gossips about participants or assistants, and/or shows no discretion regarding participants' privacy or confidentiality.
- Brags about not following norms, laws, or rules of profession.
- Has retaliated against participants or community members who pursued accountability processes about their behavior.
- Responds defensively or dismissively to critical thinking or other perspectives that are critical to theirs.
- Actively denies their role power, saying things like "I'm just like you".
- Has cultivated an inner circle of participants who receive special treatment, and ordinary participants are deprioritized until they reach an arbitrary and exclusive status.
- Believes spiritual intentions will protect them and/or their participants from hurt, harm, punitive justice, or the police.

## ***Abuse***

### **The facilitator:**

- Has a scripted story to explain past transgressions: "In my past I did all this bad stuff, but *now* I am completely reformed and therefore you can trust me *more* than other people."
- Dates previous or current participants or students.
- Has a bad reputation online. When you search for their name and "abuse" or "cult", you find relevant stories of sexual assault, abuse, gaslighting, blackmailing, and/or manipulating behavior.
- Brings up sexual subject matter irrelevant to the present conversation or context.
- Uses gaslighting to cover-up abuse. For example, "Ultimately we're all one, so there are no abusers or victims", or "This is your incapability acting out", "You need to work harder on your fear".
- Meets complaints with victim-blaming. For example, "You need to stop identifying as a victim" or "You are the reason for your own suffering".
- Opts out of accountability processes, ethics groups, or agreements.
- Uses buzzwords and jargon to describe and/or justify what is assault. For example, "My intentions were pure", or "I could see a blockage in their sacral chakra".



- Promises to provide some kind of deconstruction like, “I’m going to take you apart,” without indicating how you might consent, or how they will support you afterwards.
- Is charming one minute, and wrathful the next. They talk down to or shame others. You notice yourself wanting them to like you, while also fearing them.
- Says, “That’s just your ego,” as an explanation for something they don’t like, or resistance in the participant.
- Dismisses survivor allegations as malicious instead of addressing them; uses threats or non-disclosure agreements when confronted; claims accusations are inaccurate without addressing or engaging with details and evidence; labels any questioning or criticism as attack or as hateful.
- Uses their belief system or lineage to silence or discredit dissent or resistance. For example, “This is how my teacher taught me and he is very trustworthy,” or “The plants told me to tell you”.
- Has an internal ethics board composed of people with biases in favor of the facilitator (former teacher, friend, mentor, etc.) that may enforce or enable unethical behavior to continue.
- Does not disclose past transgressions of sexual relations with participants or community.

### ***Credentials, Training, and Supervision***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Claims to be enlightened or operating at another dimension or frequency.
- Says they don’t need teachers, education, or supervisors, *only* the substance.
- Has no lineage, training, community, mentor, living teacher, supervisor, consultation or peer group membership.
- Misrepresents their credentials, background, and/or experience.
- Hides, obscures or doesn’t openly acknowledge past sanctions or processes involving abuse.
- Lacks a professional community and many other facilitators refuse to work with them.
- Is part of a Multi-Level Marketing company or a pyramid sales scheme.
- Doesn’t recognize or acknowledge their own shadow.
- Implies that their teachings cannot be challenged or questioned because they have been “passed down for hundreds of years” or come from mysterious, untraceable sources.
- Puts themselves at the center of their teachings, potentially accompanied by a story of an event making them enlightened.
- Speaks authoritatively on subjects they have no training, background, or lived experience in.
- Works outside the scope of their training with regards to touch, somatics, inducing catharsis etc.

### ***Business and Money***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Charges a disproportionately high amount for a session than their skill or experience level warrants.
- Offers no transparency around money. For example, they refuse to or cannot provide information about their costs, and the costs for similar facilitation by other practitioners.
- Does nothing in the realm of equity or accessibility pricing or sliding scale.

- Has a website that brazenly proclaims illegal services or products.
- Exploits a community (particularly international or indigenous) for their resources, labor, and/or land without equitable exchange and reflection of their positionality of power.
- Does not utilize encryption to communicate with participants or others about illegal substances or activities.

### ***Group Ceremonies***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Doesn't screen participants beforehand.
- And/or their assistants consume a dose of the substance that impairs their judgment, is not explained by lineage or tradition, and/or they are under the influence of alcohol.
- Doesn't provide or abide by group agreements and rules to keep participants safe, such as guidance about participant interaction during the ceremony.
- Creates scenarios and agreements that could violate an individual's boundaries or agency. For example requiring untrained participants to hold space for each other.
- Doesn't intervene if a participant or assistant violates a group agreement. For example, not intervening in a case where the agreement is no nudity, but someone removes their clothing.
- Is completely unavailable for care and questions during and/or after the session.
- Brings in other substances that were not discussed beforehand.
- Has or has had sexual relations with participants in the group.

### ***Inclusivity***

#### **The facilitator:**

- Spreads racist and/or discriminating messages in their work or on their social media.
- Uses methods that have a negative impact on others, while performing solidarity.
- Says things like, "We are all indigenous" but lacks any actual acknowledgment of land conflict today.
- Uses stolen content or unethically harvested, cultivated, or sourced materials. For example: Bufo toad while synthetic 5-MeO is available, iboga while voacanga is available, peyote as it is "vulnerable" under conservation status, or conventional cannabis grown with dangerous pesticides.
- Assumes everyone is cisgender and heterosexual, or imply that being LGBTQIA2+ is less spiritual or evolved. Their rhetoric includes lots of divine femininity/masculinity language, elevating cis-hetero identities and passively dismissing queerness.
- Shows no awareness of or willingness to accommodate a participant's accessibility needs.
- Makes sexual or misogynist jokes.

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## Resources

[www.psychedelic-survivors.com](http://www.psychedelic-survivors.com)

*Peer support and advocacy for survivors of harm in psychedelic therapy or ceremony*

Psychedelic Safehouse, Colorado

*survivor centered peer support and community resource navigation*

[Psychedelicethics.net](http://Psychedelicethics.net)

*towards a membership oversight organization for psychedelic practitioners*

[www.epicpsychedelic.com](http://www.epicpsychedelic.com)

*offers ethics advising and consulting support*

[www.firesideproject.org](http://www.firesideproject.org)

*psychedelic peer support line*

## Further Educational Resources

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