

Straight Talk About The Near-Death Phenomenon

Un diálogo sobre el fenómeno de las experiencias cercanas a la muerte

P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D.

International Association for Near-Death Studies
Charlottesville, VA, USA

Abstract

After over three decades of researching the near-death phenomenon, using police investigative techniques as my protocol, and including sessions with nearly 4,000 child and adult experiencers, a summary of my findings follow. This includes four main types of experiences, the pattern of physiological and psychological aftereffects, near-death-like experiences, differences between child and adult experiencers, and the four phases of integration. Because of an increase in prospective studies, there has been a shift in the field - confirming that the "classical model" isn't that classical. This underscores the work I have done since 1978 as a field worker examining actual dynamics.

Keywords: Near Death Experiences, NDE, NDE aftereffects, child experiencers, phases of integration, four types of NDE

Resumen

Este artículo es el resumen de mis investigaciones después de tres décadas estudiando el fenómeno de la proximidad de la muerte con cerca de 4.000 niños y adultos, usando técnicas policiales de investigación como protocolo. Algunos importantes resultados incluyen los cuatro tipos principales de experiencias, el patrón común de los efectos fisiológicos y psicológicos a largo plazo y la naturaleza de las experiencias cercanas a la muerte. Debido al aumento de investigación en este campo, se ha dado un cambio que ha confirmado que el "modelo clásico" no es tan clásico. Esto enfatiza el trabajo que he hecho desde 1978 como investigadora examinando las dinámicas actuales.

Palabras clave: experiencias cercanas a la muerte, ECM, consecuencias de las ECM, niños con ECM, fases de integración, cuatro tipos de ECM

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Introduction

Although every researcher seems to have their own favorite definition of what a "near-death experience" is, the most commonly used is the one originated by the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS).

The near-death experience is an intense awareness, sense, or experience of otherworldliness, whether pleasant or unpleasant, that happens to people who are at the edge of death. It is of such magnitude that most experiencers are deeply affected - many to the point of making significant changes in their lives afterward, because of what they went through.

During the early years, the field of near-death studies did not have the respect it has gained today. Rather, it was relegated to the "imaginings" of Raymond E. Moody, Jr., M.D. and his American cohorts by numerous scientists in other countries - because what they found didn't match published claims. Ignoring prior work, some of it dating back to the 1700s and featuring essentially the same patterning as modern cases (Atwater, 2007: 3-7), the objection held that there were "too many variables" for comparison. We know different now, yet the model that developed in the mid-1970s of elements within the pattern (termed the "classical model"), does not hold up in broad-based studies. A common lament: "If only we could research near-death states in a climate devoid of sensationalism, what followed the 1975 publication of Moody's book, *Life After Life* (Moody, 1975)".

As a matter of review, the classical model based on the work of Raymond E. Moody, Jr., M.D., as verified by Kenneth Ring in his book, *Life at Death* (Ring, 1980), follows:

Original List:

- ineffability, beyond the limits of any language to describe
- hearing yourself pronounced dead
- feelings of peace and quiet
- hearing unusual noises
- seeing a dark tunnel
- finding yourself outside your body
- meeting "spiritual beings"
- a very bright light experienced as a "being of light"
- a panoramic life review
- sensing a border or limit to where you can go
- coming back to your body
- frustrating attempts to tell others about what happened to you
- subtle "broadening and deepening" of your life afterward
- elimination of the fear of death
- corroboration of events witnessed while out of your body

Two years later, after hundreds more interviews, Moody added four more elements to this list:

- a realm where all knowledge exists
- cities of light

- a realm of bewildered spirits
- supernatural rescues

Where this model breaks down: (1) few see tunnels, (2) few encounter even half the elements listed, (3) the broad spectrum of experience types is not addressed, and (4) aftereffects are far more complex than originally thought with integration taking a minimum of seven to 10 years.

I began my research of near-death states in 1978. Using police investigative techniques as my protocol and searching broadly, cross-checking everything I found with new groups in different places, including with "significant others", I discovered patterning to the phenomenon that accommodated variables, while revealing a more in-depth spread to the aftereffects. When Kenneth Ring, the researcher who verified Moody's work, learned about me and what I was doing (he found out from several near-death experiencers whom I had met), he came for a visit. Ring told me about Raymond Moody, as I had never heard of him before, and then he invited me to join my peer group within the International Association for Near-Death Studies, located at the time in Storrs, Connecticut. The year was 1981.

My peer group turned out to be physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, and scientists, who spoke a language I was unfamiliar with, plus they practiced a type of research that seemed inappropriate to me for the work at hand. Experience had long since taught me that transformational shifts in consciousness and the wide sweep of exceptions that can occur because of them, were outside the range of double-blind studies with a control group (the "scientific method"). I felt that, since 90 to 95% of what is learned in medicine comes from personnel listening to patients, and because over 70% of the medical procedures used today resulted from trained observers like myself who cross-checked and tested what they found, my work, then, was just as valid as anyone else's. Never once did I just ask questions of people; I observed, watched, and studied them - as behaviors and body language often say more than words do.

