

AYAHUASCA

Good Practice Guide






This document is a compilation of good practices concerning ayahuasca use, for the benefit of people organizing and conducting ayahuasca sessions. It can also be useful for participants in the sessions, looking to assess the safety and accountability that's on offer. It is intended as a guide for the implementation of suitable safety measures for anyone approaching ayahuasca, and is open to contributions and suggestions for improvement (aya@iceers.org).

I. Before holding any Session




1. Anybody intending to hold ayahuasca sessions should first gain sufficient knowledge and expertise in the following areas:
 - a) the pharmacology of ayahuasca ([Scientific Information](#))
 - b) the risks and contraindications of ayahuasca ([Interested in taking Ayahuasca](#))
 - c) the legal implications of ayahuasca
 - d) first aid
 - e) the theory of non-ordinary states of consciousness and therapeutic approaches
 - f) extensive prior personal experience with ayahuasca
 - g) forming a team of collaborators
 - h) the purpose of drinking ayahuasca and the ethical means of achieving it

II. Selecting and Preparing the Participants

1. Send all of the applicants an information sheet on ayahuasca well in advance of the session so that they are suitably informed and can prepare responsibly for the session. Include information on:
 - a) the properties of ayahuasca, its composition, its effects and the potential risks
 - b) the implications of drinking ayahuasca
 - c) the dietary restrictions before and after the session
 - d) the responsibilities of the staff and the participants
 - e) the procedure and operation of the session
 - f) the process in its entirety

2. Send all of the applicants a medical form to fill out and return, e.g.:
 - a) General Health Questionnaire (*see attached sample*)
 - b) Mental Health Questionnaire (*e.g. CAPE, SCL-90-R**)
3. Conduct a one-to-one interview with each of the applicants:
 - a) get a feel for the individual, find out why they want to join the session and qualitatively assess their current status
 - b) if a participant has prior experience, make a note of any changes they have noticed since their last session
4. Present the applicants with a consent form to sign and clearly explain its purpose (*see attached sample*)
5. Use the information gathered from the questionnaires and interview to decide whether to accept an individual or not. Also consider the following:
 -  Applicants must be able to demonstrate that they understand the personal process that their participation involves .
 -  Only accept applicants whose personal process is unlikely to require more assistance (in time or resources) than is available in the current context of the session.
 -  Applicants may be in need of additional therapy before drinking ayahuasca and should be advised to seek appropriate professional help.
 -  In cases where an applicant is refused, suggest alternatives and explain the reasons for your decision.
 -  If you have any doubts about a person's suitability, it is better not to accept him or her.

Other suggestions for this previous phase:

-  **Padrinazgo/Madrinazgo:** For sessions conducted in foreign countries, it can be useful to introduce the concept of “padrino” or “madrina”. It implies only accepting new participants to the group if they come with someone who has prior experience with the context and the plant. The padrino/madrina acts as an available person in case of emergency and takes responsibility for introducing the newcomer to the group and the way it works.
-  **Intention:** The organiser of the session should encourage the participants to properly prepare for the experience and offer suggestions about how to do so. (*[interested in taking ayahuasca](#)*)
-  **Bond:** It is advised to establish a personal and supportive bond between the person offering the session and the participants.

III. Before the Session

The person or team organising the session should:

1. Know the strength of the ayahuasca and know what ingredients have been used. No preparation should be administered that has not been analyzed or tested in advance by the person responsible.
2. Have enough helpers on hand to cater for all the participants. It is not advisable to hold large sessions unassisted
3. Select a safe venue with enough space, drinking water and toilet amenities for the group, that is unlikely to be disturbed and yet not too isolated

4. Ensure the participants' physical safety and comfort by preparing the environment to accommodate their needs (e.g. remove any dangerous objects, make the place cosy, provide mats, bowls, paper tissues, etc.)
5. Have an emergency plan for various scenarios. Make sure the whole team knows it.

