When Life Suddenly Feels Different

A Compassionate Guide to Unusual Experiences, Awakening and Finding Support



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Welcome

Sometimes, life changes in ways we don't understand.

You might experience unfamiliar feelings, unusual sensations, vivid dreams, a deep sense of connection or changes in how you see yourself and the world.

For some people, these experiences feel beautiful and meaningful. For others, they can be confusing, frightening or overwhelming. Sometimes they can be both.

You may wonder what is happening, whether anyone else has experienced something similar, or who you can turn to for help. If this sounds familiar, you are in the right place.

You do not need to have a clear explanation before asking for help.

This guide introduces some of the language used around awakening, expanded states of consciousness and distress or personal crises that may emerge from these processes. It also recognises that unusual experiences can have many possible causes, including stress, grief, major life changes, sleep disruption, physical health, medication, mental health and other factors.

Spiritual or personal meaning may be important to you, and it is possible to explore that meaning while also taking care of your physical and mental wellbeing.

This guide is intended to provide understanding, practical information and guidance towards appropriate support. It is not intended to diagnose or explain an individual's experience, and it does not replace medical, psychological or other professional care.

Above all, this guide is here to remind you that you do not have to face uncertainty alone.

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When Life Feels Overwhelming

QUICK REFERENCE CHEAT SHEET

You are not alone.

Small steps can make a big difference. Here are some gentle ways to support yourself when life feels different.

1 Pause and Find a Safe Space

- Move somewhere comfortable and safe if you can.
- Give yourself permission to slow down.

2 Ground Yourself

- Notice your surroundings.
- Feel your feet on the floor.
- Hold a familiar object or listen to calming music.

3 Look After Your Body

- Drink water and eat nourishing food.
- Get enough rest and sleep.
- Reduce stimulation when needed.
- Avoid alcohol and other non-prescribed substances.

4 Try Gentle Exercise

- Take a short walk, stretch or try gentle yoga.
- Choose movement that feels safe and comfortable.
- You don't need to push yourself.

5 Keep a Simple Routine

- Aim for regular sleep and meal times.
- Plan a few manageable daily activities.
- Make time for rest and the things you enjoy.

6 Reach Out for Support

- Talk to someone you trust or a qualified health professional.
- You could say:
  "I'm experiencing something I don't fully understand, and I'd appreciate someone listening and helping me work out what to do next."

7 Know When to Seek Extra Help

- If your experiences are frightening, affecting your sleep or disrupting daily life, speak with a qualified health professional.
- If you cannot keep yourself or someone else safe, call 000 (Australia) in an emergency.
- For crisis support, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14.

8 Remember

- You don't need to understand everything before you deserve help.
- Take one small step at a time.
- Be kind to yourself.

You deserve compassion, care and support.

The Healing Coach

www.thehealingcoach.com.au

When Life Suddenly Feels Different



Sometimes life changes in ways that are difficult to explain.

You may notice changes in your thoughts, emotions, perceptions, sleep or relationships. You might feel more sensitive than usual, experience vivid dreams, question long-held beliefs or feel a stronger connection to nature or other people.

You may feel peaceful and connected. You may feel confused or frightened. You may experience several of these feelings at different times.

It is natural to ask yourself:

- *What is happening to me?*
- *Is this something I should be concerned about?*
- *What does it mean?*
- *Is anyone else experiencing this?*
- *Who can I talk to?*

There may not be one immediate answer.

There Can Be Different Explanations

Unusual experiences can occur for many reasons. Stress, grief, trauma, major life changes, lack of sleep, physical health, medication, alcohol, exploring psychedelics and plant medicines or other substances, and mental health can all influence how a person thinks, feels and experiences the world.

Some people understand their experiences through a spiritual or personal framework. Culture, beliefs and previous experiences can also influence the meaning a person gives to what is happening.

You Do Not Have to Choose

You do not have to choose one explanation immediately. It is possible to be curious about the personal or spiritual meaning of an experience while remaining open to other possibilities and seeking appropriate health advice.