I am a cop's kid, raised in a police station. My Dad started teaching me police investigative techniques at the age of nine. That means no leading questions and you pay particular attention to inflections, behaviors, body movements, and pacing. I have used questionnaires three times, but only to further investigate what I had already discovered. The bulk of my work was done during one-on-one sessions; the rest in group settings. I have been doing this since 1978. *Near-Death Experiences: The Rest of The Story* (Atwater, 2011) summarizes this research and compares it with what I did in the 1960s and 1970s when I experimented with and studied altered states of consciousness, mysticism, psychic phenomena, and the transformational process with the public at large. To understand why I would devote my life to this type of pursuit, know that I am highly curious, and am intrigued by what exists beyond what seems to be true (this led to my first double-blind study with controls at the age of five). Also know that I "died" or nearly died three times in 1977 within a span of three months, and each time experienced the near-death phenomenon. During my third episode I was told by what I came to call "The Voice Like None Other" to do this work.

Methodology

As it has been mentioned before, the methodology followed was using the following:

- Police investigative techniques with cross-checking
- Questionnaires
- Observation in one-on-one sessions
- Observation in group settings
- Observation in personal experience

Percentages of how I connected with these people, see Table 1.

Table 1.
Contacted people

Method	Percentage
Synchronicity (9 people of all of them were blind; 7 out the 9 since birth)	60%
Through talks, advertisements and announcements placed in magazines, newspapers and newsletters	30%
Questionnaire participants who had agreed to take part in the research	10%

The synchronicity of how I met the majority of experiencers is uncanny, if not bizarre. Nearly every day some would pop into my life, sometimes groups of them at a time. Example:

I was sitting at a table in a truck stop near Macon, Georgia, when a giant of a man pulled up a chair opposite me and proceeded to describe his near-death experience. I hailed a cab in Washington, D.C., and the Haitian cabbie took one look at me, then yelled: "You died like I did. I can tell you about what happened to me and you won't laugh." Unplanned. Spontaneous. Constant. I finally decided I must have been wearing a "sign" on my back that said "Tell me about your near-death experience." No names. We were drawn to each other.

The language used with the people was open-ended, non-leading, and knowing nothing about Moody's findings and his work.

Subjects

The material in this paper comes from 33 years of exploring near-death states. It is based on my observations and analysis of 3,000 adult and 277 child experiencers, as well as additional sessions held with significant others. See Table 2.

Table 2.
Population studied

Amount	Etnity	Country
3000 adult experiencers (from 16 years)	80% White	U.S., Canada, England, Belgium, France, Mexico, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Georgia, Ukraine - no further breakdowns
	20% Black	15% African American 5% Kenya, Haiti, Canada
277 child experiencers (from birth trauma up to 15 years)	60% White	U.S., Canada, France, England, Ukraine, no further breakdowns
	12% Black	15% African American 5% Kenya, Haiti, Canada

Note: I rejected an additional 15% of my cases with children, because the session was compromised by adult interference (adult explaining/interpreting for the child). I found that fascination with "out-of-the-mouths-of-babes" reports can mislead more readily than enlighten.

Results and Discussion

From 3277 testimonies, I discovered four types of near-death experiences. This discovery includes another: anyone of any age can have a near-death experience - that includes tiny ones still in utero, those in the birth canal, babies, toddlers, children and teenagers, the full range of adults and seniors.

The Four Types of Near-Death Experiences

1. Initial Experience - sometimes referred to as the "non-experience" (an awakening).

Involves only one - maybe two or three - elements, such as a loving nothingness, the living dark, a friendly voice, a brief out-of-body experience, or a manifestation of some type. Usually experienced by those who seem to need the least amount of evidence for proof of survival, or who need the least amount of shakeup in their lives at that point in time. Often, this becomes a "seed" experience or an introduction to other ways of perceiving and recognizing reality. Rarely is any other element present.

Table 3.

Initial experience

Incident rate	Type of experiencer
76%	Child
20%	Adult

2. Unpleasant and/or Hell-Like Experience - sometimes referred to as "distressing" (inner cleansing and self-confrontational).

Encounter with a threatening void, stark limbo, or hellish purgatory, or scenes of a startling and unexpected indifference (like being shunned), even "hauntings" from one's own past. Scenarios usually experienced by those who seem to have deeply suppressed or repressed guilt, fear, and anger, and/or those who expect some kind of punishment or discomfort after death. Life reviews common. Some have life previews.

Table 4. Unpleasant Experience

Incident rate	Type of experiencer
3%	child
15%	adult

3. Pleasant and/or Heaven-Like Experience - sometimes referred to as "radiant" (reassurance and self-validation).

Heaven-like scenarios of loving family reunions with those who have died previously, reassuring religious figures or light beings, validation that life counts, affirmative and inspiring dialogue. Scenarios usually experienced by those who most need to know how loved they are and how important life is and how every effort has a purpose in the overall scheme of things. Life reviews common. Some have life previews.

Table 5.

Pleasant Experience

Incident rate	Type of experiencer
19%	child
47%	adult

4. Transcendent Experience - sometimes referred to as "collective universality" (expansive revelations, alternate realities).

Exposure to otherworldly dimensions and scenes beyond the individual's frame of reference; sometimes includes revelations of greater truths. Seldom personal in content. Scenarios usually experienced by those who are ready for a "mind stretching" challenge and/or individuals who are more apt to use (to whatever degree) the truths revealed to them. Life reviews rare. Collective previews common (the world's future, evolutionary changes, etc.).

Table 6.
Transcendent Experience

Incident rate	Type of experiencer
2%	Child
18%	Adult

Do not affix "positive" or "negative" to any of these experience types

Positive and negative are judgmental terms that do not necessarily apply to near-death states or the aftereffects which follow. Case in point:

I gave a talk about the phenomenon in a large hall. It was so packed there were not enough chairs, leaving some standing. When I finished, I asked if there were any experiencers in the audience who would like to come up to the microphone and share what had happened to them. Two volunteered. A slender man, maybe in his late twenties, entranced everyone with one of the most beautiful, heavenly experiences I had ever heard. There was hardly a dry eye in the place. Then he shocked the audience by saying this was the worst thing that had ever happened to him, that it had fouled up his life and he felt cursed to have had it. Immediately, a woman, probably in her thirties, jumped up and described her's, a terror-filled scenario of being at the mercy of a raging storm, with high winds, thunder and lightning. She had to fight to save herself from being sucked into a whirlpool as she swam to shore. What she said next was equally a stunner: "This was the best thing that ever happened to me. It proved to me that we all have a second chance in life and we can succeed no matter what the obstacles are". She was glowing when she said this, and appeared as if engulfed by a special light.

Previous to this incident, I labeled unpleasant experiences as negative and pleasant ones as positive. I no longer make that mistake.

I want to set the record straight on "tunnels." In the first poll done by Gallup (1982), only around 9% of the experiencers surveyed said they saw or passed through anything like a tunnel. In many cultures, such things are unheard of even to this day. The idea of tunnels did not become popular as an element of near-death states until after Moody's book *Life After Life* was sensationalized by the media.

Having said that, I want to discuss the elements that are commonplace, occurring in most episodes anywhere in the world. Please know that during any near-death state, faculties are hyperalert, thoughts hyperlucid, and emotions at hyperpitch.

Out-of-body experiences are the most reported element; nearly as many also spoke of encountering a special light. Two-thirds claimed to have been met by a greeter of some kind, either at or shortly after crossing over to the Other Side. Forty percent described a life review. Any of these four main elements could comprise a single experience, or be part of a brief or broader scenario (storyline/narrative) that encompassed multiple components such as: walks through meadows, forests, open fields, mountain passes, alongside a river, or passage through darkness of caves or tunnels; tours of great cities, the universe, heaven and hell, history and/or evolution; discussions with other beings, heavenly assignments, hellish

condemnations; attending classes in a special school, learning how to heal, being shown inventions/systems that could help society; suffering from judgment or punishment, torture.

Finding oneself engulfed in an exceptional brightness, with each being or plant lit from within, is typical. Darkness is reported, too, most often in loving terms but sometimes as fearsome. Few are open to discuss anything threatening, which leads me to believe that hellish cases are not rare - just underreported. (In my research, one out of seven were the distressing type).

1.- Out-of-body Experiences: Regular out-of-body states many people have are not quite like the ones reported in near-death states. These have incredible intensity and impact, and involve 360-degree, wrap-around vision (even with people blind since birth). These "trips" can involve things like the "dead" going home and being there to see who picks up the phone when a nurse or doctor calls announcing the death - accurately describing individuals, wearing apparel, words said. Also things like bobbing along the ceiling like a balloon (maybe confused about what just happened); or those who journey to far away towns and countries (giving detailed "travelogues" of everything seen and encountered). The average skeptic cries foul about lack of verification with out-of-body reports, when, in fact, third-party testimonials validating details are numerous.

2.- A Loving Light That Knows You: Adult experiencers typically describe this light as brighter than a million suns and more powerful than a million orgasms. Even children acknowledge that it is alive, knows everything there is to know, and is so loving that being engulfed by it is the purest of bliss. Three different lights are commonly seen:

- Primary (luminous): more of a pulsating radiance of raw, piercing power that is so awesome that prolonged contact makes experiencers feel as if they are about to explode.
- *Dark or Black (can have purple tinges)*: velvety and warm, safe haven, usually associated with miraculous healings and sudden genius (seldom ever with evil, although it can be experienced that way).
- *Bright or White (silver tinges) or Yellow (gold tinges)*: an almost blinding brilliance that emanates unconditional love and knowingness.