IV. During the Session

The person or team organising the session should:

1. Estimate the correct dose according to age, gender, experience, health condition and individual needs. If unsure, administer a smaller dose.
2. Ensure the participants' physical safety by keeping an eye out for potential hazards (eg. removing dangerous objects, preventing anyone from driving, someone mistakenly sitting on someone else's mat, wandering off, etc.).
3. Ensure the participants' emotional safety. This includes providing the emotional support needed, making sure no harmful interactions take place between participants and/or assistants and watch over the participants' well-being.
4. Never leave the participants alone. Under no circumstances.
5. Protect the integrity, privacy and security of the participants and their interactions
6. No participant should leave the session before it has been closed.
7. Check each participant individually before closing the session to ensure that he or she is in a stable emotional space
8. Ask for the proper help in case of need, emergency or in a difficult situation. Be able to delegate.
9. Never deny help to anyone, not even when assuming legal problems in doing so. Safety first.

Other suggestions to maximize potential benefits during the session:



Physical position: Suggest the participants to keep a sitting position rather than lying down during the session. This prevents any risk of choking in case of vomiting, helps noticing anyone fainting, etc.



In case of problems: Might a participant find some emotional difficulties during the session, proceed with simple non-pharmacological techniques (focused breathing, active listening, serene presence, etc)



Medication: Have someone qualified to prescribe medication in the case is needed. Use medication only as a last-resort.




V. After the Session

The person or team organising the session should:

1. Give the participants ample time to recover before allowing them to leave the premises and make sure they have room to do so. Traditionally, participants may return to their beds or remain in the ceremonial space until morning
2. Ensure that there is ongoing support available for those who need it after the session.
3. Provide an integration area, where the participants can individually or together use creative materials (paper, pencils and crayons for drawing, etc.) as they process their experience

4. Ensure that all participants have the opportunity to share their experience with the rest of the group.
5. Be mindful of the interventions during the share group. An active listening attitude, without judgment nor interpretation that can narrow the amplitude of the experience. Allow the participant to reach his/her own conclusions and interpretations.
6. Check the physical and emotional state of all participants before they leave.
7. Offer the possibility of additional support after the session. Provide contact information, phone number or e-mail address, and be available to maintain communication.
8. Direct participants to a qualified professional if you are unable to provide the level of support that they require during their integration process.
9. Ask the participants to fill again the health questionnaire during the next week. *(eg. SCL-90-R)**

Other suggestions for integration/follow-up:

-  **Feedback:** It could be useful to have a questionnaire so participants can give feedback about the session, or ask for it by speaking to them, with the aim of improving the support given.
-  **Generate Knowledge:** Validated questionnaires could be administered in order to measure the impact of the experience on the daily life of the participants for a longer period and to monitor the integration process. The questionnaire can be re-sent to the participants after a week and after two months. *(eg. SCL-90-R)**
-  **Self-care:** Be mindful of your role as assistant and do not get carried away if participants wish to give you the credit for their profound experiences or see you as a kind of spiritual guide. It is important to be helpful and supportive but knowing that is each participant who directs his/her own process and is the responsible of his/her evolution and the discoveries and connexions he/she makes.

* If you want advice about any of our questionnaires or other data collection tools, please contact us at Info@iceers.org

Informed Consent

For participants in ayahuasca sessions

The purpose of this document is to provide participants with a clear understanding of the nature of ayahuasca and of their role in the sessions.

Relevant Information

This ayahuasca session is run by, and his/her team. The work that is carried out in the session will focus on personal growth and therapeutic self-work by the participants through the ingestion of *ayahuasca*.

Ayahuasca is an Amazonian decoction of the vine *Banisteriopsis Caapi*, which contains betacarbolines, and either the leaves of the shrub *Psychotria Viridis* (Chacruna) or the leaves and stems of the liana *Diplopterys Cabrerana* (Chacropanga), which are rich sources of DMT, the internationally banned compound that is responsible for the psychoactive effects of ayahuasca. In traditional preparations, plants of various other species are often added to the brew, including tobacco, varieties of *Brugmansia*, *Brunfelsia*, and many more. For centuries, the indigenous communities of the Amazon basin have been using ayahuasca in their ceremonies to safeguard the health of both the drinker and the community.