When Life Suddenly Feels Different
(continued)



Notice What Has Changed

Rather than trying to explain everything at once, it can help to notice what is actually happening.

Consider:

- When did you first notice the change?
- Has it become stronger or more frequent?
- How are you sleeping?
- Are you eating and caring for yourself normally?
- Is it affecting your relationships, work or everyday activities?
- Are you feeling safe?
- Has anything significant changed in your life recently?

Useful for a Conversation
These observations can also be useful when talking with a health professional. You do not need to have the answers before asking for help

What Might I Be Experiencing?



People describe unusual experiences in many different ways.

The examples below are intended to help you find words for what you may be noticing. They are not diagnoses and do not establish a particular cause.

A Sense of Connection	You may feel deeply connected to nature, music, other people or life itself. Ordinary experiences may suddenly feel especially meaningful.
Increased Emotional Sensitivity	You may notice that emotions feel stronger than usual. You might become tearful more easily, feel deeply affected by other people's emotions or find busy environments harder to manage.
Vivid Dreams or Changes in Sleep	Dreams may become unusually vivid or memorable. You may also have difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep or feeling rested. Because sleep can strongly affect emotional and mental wellbeing, ongoing or significant sleep disruption is worth discussing with a health professional.
Changes in Meaning or Beliefs	You may begin questioning beliefs you have held for many years. You may think more deeply about your purpose, relationships, values or direction in life. This can be a meaningful part of personal growth, but it can also feel unsettling when many things are changing at once.
Unfamiliar Sensations or Perceptions	You may notice sensations, sounds, images or changes in perception that are difficult to describe. If these experiences are new, persistent, distressing or affecting your ability to function, it is important to discuss them with a qualified health professional rather than assuming they have one particular cause.
Feeling Detached or Overwhelmed	You may feel unlike your usual self, disconnected from people or your surroundings, unusually anxious or unsure how to describe what is happening. These experiences deserve care and attention, particularly if they are becoming stronger or interfering with everyday life.

You Do Not Have to Label the Experience

It can be tempting to search for a name or explanation immediately. However, a label does not tell the whole story. What matters first is how the experience is affecting you and what support you may need. You can explore its personal or spiritual meaning while also paying attention to your health, safety and everyday functioning.

Could I Be Having a Spiritual Awakening?



When searching for information about unusual experiences, you may come across the terms spiritual emergence and spiritual emergency. These terms are used in some spiritual and transpersonal approaches to describe experiences of significant personal or spiritual change. They are not formal medical diagnoses.

What Is Spiritual Emergence?

Spiritual Emergence describes a natural process of human development. It involves personal transformation and expanded awareness. This often shifts one's sense of meaning and purpose.

For some people, this may involve:

- a stronger sense of connection
- questioning previous beliefs
- changes in values
- greater interest in personal growth
- a deeper sense of meaning or purpose
- increased compassion or awareness

For some this process is gradual and positive. For others, significant personal change can bring uncertainty or emotional difficulty. There is no single way to experience this kind of growth.

What Is Spiritual Emergency?

The term spiritual emergency is sometimes used when expanded states of consciousness, often considered "spiritual", become distressing which can make it difficult to manage or integrate into everyday life.

A person may experience intense emotions, changes in their sense of identity, difficulty maintaining routines or relationships, or a strong need to understand what is happening. The experience may feel deeply meaningful while also becoming distressing.

A Distinction Worth Remembering

Something can feel meaningful and still require professional support. Spiritual emergency is a descriptive term used in some approaches; it does not by itself establish the cause of an experience or determine what treatment or care a person needs.

“Meaningful experiences can still deserve careful support”

Could I Be Having a Spiritual Awakening?
(continued)



A Balanced Approach

The Core Idea

Unusual or intense experiences can have psychological, physical, social, sleep-related, medication-related or spiritual interpretations. It is important not to automatically assume that an experience has a spiritual cause, while also avoiding dismissing the personal meaning it may have for someone.

A balanced approach allows a person to explore their beliefs and experiences while also considering their physical and mental wellbeing

When Professional Assessment Is Important

If an experience is significantly affecting sleep, judgement, everyday functioning or safety, appropriate professional assessment is important.

When Things Feel Overwhelming



There may be times when an experience becomes too much to manage.

You may feel frightened, confused, emotionally overwhelmed or unable to concentrate. You may be struggling with sleep or finding it difficult to keep up with normal responsibilities. At these times, the priority is not necessarily to understand the experience.

The priority is to help you feel safe, supported and cared for.

Return to the Basics

When things feel overwhelming, focus on the essentials:

- eat regularly
- drink plenty of water
- rest when you can
- maintain a simple sleep routine
- reduce unnecessary stimulation
- stay connected with safe people
- be sure to exercise each day - preferably outdoors in nature

Gentle movement, such as walking or stretching, may also be helpful if it is appropriate for you. A simple routine can provide structure during uncertain periods. It does not need to be perfect.

Grounding

Grounding means reconnecting with your body in the present moment and your immediate surroundings.

You might:

- notice your feet on the floor
- hold an ordinary object in your hand
- listen to familiar music
- notice what you can see and hear
- sit somewhere familiar
- spend time in nature if that feels safe
- complete a simple everyday task

Not every technique works for everyone. If focusing inward or using a particular exercise makes you feel more unsettled, stop and choose something more comfortable.

When Things Feel Overwhelming
(continued)



Spiritual Practices

If spirituality is meaningful to you, practices such as prayer, meditation, reflection or time in nature may feel supportive. Choose practices that help you remain connected to everyday life.

If a practice increases distress, interferes with sleep or makes everyday responsibilities more difficult, consider pausing it and discussing what is happening with a qualified health professional or qualified spiritual teacher.

When Additional Help Is Important

Self-care and grounding can be useful, but they are not a substitute for professional assessment when it is needed.

Consider seeking professional support if you are:

- becoming increasingly distressed
- unable to sleep adequately
- finding it difficult to care for yourself
- struggling to manage everyday responsibilities
- experiencing significant changes in mood, thinking or perception
- feeling unsafe

Seeking help does not invalidate the personal or spiritual meaning of your experience. It is a way of caring for your wellbeing while you work out what is happening.

> **Important**
>
> If you are feeling unsafe, or you are struggling to sleep, care for yourself or manage everyday life, please speak with an appropriately qualified health professional as soon as you can. In an emergency, call 000.

"Seeking help is a way of caring for yourself, not a sign that something is wrong with you."

Finding the Right Support



Finding appropriate support can make a significant difference.

You may benefit from more than one kind of support, depending on your needs. This could include a trusted friend or family member, a GP, psychiatrist, psychologist, counsellor, art therapist, other qualified health professional, spiritual mentor, faith leader or Spiritual Emergence Coach®.

Start With Someone You Trust

A trusted person does not need to understand everything.

They can listen, provide company and help you decide what to do next. You might say:

"I've been experiencing some things I don't fully understand. I would appreciate it if you could listen without judging me."

You do not have to tell everyone what is happening. Choose someone who is likely to treat you with kindness and respect.

Speaking With a GP or Health Professional

A GP can be a useful starting point when you are experiencing changes in your thoughts, feelings, sleep, physical health or everyday functioning.

A health professional can consider possible contributing factors, discuss your concerns and recommend appropriate support or referral.

You can tell them if spirituality or expanding your consciousness is important to you.

It may also help to bring notes about:

- what you have noticed
- when it began
- changes in sleep
- changes in mood or physical wellbeing
- changes in daily functioning
- medicines or substances
- significant life events
- what you are most concerned about

You can ask questions about assessment or treatment and ask for explanations in language you understand.

Finding the Right Support
(continued)



Spiritual Support

If you wish to explore the spiritual or personal meaning of your experience, you may choose to speak with someone appropriately trained in spiritual support.

A responsible support person should:

- listen without judgement
- respect your beliefs and choices
- be clear about their qualifications and role
- recognise the limits of their role
- be discerning, i.e. encourage appropriate healthcare when needed
- avoid presenting one explanation as certain
- avoid creating dependence or isolation

Be Cautious

Be cautious of anyone who tells you that they alone understand what is happening, discourages you from seeking healthcare, pressures you into major decisions or tells you to stop prescribed treatment. Do not stop or change prescribed medication without discussing it with the prescribing health professional.