Child experiencers say that Bright Light is Father Light, Dark/Black Light is Mother Light, and Primary is God's Light.

3.- A Greeter of Some Kind: Not everyone is met by a greeter, but most are. Usually, it is a deceased relative or pet who appears younger or at least healthier. Family relationships dominate, for good or ill. If you couldn't tolerate a particular relative, odds are that person will be there either as an agitator or as a guide. With angel greeters, 70% of the kids had angels come to them. Children described the angels as human appearing (most said they had wings), and were either black or white of color (like a black or white color-crayon), or colored like real people are (with the variations found in human skin hues). It was 50/50 with adults and teenagers. Of those who reported this, 39% saw winged ones, the rest spoke of either special "humans" or human-shaped lightforms/globes/cylinders. Some spoke of black angels, like the kids did. Religious figures usually matched the individual's faith tradition, but not always. For those who saw Jesus, the most common response was "He's so joyful and loving."

With children, stern greeters were almost as numerous as kind ones. I came to recognize a "critical" or "caring" parent-type of greeter for the young, whose job seemed to center around whatever was needed -

either with words of praise and comfort, or through instructive lectures - as if the child could use some "fetching up". Futuristic events plus the child's mission in life were often revealed. Other kinds of greeters were animals (usually deceased pets), yet some unknown to the experiencer. On occasion, I did run across reports of misshapen, grotesque, or demonic greeters, or those who looked so alien the experiencer was at a loss to describe them.

4.- Life Reviews: Not half the experiencers report them, yet life reviews wield an almost unspeakable power. Even in consideration of hellish, frightening, or distressing near-death states, nothing strikes at the core of what it is to be human as bluntly as these. It is your life you must face, either from birth to death, in reverse order, or in segments - reviewed or relived as things actually occurred, in a moment's flash or agonizingly slow. Of those in my research, some experienced no buffer between them and any pain that could be experienced. The rest, the majority, were more like objective witnesses during the process; their reviews, a deeply meaningful opportunity to see "the other side" of actions and behaviors.

An example of one more radical than most is that of a Mafia hit man whose life review not only involved him reliving everything he had ever done, good or bad, as well as the consequences, but he also had to live through whatever happened to each person he hurt *as if he were them*. He felt all of *their pain*, lived through *their* circumstances, faced *their* grief. He was incapable of hurting another after that, and devoted the rest of his life to helping the poor. There is no prison term, no punishment, which can equal the totality of a radical life review. Some accounts are beyond belief in what they cover.

5.- The Book of Life: I want to mention this because about 30% of the adults in my research reported having seen the fabled book - very few were children. Some said it really was a very large book - found in a library stacked with millions of others, or simply was lying on a stand or podium as if waiting to be noticed. The majority, however, described "The Book" as a hologram or television-like showing. The rest said the histories of all of us are spread out upon "the skeins of time," as if this were a vibrational field, and we are drawn to that place where we resonate. Hardly anyone refers to a "silver cord," that "umbilical" said to connect our physical body to our spirit body. I only ran across two (of those who did see some kind of cord), who said their's was broken, but had to be quickly mended or they couldn't return.

An impressive finding that holds up throughout the entire field of near-death studies that establishes veracity of accounts, is this: *the narratives experiencers give hold up over time*. Their stories are as clear, coherent, and vivid as the day originally told, even if 20 years or more have passed. This is almost unheard of in memory trials.

Personality factors

There are a few complicating factors when dealing with experiencers that appear to challenge the honesty factor, but really don't. *The majority tend to hold back until they trust you*. Perhaps this is because of the fear of being labeled crazy afterwards. Whatever the reason, it is fairly common for narrative stories to be delivered in bits and pieces and spread out over a few months or a year or so. And then there's *downloading*. Few experiencers can readily process the revelations that surface during their episode. You hear comments such as: "I felt like I would explode if the information didn't stop coming" or "I can't handle this - too much, too fast" or "I just can't remember it all". And, indeed, most of the deeper material that often floods in during an episode is lost. Yet, some experiencers report downloading afterward as if what was lost is now coming back. This can occur in dribs and drabs or be quite extensive, and go on for years. This "extra" material does not affect the individual's original narrative, thus no embellishment.

I did find *personality patterns*. Those people who had more fixed belief systems and inflexible attitudes about life often returned thinking their experience was a religious conversion, or felt a need to somehow evangelize about what they had learned from it. It's almost as if they traded one belief system for another. But those who were more flexible and curious, more open to begin with, these were the folks who often returned so bewildered and confused they seemed bereft of any belief system at all. This latter group usually had the most work to do redefining life, yet they were the least likely to evangelize. They seemed to spend more time remaking themselves than trying to remake everyone else.

If you are honest about near-death episodes and keep them in context with the life of each experiencer, you will discover what I did: *scenarios complement on some level the inner reality of those who experience it*. Always! Including with children. For a child brings forward into his or her birth the sum total of whatever existed before conception as well as whatever was absorbed during gestation in the mother's womb. Children's stories are simple and direct. Adult's are colored from years of living. But it's the same phenomenon with the same patterning.

There are *regionalisms*. For instance, people from the Northwest and Southwest of United States, and from Haiti, had more animals in their scenario than most others. Those from the Southeast, Midwest, and Central states had more overall themes of good and evil in their stories. I did not find heavy concentrations of hellish scenarios among Bible Belt Christians, as others claim, but I did notice that only Fundamentalists described hell as hot and fiery. Everyone else commented on how cold or clammy it was, or devoid of temperature.

Culturalisms are commonplace. Example: how an experience is described depends on language constraints for the individual and on societal taboos. Within indigenous cultures, the concept of "self" is missing. These people operate from a collective reality, the wisdom of the group. With the Lakota Sioux, there is no concept or word for "individual self." Their language and their understanding of life is based on "relations with all that exists." Hence, what good would a life review be to them if it examines a "self" that has no meaning or validity in their culture? Some researchers have suggested that this finding may be an accommodation for brain development, rather than a mirror of regional or cultural beliefs.

Greeter variation

The *surprising variation with greeters* is a puzzle. Almost always predeceased relatives and friends manifest as somewhat younger. Those greeters who died young can still be young, or they can appear at the age they should have been had they lived. Yet the living can appear, too, like the child's favorite school teacher or the kid down the block, or in the case of adults, a treasured friend still very much alive. What I have noticed with *living greeters* is that they stick around only long enough for the experiencer to relax into what is occurring, then they disappear, and components more typical of near-death states take over. It's as if the only purpose of living greeters is to create a comfort zone wherein deeper and more profound things can follow.

And, what about those "*caring or critical parent types*"? These greeters tend to be rather specific regarding the child's behavior: how have they been acting, are they measuring up, are they ready for the job they will someday perform. Children always see *God or a God-Like Figure* as a man. Teenagers and adults, for the most part, see The Holiest of the Holy as some form of light, usually a huge sphere. I've yet to hear of a child who challenged God as to what he really looked like, yet they often challenged angels. Each time they did, the angelic being transformed into light.

Near-death scenarios are real and profound, and the otherworldly greeters who attend are just as real, sometimes nothing short of miraculous. Still, what actually happens (the experience itself), *always occurs in a form the experiencer is capable of receiving, even if otherworldly or bizarre*. With initial greeters, I

noticed that they *always match the individual's conceptual level of understanding*, either to alert or relax, so what is happening can deepen.

Multiple scenarios. It is not uncommon for an individual to have several near-death experiences during his or her lifetime. I had three myself in three months back in 1977. With the 277 child experiencers I worked with, nearly 20% had a second episode while still a child (several had four or more); 27% went on to have additional experiences as adults. The "record holder" for me was a man who had 23 of them throughout a lifetime of surgeries and pain. He had been born with serious birth defects and was not expected to live past six months of age. He was in his early 40s and wheel-chair bound when I met him. When I asked why so many, he replied: "Each one gives me the strength and courage I need to keep going."

People who die together typically have near-death experiences together, and see each other in their separate episodes. This happens with some regularity if parents and children are involved, or friends, or with large groups of people - like passengers in the same vehicle that crashed, or strangers who drowned in close proximity.

Stunning cases of group death/near-death come from the military. Diane Corcoran, a retired Army nurse, was on hand for some of these. She tells of entire platoons blown up; the few survivors talking afterwards about watching their buds rise from their bodies, and, as they did, how they talked to each other, assessed the situation, learned who would live and who would die. She warns that veterans seldom speak of such experiences, primarily because military doctors still consider near-death states a sign of mental incompetency. As Diane Corcoran (president of IANDS) reported me personally: "With blast injuries affecting so many who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, these soldiers dare not even report NDEs for fear they can't get back into the system for healthcare".

Previews, occasionally called "flash forwards," refer to experiencers who were privy to their future or the future of others. Children often see the affect their death will cause their family and because of that choose to return. Being shown their funeral and what comes next is fairly common with adults, as well. Another feature of children's scenarios, especially if the child is from an unindustrialized country, is being told or shown their life's work, how they must prepare, and what they must learn. One adult female I had several sessions with accurately saw the man she would someday marry as well as wedding details. Another was shown atomic bombs being dropped over several cities in Japan years before this occurred during World War II. Another saw a younger brother and recognized him immediately, even though he was not conceived by her mother until a year later. One man was shown all of history from beginning to end.

Connections to UFOs and extraterrestrials

Sometimes occurred in my research:

Table 7.
Extraterrestrial Experience

	<i>Adult Near-Death Experiencers (based on 3,000 cases)</i>	<i>Child Near-Death Experiencers (based on 277 cases)</i>
Claimed to have been abducted by a UFO	9%	14%
Identified with being from another planet	20%	9%
Identified with being from another dimension		39%

Children have strong ties with otherworldly things and other types of beings (Atwater, 2003). With adults, however, this is unusual.

Physiological Aftereffects of Near-Death States

The pattern of physiological and psychological aftereffects is true throughout.

Most Common (between 80 to 95%) - more sensitive to light, especially sunlight, and to sound (tastes in music change); look younger/act younger/more playful (with adults) - look older, act and seem more mature (with children); substantial change in energy levels (can have energy surges); changes in thought processing (switch from sequential/selective thinking to clustered/abstracting, with an acceptance of ambiguity); insatiable curiosity; lower blood pressure; bright skin and eyes; reversal of brain hemisphere dominance commonplace; heal quicker.

Quite Common (50 to 79%) - reversal of body clock, electrical sensitivity, heightened intelligence, metabolic changes (doesn't take as long to process food, bowel movements can increase); assimilate substances into bloodstream quicker (takes less of something for full effect); loss of pharmaceutical tolerance (many turn to alternative/complementary healing modalities); heightened response to taste/touch/texture/smell/pressure; more creative and inventive; synesthesia (multiple sensing); increased allergies; preference for more vegetables, less meat (with adults) - more meat, less vegetables (with children); latent talents surface; indications of brain structure/function changes (also to nervous and digestive systems, skin sensitivity).

Psychological Aftereffects of Near-Death States

Most Common (between 80 to 90%) - loss of the fear of death; become more spiritual/less religious; more generous and charitable; handle stress easier; philosophical; more open and accepting of the new and different; disregard for time and schedules; regard things as new even when they're not (boredom levels decrease); form expansive concepts of love while at the same time challenged to initiate and maintain satisfying relationships; become psychic/intuitive; know things (closer connection to Deity/God, prayerful); deal with bouts of depression; less competitive.

Quite Common (50 to 79%) - displays of psychic phenomena; vivid dreams and visions; "inner child" issues exaggerate; convinced of life purpose/mission; rejection of previous limitations/norms; episodes of future knowing common; more detached and objective (dissociation); "merge" easily (absorption); hunger for knowledge; difficulty communicating and with language; can go through deep periods of depression and feelings of alienation from others; synchronicity commonplace; more or less sexual; less desire for possessions and money; service oriented; healing ability; attract animals (good with plants); aware of invisible energy fields/auras; preference for open doors and open windows/shades; drawn to crystals; laugh more; adults lighter afterwards - children wiser; more serious; bonding to parents lessens.

A further look at how this stacks up with experiencers:

21% - claimed no discernible differences afterward (this claim was countered by the experiencer's significant others in every case where I was able to obtain a second opinion).

60% - reported significant, noticeable changes.

19% - said changes were so radical they felt as if they had become another person (before and after photos sometimes differed, although basic body type and facial structures remained the same).

Those, then, who reported changes of a significant nature after their near-death episode, exhibiting all or most of this pattern, totaled 79%. There is no drug (legal or illegal/natural or synthetic), no hallucination, no case of oxygen deprivation, no epileptic seizures, nothing, that can match or mimic this pattern of aftereffects –except a deeply impactful spiritual transformation that also evidenced a kundalini breakthrough (both can and usually do occur at the same time, automatically). Kundalini, by the way, is that spiritual energy said to reside at the base of the spine, that when activated (through prayer, ritual, or certain types of yoga), rises the full length of the spine up to the head, where it bursts out -activating all major endocrine centers in the body as it moves.

The key in near-death research is to look at the whole phenomenon, not just a few aspects. It is the aftereffects that validate the experience, not the other way around.

Switches in brain dominance tend to follow this pattern: if more right-brained before (creative, innovative, intuitive, compassionate), usually return more left-brained in the sense of a sudden interest in physics, science, experimentation, and history. We usually hear the most about the reverse switch, from left-brained to right, but the other can also occur. Actually, if you really study these switches, it's almost as if the end result is for whole brain development - a melding of art and science (right and left) into a unified whole.

Unconditional love is on everyone's lips, yet experiencers are sorely challenged to initiate and maintain satisfying relationships. To understand why this may be so, realize that "unconditional love" is known as "agape" in Greek. It is a reference to the highest form of love possible to express: God's Love, Cosmic Love, Universal Love. Literally, it is love sans object. After a near-death experience, it is as if everyone you see is your beloved. It's not that you can't tell differences; rather, everyone takes on "the glow of family" - the human family in oneness with each other. Basic cautions often have to be relearned. Is everyone truly ready to love each other unconditionally - no secrets, nothing ever held back, no exceptions? Not hardly. I am continually amazed at how coldly indifferent experiencers can be regarded by others, when, in actuality, they are simply behaving in an unselfish, friendly, or helpful manner. Misunderstandings are frequent.

Cautions to be considered

Here's a list of cautions to consider for all medical and healthcare professionals when treating near death experiencers:

- *Low blood pressure is normal for experiencers.* This is not a sign of chronic fatigue syndrome, nor does it require "disease" treatment.
- *Less aging.* Low blood pressure and looking younger go together, and are a sign that cortisol (in the class of steroids/stress related) is less present in the body. Experiencers tend to have slower responses to stress, which creates less cortisol, lowers blood pressure, and slows down the aging factor.
- *Light sensitivity.* Fresh air is healthy but be careful of excessive sunlight. Especially with the young, limit playtime or sports outside. Adults who work outdoors should consider wearing sunglasses and taking "shade" breaks. Too much bright light could be fatiguing and put the immune system at risk. There are some experiencers who crave light and can't get enough of it. Extremes in reaction to light are commonplace.
- *Sound sensitivity.* A real challenge for teens and those living in larger cities who are inundated with loud sounds/music. This can be painful. Most switch to melodic music, the sounds of nature, or silence.

- *Less tolerance of pharmaceuticals.* Less is more. Experiencers are urged to tell medical staff that they have had a near-death episode, when, and under what conditions. This alerts doctors and nurses to a possible need to alter treatment. Assimilation is quicker for the vast majority, as it takes less of something for full effect. Seek out the mildest medication possible for the condition. Careful with child experiencers, as substances for them are administered according to weight and age and often contain unnecessary or excessive sweeteners.
- *Sleep cycles can change.* The very young tend to nap less and "flow" more (flow states are free of thinking and help to energize creativity). Many relive their near-death episode or are haunted by it in vivid dream states. Sixty percent of adult experiencers wake up between 3 and 4 am, and for no apparent reason. Medically, that time period is known as "The Hour of the Wolf," and is associated with congestive heart failure and other serious health problems (Ackerman, 2007: 186). With creative people, it is called "The Hour of the Muse," a period when artistic/inventive types receive their greatest ideas and inspiration. That same hour, spiritually, is when angels and heavenly guidance are said to be easier to access; in Islam, the first prayer of the morning begins at 4:00 am. Scientifically, it is known that the earth's magnetic fields, pushed by solar winds, peak around 3:00 am each night. This "ambient" or surrounding circulation is considered *unstable* by scientists, *creatively stimulating* by artists. Other changes: onset of sleep can be difficult at first; breathing can stop without cause, even while asleep. Body clock reversals are typical. None of these sleep deviations are outside the norm.
- *Switch to alternative/complementary therapies.* Those who are able to maintain successful and satisfying states of health, are most often those who utilize more natural approaches to healthcare. With acupuncture, practitioners who use gold needles instead of stainless steel note a quicker, better healing response with experiencers - indicative of a biofield shift. One out of five became vegetarians. Many come to say grace at mealtimes and meditate on a regular basis. There is no question that our biofields are altered to some degree after a near-death experience (hence gold needles work better than stainless steel with acupuncture). And, 73% of experiencers report very real challenges with electrical sensitivity afterward: stopping watches, popping light bulbs, changing television stations by just walking by, burning up or short-circuiting tape recorders/small appliances/microphones/electrical systems/phone lines/even car batteries. This is expensive! One experiencer switched to solar batteries so watches could be worn.

Faculty Extensions

Our faculties expand as well, enhancing our sensitivity to taste, touch, texture, smell, pressure, sight, sound, vibrations and shapes of any sort, weather, subtle movements. Faculties can mix, conjoin, or come in multiples. This is called "synesthesia" and is associated with the limbic system in the brain. An example of synesthesia is when experiencers buy a picture for the sound it makes, not just for its pleasing image. Or smelling color or hearing numbers, or seeing shapes or orbs in the air that correspond to emotional states. The limbic system is the seat of our emotional and survival natures. A lot of what we call "psychic abilities" in actuality are accelerations or expansions of the limbic system – survival hyperfunctions.

Thus, if you weren't psychic before, you become psychic after. If you were psychic before, you become very psychic after. Intuition relates to our faculty of perception and how we piece together information that helps us to live our lives safer and easier. Our brain literally has an "intuition switch" that turns on about every 90 minutes. You can tell if it's "on" if you suddenly feel spacey, sleepy, or cannot focus (an excellent time for a brief meditation or flow state). Things psychic, in my opinion, relate to how we use intuition. The word "psychic" derives from the Greek term *psychikos*, which means "of the soul." Traditionally, the ability is identified via mode of usage: clairvoyance (seeing beyond eyes), clairaudience

(hearing beyond ears), clairsentience (sensing beyond response), clairgustience (tasting beyond taste buds), and clarolfactory (smelling beyond nose).

