

Guide for Individuals Moving Through a Spiritual Emergency or Spiritual Crises

(adapted from the ISEN Guidelines)

A crisis is different for everyone, but one thing is the same for all of us; when we are in crises we can feel as though everything is falling apart.

Reframing your crisis as a '*breakdown to breakthrough*' process can help to provide a sense of faith and courage.

This guide offers some simple, often obvious, but vital tools that can help maintain safety and some containment during emergent processes.

Validation of spiritual awakening processes as 'normal', real, natural and meaningful can be one of the most important aspects of being able to stay open to the process, to integrating what's learned and being able to bring that learning to the living of daily life.

It's vital that kindness and acceptance guide the process, allowing any emotions to surface and be expressed in a safe environment.

It's important to have peer support from someone who has gone through a similar experience, someone who can listen without judgement.

Know that you are not alone! Spiritual crises are a natural part of healing into wholeness. Don't give up – Keep going. There is light at the end of the tunnel even when all appears as complete darkness.

You are not crazy, you are becoming well and growing into wholeness. The death of old ideas and identities can be terrifying, and these transitions herald the birth of a mature and expanded consciousness.

Creativity and Self Expression

Many people find times of crisis to be a time when their creative energies are active. Painting, drawing, craftwork; these can be used as a way of expressing experiences, releasing emotions and bringing a sense of focus. Enjoy the creation of whatever comes, rather than focusing on the final outcome; messy is good!

Dancing, music, singing and playing music, can create an enormous release of energy. Even when having a bad day, listening to your favorite music and dancing around has an enormous power of positive refocusing. Turn the music up loud and let those pent-up screams too; it can be very cathartic to release repressed emotions.

Simple things like writing stories, poetry, upcycling old furniture or clothing, changing your bedroom around, all help with creative expression.

Go slow – small steps can have a big impact, especially when they lead to a growing sense of satisfaction and confidence.

Suicidal Thoughts and Self Harm

Even though a crisis can be growth towards healing, there may be times when it's extremely dark, terrifying and dangerous; it is common to experience having suicidal thoughts and thoughts of self-harm.

There are, however, a lot of things that can help manage this distress, more of which can be found at this link: <http://www.metanoia.org/suicide/>.

The fact is you are not alone – other people have felt deep and terrible pain and come through it - you can too!

1. Feeling suicidal does not have to mean giving up on life.

If you are feeling suicidal it may be that you are desperate for things to be different. Wanting this life to end does not rule out the possibility of a new, better life beginning, but you may feel like that is beyond reach right now. Imagine what a better life might look like and consider how it might be possible to experience that new life if you stick around to find out what could happen. Turn some of that suicidal energy towards risking changes in your life. Consider that it may be a behavior pattern or life condition that needs to die, rather than your body ending. Ask yourself, "what really needs to die?".

2. Feeling suicidal often leads to isolation.

It's vital that you find someone to talk with confidentially on a deep level, someone who is not going to judge or reject what you say. Admitting our vulnerabilities can be terrifying, but once we open up it can bring a huge sense of relief. Sharing any plans with just one person can help to keep you safe.

Tips to keep yourself safe:

- Your thoughts do not have to take charge; you can have them without acting on them.

- If you are feeling like hurting yourself; wait, even if it's for 5 minutes, but just wait, and breathe... this may be hard but it's likely the intensity will subside.
- Call a person or group you can trust to open up to about how you feel.
- Find a safe way to express any emotions that are surfacing.
- Call a suicide helpline –

Empower Yourself; create an 'Advance Statement'

If you know your crisis is getting bad enough to get you into a hospital, there is a tool you could use called a Psychiatric Advance Statement.

- You do not have to use a template for an advance statement. You can just tell someone your advance statement. They can write it down for you. It is recommended you include:
 - Full name and address.
 - The details of someone you would like to be contacted when you are feeling unwell, such as a friend or relative.
 - Name the person you would like to make decisions for you when you are unable to make them for yourself.
 - What treatments would you like? (i.e. bodywork, art therapy, etc.)
 - What treatments would you like to not experience? (i.e. medication, electroshock)
 - What kind of help would you like from your supporters?
 - What specifically helps you during times of confusion, crisis, or chaos . . . (i.e. doing art, going for walks, being in nature, being left alone / listened to).
 - What is important to you during this time, (i.e. that your pets are cared for, you are fed a healthy / special diet.)
 - Your doctor's contact details.
 - Your signature.
 - Date of signing and a signature of a witness.
 - If any of this information changes, make sure you update your advance statement and let people know.

Where to keep your statement:

- It is important that whoever is close to you knows about your advance statement and where it is.
- You should think about giving a copy of the statement to:
 - Your GP, your mental health team and a friend / relative.