Different Types of Support Can Work Together

You do not necessarily have to choose between spiritual support and professional healthcare. They may serve different purposes.

- Spiritual support may provide space to explore meaning, beliefs, values and personal growth.
- Professional healthcare can assess physical and mental health, changes in sleep, mood, thinking or perception, and difficulties with everyday functioning.

Both can contribute to a person's overall wellbeing. The aim is not to decide in advance exactly what is causing an experience. The aim is to provide appropriate care while allowing the person to explore what the experience means to them.

If You Feel Misunderstood

Sometimes the first person you speak with may not understand your experience. That can be discouraging, particularly if you have already been worried about being judged.

One difficult conversation does not mean that support is unavailable. You can explain your needs again, ask questions or seek another appropriately qualified professional when appropriate. You do not need to convince someone of a particular explanation to receive care. The focus can remain on what you are experiencing, how it is affecting you and what support may be helpful.

Helping Someone You Care About



It can be difficult to watch someone you care about experience something unfamiliar or overwhelming.

You may notice changes in their behaviour, mood, sleep, beliefs, relationships or ability to manage everyday life. You may not understand what they are experiencing or know what to say.

You do not need to have all the answers to be supportive.

Listen First

Give the person space to speak without immediately correcting, giving advice, interpreting or arguing with them.

You might say:

- *"I'm glad you told me."*
- *"That sounds like a lot to deal with."*
- *"I may not fully understand, but I'm here to listen."*
- *"What would feel helpful right now?"*
- *"Would you like me to help you find someone to talk to?"*

You can acknowledge that an experience feels real or distressing to the person without confirming an explanation that you cannot know to be true. For example:

"I can see that this is frightening for you. Let's think about what might help you feel safe and supported."

Avoid Pressure

Mocking, dismissing or telling someone to simply pull themselves together is unlikely to help. It can also be unhelpful to insist that every unusual experience has a spiritual explanation or that professional healthcare is unnecessary.

Instead, remain open and respectful. Focus on their wellbeing, practical needs and safety. Avoid encouraging major decisions about relationships, work, finances or living arrangements while the person is highly distressed.

Helping Someone You Care About
(continued)



Offer Practical Help

You might:

- prepare a meal
- sit with them
- help them contact someone
- accompany them to an appointment
- help them write down what they have been experiencing
- encourage rest and ordinary routines

If they are struggling to sleep, care for themselves or manage everyday life, encourage them to speak with an appropriately qualified health professional.

Look After Yourself

Supporting someone can also be emotionally demanding.

You cannot be solely responsible for another person's wellbeing. It is appropriate to seek support for yourself and to maintain reasonable boundaries. If you are concerned about immediate safety, seek urgent assistance.

"You do not need to have all the answers to be supportive."

Moving Forward



You may still have unanswered questions after reading this guide. That is okay. You do not need to have a complete explanation before taking care of yourself or seeking support.

Choose Your Next Step

Your next step might be:

- talking with someone you trust
- making an appointment with your GP
- writing down changes you have noticed
- returning to a steady routine
- getting more rest
- reducing things that increase distress
- finding appropriate spiritual support
- asking someone to accompany you to an appointment

Choose what is appropriate for your circumstances.

Allow Your Understanding to Develop

Your understanding of an experience may change over time. You may learn more, receive support or gain a different perspective.

You do not have to reach a conclusion immediately. What matters is that you remain connected to appropriate support and continue to care for your wellbeing.

Moving Forward



Create Your Own Support Plan

It may be useful to keep a simple plan somewhere easy to find.

People I can contact:

Write down trusted people and their contact details.

Name	Relationship	Phone number	Notes

Professional support:

Include your GP, mental health professional or other appropriate services.

Service or professional	Type	Phone number	Notes

Things that help me feel steadier:

List familiar activities, places, routines or people that help.