Today, ayahuasca is used in many places throughout the world for therapeutic and religio-spiritual purposes and for personal growth, although almost no country officially recognises it as a medicine or therapeutic method. The religious use of ayahuasca by certain churches is legally protected and regulated in Brazil, Holland, Canada and the USA, and in Peru it has cultural heritage status. According to the UN's 2012 International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) Report, ayahuasca is not under international control, despite containing the controlled alkaloid DMT, which is primarily responsible for its effects. In some countries, ayahuasca is controlled, however, such as in France, USA and Canada. The presence of DMT in ayahuasca makes its legality interpretable by the authorities in different ways, with various ongoing court cases dealing with its import and use.

Working with ayahuasca is not a substitute for medical, psychiatric or psychotherapeutic treatment, but can complement a therapeutic process and facilitate personal development. If you are currently receiving treatment of any kind and are not sure about whether to participate in a session, check with your doctor or therapist first.

The effects produced by ayahuasca may include changes in your perception of reality and way of thinking, visions (of abstract motifs or clearly identifiable images and scenarios), heightened emotions, access to detailed memories that you'd thought forgotten, paranormal phenomena, the emergence of fears or difficult emotions (some of which may be associated with blockages in the body and be causing pain and tension), introspection, and perinatal or transpersonal experiences (in which you may experience your own death and rebirth). At the physical level, you may experience nausea, vomiting, chills, tingling, ringing in the ears, dizziness, diarrhoea, tremors, sweating, ataxia and, in rare cases, fainting. Sometimes, especially if you have not drunk ayahuasca before, you may not notice any visionary effects. If that happens, it does not mean the ayahuasca is not having an effect on other levels. The experience is more intense with eyes closed, and the best thing you can do in difficult times is to breathe slowly and

deeply, go with the music and have confidence in the process that the ayahuasca is taking you through, and in the person holding the session. The ayahuasca experience is not linear, but rather it passes through different phases, some more pleasant, even euphoric, and others more difficult. You may temporarily experience the symptoms of mental illness, such as suspicion, paranoia and 'delusions of reference' (e.g. believing the whole world is watching you or that something is happening because of or for you). It is quite normal to have several waves of these feelings during the experience, and they tend to pass quickly. They are feelings that we all have at some time or another in our lives, and although they may be uncomfortable, exposing ourselves to them in this helps us to deal with them. Remember, support is right there if you need it; just call out.

Although scientific studies show that in controlled environments ayahuasca is relatively safe to drink for people without serious physical or psychological problems, there are some cases of it having adverse effects. These tend to be acute, such as a panic attack or psychotic episode with depersonalisation, and there are some chronic cases, albeit very rare, in the form of anxiety, depersonalisation, delirium or psychosis. The setting and adequate preparation and integration are key to reducing the risks as much as possible. More info at: iceers.org/interested-taking-ayahuasca.php

If you agree to participate in this session, you will be required to answer a series of questions and to complete a medical form and questionnaire. You must agree to answer all questions honestly and to disclose any relevant personal information about your health After the session, and periodically over the coming year, you will be contacted and invited to fill out the questionnaire again for the purpose of monitoring and measuring your psychological and physical progress.

Your facilitator is responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of any personal information. This includes your name, address, phone number and other information that could identify you. You agree that other information obtained from your questionnaires may be shared anonymously with other institutions for the sole purpose of scientific research, using a reference code instead of your ID. This includes information from your medical records.

If you have questions about the session or your integration process over the coming months, feel free to approach the facilitator or any member of the team. Your participation in the sessions is entirely voluntary and you are free to opt out if you wish before the start of the session. However, you must endeavour at all times to follow the instructions of the team and facilitator so that your safety is not jeopardised. The facilitator's discretion may be used at any time to exclude you from participation in the session for any perceived impairment in your physical or psychological health that risks leading to problems for you during the session, or if for any other reason you do not meet the requirements for participation.