Nature

Try to spend lots of time in nature. It may sound simple or obvious but spending time in the natural environment can really help a great deal. For people experiencing psychological distress, focusing on the calmness in nature can give a sense of grounding and relief from the confusion happening in the mind.

Perhaps there is something in the following list that you can do –

- Do some gardening (or even offer to help in a neighbors garden) - plant some flowers in a window box or indoors; grow some veggies.
- Go for a walk in the woods.
- Get involved in a group that works out in nature or helps clean up the local environment. This can be a great way to meet other people and make friends too.
- Allow yourself to get dirty – having fun and getting in touch with the earth can be healing.
- Go for a swim in the ocean or in a river or lake.

Exercise

Some people find vigorous exercise like running, very helpful because of the increased amount of energy they are experiencing in their bodies. Others find gentle walking or yoga to be more what they need. Creative exercise e.g. dancing, drumming or even hula-hooping can help to release some energy from your body. Let your body move in whatever ways feel natural to you.

Spiritual Practices

At the beginning of a crisis it may be advisable to stop or at least reduce spiritual practices, such as meditation, to titrate or pace your process; these can gradually reintroduced over time.

Stress

It's very common to experience high levels of anxiety during these times. This can present as shallow breathing, palpitations, sweating, confusion or even panic attacks. There are some simple and effective self-help tools that can help you address these experiences, such as a guided body scan, i.e. The Autogenic Technique or a Yoga Nidra Meditation. Check out the basic tips on relaxation included in the sleep section, and the benefits gained from releasing emotions and talking openly to someone you trust.

Food

Remembering to eat really helps. You may find that at different stages of your process you might be drawn to, and need, different types of food.

The general consensus seems to be that heavier foods are useful for grounding, these include grains, root vegetables, dairy products and meat. Protein should be an important element in your diet although, at times, animal products may become difficult to digest; in this case, switch to plant-related protein sources such as nuts or grains which can be a better choice for your well-being.

Be aware that sweet foods and sugar can affect blood sugar levels, which can in turn destabilize your mood. Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, which is found in coffee, but also tea, fizzy drinks, and in chocolate. Alcohol and fat-laden processed foods, with no nutritional content, can make you feel sluggish.

It's important to eat fresh food any time you can, drink a lot, mainly water. Eating less, more often, is the healthiest way to manage your diet. However, fasting can intensify your experience.

Vitamins and minerals are vital for your balance: Vitamin C, Vitamin B, Iron and Calcium.

You may be able to tune into your physical well-being and listen to what your body is calling for rather than what your mind is saying you "should" be eating. Our bodies have wisdom of their own if we can learn to listen.

Sleep

Normal sleep patterns can be interrupted, which may be ok for a short time, especially if it's possible to rest as and when it's needed. However, prolonged loss of sleep can make your experience more difficult to cope with, so you could try some simple relaxation methods such as - taking a bubble bath, doing some relaxation breathing techniques, listening to guided meditations, using lavender oil and drinking chamomile tea.

If you feel anxious or frightened, herbal and homeopathic remedies can help. If possible, ask a practitioner for advice on something to suit your needs. If herbs don't help, consider seeking medical advice; taking a sleeping tablet for a few nights may help reestablish a normal sleep pattern.

Quick Tips

1. Allow your vulnerability – allow your tears to fall and your heart to shine – it's the best way to connect as humans and can help you feel less alone.
2. Allow yourself to 'turn up whole' and trust that it's all part of the process. This also means acknowledging that it's ok to have 'dark' thoughts and uncomfortable emotions.
3. Breathe – it's normal to feel that you have no stability when you are going through such a process of immense change, but it will settle down and get easier to manage.

4. Find a safe environment i.e. with a therapist or in a group, to help you work through trauma when it arises to be healed. Releasing your emotions; verbally, physically and in any other way necessary is vital.
5. Focus on your own self-care – getting physical exercise / being in nature / eating wholesome food and getting plenty of sleep is important. Initially, some prescribed medications can be necessary to help you maintain some responsibilities in your life. Conversely you may need to discontinue some medications.
6. Avoid stimulants (alcohol / drugs/ caffeine / processed foods, especially sugar).
7. Join a support group – this can be an online forum / it helps not to isolate yourself. Try to find at least one person you trust where you can openly talk about your experiences without fear of being judged.
8. Reduce stress wherever possible – both at home and at work.
9. Reflect on spiritual practices and, adapt those practices according to the intensity of your emergence.
10. Listening to calming or uplifting music, and to the sounds of nature can be helpful.
11. Relationships – spend time with supportive people, and distance yourself from those that feel stressful.
12. Creative self-expression is helpful when you find talking difficult, i.e. drawing, painting, poetry, music, drumming, sculpture, singing.
13. If you are already taking prescribed medications, it is not advisable to reduce or stop this without clinical guidance.