

# 21 Safety Tips for Participating in Ceremonies That Use Psychoactive Substances

1. **Work with Women** – Consider working in all female groups and or/ with a female facilitator, or at least facilitators who work in male/female pairs.

2. **Conduct Due Diligence** – Check out the reputation of the shaman or healer you are considering being in ceremony with. If possible, talk to people who have worked with this person and their assistants. Search online for reviews by past participants. Inquire about the facilitator, healer or shaman's background and who they are apprenticing with. Determining their lineage and if they apprentice with those who are known to violate women provides insight into their integrity. Consider that those who work with known abusers are culpable and seek others to work with. If you cannot confirm the background of your intended healer, wait for another opportunity to be in ceremony with facilitators whose ethics you can verify.

3. **Consider The Substance** – Carefully consider the quality of the substance that the healer is dispensing during the ceremony. Talk to others who have ingested preparations made by the same person or group. Try to determine which substance(s) will be used and at what dosage. If you have never ingested this material, research its effects, possible benefits and drawbacks. If you are new to the material, consider ingesting at the lowest dosage offered. Erowid is a great resource for learning about psychoactive medicines.

4. **Check Out Ceremonial Site** – Determine where the ceremony will be held and if the location was considered safe and comfortable by past participants. Contact others who have attended ceremonies in that location. Request a description of the space and how it will be used.

5. **Secure Safe Lodging** – If you are traveling to participate in the ceremony, investigate the safety of your lodgings. This is especially important if you plan to attend a ceremony in a country other than your own. Determine if others feel safe there. Read online reviews of your intended accommodations. Ask for an escort if you feel unsafe en route to your lodging.

6. **Find Local Ceremonies** – Consider taking part in ceremonies in your own community or a nearby location. A growing number of shamans travel to locations in the U.S., Canada and Europe. These practitioners can be held accountable under laws within these jurisdictions. Determine if there is a local ceremonial healer you are comfortable working with.

7. **Journey With Friends** – Go to the ceremony with a trusted friend or group of people you know. While they themselves may not be able to watch over you while participating

in the ceremony, having friends with you before, during and after the ritual can provide support and a familiar frame of reference.

**8. Create A Plan** – Develop a safety plan with friends who are both participating in the ceremony and with some who are not participating. Plan check ins with these people before and after the event. Consider asking a non-participant for a ride home after the ritual. If you are traveling for the ceremony, determine what types of supportive services exist in that location.

**9. Identify Accountability Mechanisms** – Determine what form of accountability exists for the shaman or healer you intend to work with. If that person disrespects or harms you in some way, what mechanisms exist to help ensure they are held accountable? Is that person part of a larger community, who can hold them to a standard of care?

**10. Ask For Help** – Cultivate a spiritual practice that gives you access to spirit allies or guardians. Practice asking these beings for assistance. Contact them during the ceremony and maintain an open channel with your protectors.

**11. Cultivate Boundaries** – Make a habit of setting good physical and psychic boundaries. Focus on this skill in the weeks leading up to the ceremony. Learn how to set a protective energetic shield around yourself and do so before the event. Understand that such measures can be modulated to permit exposure to beneficial energies.

**12. Set Intentions** – Come to the ceremony with a clear intention. Decide what you want out of the experience. Take stock of your present strengths and weaknesses. Prepare a question or queries that the experience may help you answer.

**13. Strengthen Yourself** – Cultivate your overall health and well being before the ceremony. Arrive at the gathering rested and fully present. Develop a personal ritual to ground yourself physically and mentally. If circumstances in your life have placed you in a particularly uncomfortable state of mind, address these issues prior to the gathering.

**14. Focus Inward** – During the ceremony, be wary of physical contact with other participants. Do not attempt to intervene or assist others taking part. Allow the leaders of the ceremony to take this role. If other participants are impacting your experience, alert the facilitators.

**15. Evaluate Touch** – If a shaman, healer, facilitator or apprentice touches you during the ceremony, be aware of where they are placing their hands and if the encounter feels sexual. If you are uncomfortable with this touch, express your displeasure clearly and if possible, move away. Ask for assistance from others leading the ceremony. Refuse to be victimized.

**16. Take Time To Integrate** – After the ceremony, take special care of your physical and mental state. Rest, hydrate, and eat nourishing food. Be aware that the process of integrating the experience can take time. Be patient with yourself and if possible, avoid especially challenging encounters in the days following the event.

**17. Check In After Ceremony** – Check in with the healer, their assistants and/or the facilitators at the conclusion of the ceremony. Express your impressions of the experience. If you have misgivings that you wish to address privately, wait until after the period of group sharing has concluded before raising concerns. Considering having a neutral observer present during this conversation.

**18. Protect Yourself** – Remain protective of your personal space after the ceremony when you may be in a vulnerable state. Those who truly care for your well-being will respect your right to nurture yourself in this way. Be alert for sexual or romantic overtures from the shamans, healers, apprentices, or facilitators after the ceremony. Firmly turn away such advances and keep your eyes open for such situations involving fellow participants. Wait a minimum of three days to a week before engaging in sexual encounters with anyone you are not already involved with before the ceremony. Allow time for integration and for the effects of the ceremonial substance to wear off so that you can apply your best judgment.

**19. Examine Consensual Sex** – Consensual sexual encounters between ceremonial leaders and participants do occur. These experiences may make the women involved feel special, but such relationships imply an imbalance of power that has the potential to be coercive and potentially abusive. Consider that the professional ethical standard for therapists in the U.S. is a complete ban on intimate relationships with former clients for two years after the conclusion of their therapeutic work together. Reflect deeply on the wisdom of this standard if you or your healer are considering sexual intimacy after a ceremony.

**20. Honor Gradual Emotions** – Determine how you can contact the healer or facilitators of the ceremony in the days, and weeks after the ceremony. If you feel that you have concerns or questions after the passage of time, follow up and express yourself. Take steps not to let feelings encountered during or after the ceremony get bottled up or unaddressed. If necessary, seek assistance from outside therapists or counselors.

**21. Offer A Review** – Consider writing a review of your experience or making your thoughts known to others in an appropriate venue that can benefit future participants. Both positive and negative critiques of the experience may be helpful to others. Acknowledge and give thanks to shamans and ceremonial facilitators whose actions reflect the highest degree of integrity and ethics.