The person administering the ayahuasca knows the ingredients and the strength of the brew and will adjust the dose for each participant on the basis of their age, gender, experience, sensitivity, health status and needs. The facilitator and his team are committed to protecting your physical and emotional security, integrity and privacy throughout the process, and intend to provide you with the psychological and physical support you need during the preparation phase, the session itself and the period afterwards. We have an emergency protocol and commit to provide any necessary support should the need arise.

Declaration

I, the undersigned, accept the conditions of participating in ayahuasca sessions held by and his team, and I declare that I am choosing to participate of my own free will.

I have not been coerced into participating in sessions by the organizers or by any other person; the decision to participate is mine alone, and is based on my own personal assessment of the effects, the exclusion criteria, the potential risks and benefits, the focus of the session and the commitment of the people running it.

I am aware that I am to answer all questions honestly during the screening process and am required to complete questionnaires before and after the session. I agree to provide all the relevant information about my medical history, my mental and physical health and any other information that may serve to protect my health during this process.

I acknowledge that the information I provide to the organizers of this session is strictly confidential and will not be used without my approval for any other purpose than as described in the accompanying document.

The person running the session has explained to me what to expect from the session and how it is intended to proceed. I am aware that I can ask questions about the session at any time and can change my mind about attending at any time before the session begins.

Once the session has started, I commit to not leaving the space without the consent of the person running the session, and I commit to following the instructions at all times, from the preparatory stage through to integration. I understand and agree that I can be excluded from participation in a session at the discretion of the facilitator.

I understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Name of participant

Date

SIGNATURE:

Medical Form

for participants in ayahuasca sessions

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Age: _____

Your details are confidential

Information about the Session

Ayahuasca sessions are intended to be a personal growth experience and should not be considered a substitute for psychotherapy, but rather a complementary therapeutic device. Working with ayahuasca can involve intense experiences accompanied by strong emotional and physical releases. It is not recommended for people with cardiovascular problems, serious hypertension, psychiatric conditions, recent fractures or surgery, acute infectious diseases, epilepsy or active spiritual emergencies. There is no data on the safety of ayahuasca in pregnant women. For more information about ayahuasca, please visit www.iceers.org

If you have any doubt as to whether you should participate in the session, it is essential that you consult your doctor or therapist, as well as the organizers of the session.

Personal Information

Please answer all questions as fully as possible. Your answers are intended to help facilitators and are strictly confidential.

1.	Do you currently suffer from or have a family history of any of these ailments?	SI	NO
	a) Cardiovascular disease, including heart attack	___	___
	b) High blood pressure	___	___
	c) Psychiatric condition	___	___
	d) Recent operation	___	___
	e) Past or current physical injuries, including fractures or dislocations	___	___
	f) Infectious or contagious diseases	___	___
	g) Glaucoma	___	___
	h) Displaced Retina	___	___
	i) Epilepsy	___	___
	j) Osteoporosis	___	___
	k) Asthma (if yes, make sure you bring your inhaler to the session)	___	___
2.	Are you pregnant?	___	___
3.	Have you been hospitalized in the last 20 years?	___	___

- 4. Have you ever been hospitalized for a psychiatric illness? — —
- 5. Is there anyone in your family with a history of psychiatric disorders — —
- 6. Are you currently receiving therapy or attending any kind of support group? — —
- 7. Are you taking any medication? — —
- 8. Is there anything else about your physical or emotional state we should know about? — —
- 9. Have you taken Ayahuasca before? — —
If yes, how many times? _____
- 10. Have you experienced adverse or particularly difficult experiences with ayahuasca
that you have found hard to integrate? — —
- 11. Have you experienced adverse or particularly difficult experiences with other
psychoactive substances that you have found hard to integrate? — —

Emergency Contact Details:

Name Phone

If you have answered 'yes' to any of the questions above, it is important to give specific details on the back of this form or on another sheet.

The session organizer should receive this form as part of your registration. We cannot confirm your place at the session until we have received this form.

Please read and sign the following declaration

I declare that I have read and understood the information in this medical form. I further declare that I have answered all the above questions fully and honestly and have not withheld any information that I believe could be important.

As far as I am aware, my general health is good.

Name Date

SIGNATURE: