
Integral Psychedelic Therapy

The Non-ordinary Art of
Psychospiritual Healing

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In the case described previously, Vera noted that throughout significant portions of the MDMA session she felt unsettled, distracted, and “left to her own devices,” relying on typical patterns of hypervigilance and dissociation triggered by the therapist’s lack of attunement. Imagine that her therapist, rather than “kinda just supervising,” tunes into the relational field and notices Vera’s difficulties settling into her experience. Turning toward her countertransference, the therapist senses an unformulated, bodily felt sense: a tight ball of energy in her solar plexus emitting palpable jolts at any unexpected sound or movement. As she tracks her somatic experience, she realizes that Vera just shared a childhood memory of being lost for several hours in a shopping center, terrified of the strangers around her, and unsure whether her father was still looking for her. The emotional resonance of the memory sends a strong wave through the therapist’s body, leaving an affective impression of painful abandonment and emotional betrayal.

The therapist, working to contain and regulate her own body, first deepens her breath and aligns her subtle behavioral responses with the client’s non-verbal cues, letting her heart open to fully experience the emotional resonance surfacing in the relational field. As the therapist gains a more grounded and embodied position within these unsettling feelings, she offers Vera a reflective comment about the terror of being left alone in an unfamiliar place as a child. Her voice is tuned to the frequency of Vera’s expression, matching the emotional quality and adding resonant notes of empathic care. Her comments seem to have an impact on Vera, and the client responds by shifting her body into a more settled position. From that point forward, Vera drops more deeply into herself and is able to access embodied elaborations of her childhood experiences of emotional abandonment.

Trauma Recovery Through Relational Psychedelic Therapy

Developmental Trauma

According to leading trauma expert Bessel Van der Kolk (2005), developmental trauma stems from “multiple or chronic exposure to one or more forms of developmentally adverse interpersonal trauma (e.g., abandonment, betrayal, physical assaults, sexual assaults, threats to bodily integrity, coercive practices, emotional abuse, witnessing violence and death)” (p. 404). For our purposes, we will broaden this definition to include *relational trauma* caused by less severe, yet still highly impactful, repeated experiences of compromised emotional safety within primary attachment relationships due to chronic neglect, rejection, criticism, or attack of core aspects of the self.

This array of traumatic experiences can lead to self-regulatory impairments as well as fragmentation of the personality through disidentification and dissociation from the parts of the self that make one vulnerable to harm. These traumatized, dissociated parts carry overwhelming feelings, memories, and patterns of bodily tension associated with the trauma—while the traumatized psyche develops protective