Signs that I need additional support:

For example, ongoing sleep difficulties, increasing distress, difficulty managing everyday life or concerns about safety.

What I will do if I need urgent help:

Keep emergency and crisis contacts somewhere easy to access. You can update this plan as your circumstances change.

Closing Thoughts



You Are Not Alone

I want to leave you with one message: **you are not alone**.

Life Can Change

Life can change in ways we never expect. Sometimes those changes bring connection, meaning, or a new understanding of ourselves. At other times, they can leave us frightened, confused, or unsure where to turn.

You're Allowed to Be Unsure

You may not have the words to explain what's happening yet. You may still have questions, and that's okay. You don't have to decide immediately whether your experience is spiritual, emotional, physical, psychological, or a combination of these.

What I Hope for You

As you continue to make sense of things, I hope you'll care for your physical and mental wellbeing, ask questions, and seek support from people you trust. You're allowed to explore personal meaning while also speaking with spiritual advisers or healthcare professionals.

Why I Wrote This

I created this guide because I want people to feel less alone, more understood, and more aware that support is available. I hope these pages have given you language for experiences that may be difficult to explain, along with some practical ways to care for yourself.

You Matter

Your experience matters, but it doesn't define your whole life. You deserve compassion, dignity, and respect while you work out what you need.

With compassion and care,
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Resources, Contacts and Further Reading

This section provides places to seek further information and support. Resources serve different purposes, and information about spiritual experiences should not be taken as proof of a particular cause.

Support Services in Australia

Lifeline Australia

For people experiencing emotional distress, feeling overwhelmed or needing someone to talk to.

Phone: **13 11 14** and Text: **0477 13 11 14** | Website: www.lifeline.org.au

In an emergency, call **000**

Beyond Blue

Information and support relating to mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Phone: **1300 22 4636** | Website: www.beyondblue.org.au

healthdirect Australia

Provides Australian health information and guidance about accessing health services.

Website: www.healthdirect.gov.au

Your GP or Qualified Health Professional

A GP can be a useful starting point if you are experiencing changes in your thoughts, feelings, sleep, physical health or everyday functioning. You can also tell your health professional if spiritual beliefs are important to how you understand your experience.

Spiritual Emergence Coach®

You can find a certified Spiritual Emergence Coach® through the Integrative Mental Health University (IMHU) directory at https://imhu.org/coaching/directory. Founded by Dr Emma Bragdon, IMHU offers courses for psychotherapists and the public to understand awakening and spiritual emergency so they can be managed appropriately. Their main goal is to help people understand the difference between a natural awakening or expansion of consciousness and mental illness, ensuring that intense inner changes are treated with respect rather than as a medical disorder.

Resources, Contacts and Further Reading
(continued)

Further Reading

Dr Stanislav Grof and Christina Grof – *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis*

This work explores spiritual emergency and personal transformation from a transpersonal perspective. It provides one framework for understanding intense experiences and should be considered alongside appropriate health information and professional assessment.

Dr Emma Bragdon – *The Call of Spiritual Emergency: From Personal Crisis to Personal Transformation and A Sourcebook for Helping People with Spiritual Problems*

Dr Bragdon is the Founder and Executive Director of the Integrative Mental Health University, a Psychotherapist and has co-produced 2 documentary films and written several books about spiritual emergency, spiritual emergence and approaches to supporting people experiencing intense spiritual or transformational experiences.

Her work provides another perspective for readers wishing to explore this area further. As with all spiritual emergence literature, these perspectives should not be used to assume that a particular experience has a spiritual cause.

Important Information for Readers

This guide is intended for general information, reflection and support. Information in this guide is drawn from my personal and professional experience as well as educational materials from the Integrative Mental Health University. It is not a substitute for medical advice, psychological assessment, diagnosis or treatment.

Experiences that feel unusual, intense or spiritual can have different causes. People are encouraged to seek appropriate professional support when experiences cause significant distress, or if they cannot function well due to health or safety. Spiritual support may complement appropriate healthcare, but it should not replace necessary medical or psychological care.

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