Psychic ability is really just another way of listening. Channeling spirits is just another type of self-validation. Intuition is just another avenue to express the spontaneity of a moment and all that it holds.

The Table 8 clarifies what it is meant by “Faculty Extensions” and shows these shifts in a more specific way. It is possible to extend and broaden our five faculties of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, to embrace psychic dimensions (beyond reliance on physical forms) and collective/spiritual realms (grander realities, the larger view). Notice in the following chart what happens to intuition and perception once our faculties extend and broaden.

Table 8.
Faculty Extensions

Physical Faculty	Psychic Extension	Collective and/or Spiritual Extension
See/Sight	See without use of eyes; research term - "clairvoyance"	Vision
Hear/Sound	Hear without presence of sound; research - "clairaudience"	Music
Feel/Touch	Feel, or have an effect on an object, without touching; research term - "psychokinesis"	Art
Taste/Flavor	Flavor without use of tastebuds; research term - "clairgustation"	Discernment
Smell/Scent	Odor without the use of nose; research term – "clairolfaction"	Integrity
Sense/Intuition	Aware without or in advance of recognition; research term – "clairsentience"	Grace
Perceive/Perception	Apprehend without or in advance of physical stimuli; research term – "precognition"	Knowing

Music is heard unlike that of earth in many near-death scenarios. It is called the "music of the spheres" for lack of a better term. Afterward, sound enhancements skyrocket with most, creating relationships to music that are sudden, passionate, fully-dimensional. Yes, there are stories about experiencers who, without thought or intent, began to sing grand opera or play a musical instrument or compose incredible scores - as if a pro who had a lifetime of training.

With child experiencers, it was found that enhancements in music (85%) were almost as high as those in math (93%). Since the regions for math and music in the brain are located next to each other, it is likely that they accelerate as if a single unit.

There is a clue here we need to consider. Background sound (like "hu," "hum," or "om") or melody (similar to "hoomi" singing - bell-like overtone harmonics) is present in the majority of near-death experiences. Some experiencers return with full-blown musical talent; most come back either craving certain types of music or dedicated to using music as a healing tool. Math and music tend to merge for many (just like science and art do). Our bodies are made of light and sound at the most primal level, so are the worlds of spirit and the structures of matter.

Foreseeing the future

There has been enough rigorous, repeatable experiments (Ring, 1984 and further articles published in Vital Signs and the Journal of Near-Death Studies) to prove that people can foresee the future, at least to a limited degree, usually with feelings about what is to come - rather than in specific details. This precognition (future knowing) is linked to our emotions, not only in the limbic system of the brain, but in our "heart brain"

(called that because about 65% of the heart's cells are neural cells, explaining "heart intelligence"). Changes in skin sensitivity can also signal this, as skin reflects our emotional state and the same precognitive impulses. The future knowing that emerges from near-death states, however, tends to be more specific and detailed, and not just reflective of feelings.

Experiencers can have episodes of future memory, as well, where they become acutely aware of living the future in advance (Atwater, 1999). Although these episodes can happen in dreamstates, they most often occur when individuals are wide awake and actively engaged. See Table 9.

Table 9.
The general pattern of occurrence

<i>Physical sensation at onset</i>	Like a "lift" or sweep of energy, perhaps a ringing sound
<i>Present time/space relationships freeze in place</i>	This stoppage can be accompanied by sparkles in the air. Everything becomes brighter, sense faculties heighten
<i>Expansion</i>	As you expand so does space
<i>Future temporarily overlays the present</i>	A given scenario manifests in specific detail and is sensorially experienced as if a real event
<i>Present time/space relationships then resume normal activity</i>	Sparkles disappear, rightful proportions return, regular living restarts
<i>Aftereffects</i>	Sensations of being startled, "chilled," or puzzled. Event remains vivid as long as it remains in awareness, but, eventually is either forgotten or set aside until what was pre-lived occurs.

These "pre-lived" episodes later manifest. Sometimes experiencers are able to change the timing of what is involved in these memories, but apparently not the event itself.

Timeshifts are not always forward. Experiencers can be propelled back to where they must relive what they just did. Individuals are shown things during their near-death states, even about people not yet born, that later occur - always on cue.

It is considered the ability to know or be shown "in advance" (regardless of how), of utmost importance. Experiencers typically come to face a tough challenge with this: either become comfortable with "things future" or let this bother them to the point of fear or frustration. If you study this ability - why future knowing occurs so often to so many - you begin to notice as I did that alterations in brain development are at the core of what is involved. I caught on to this when I began to investigate what regularly happens to children between the ages of three to five: they spend more time pre-living or rehearsing future events than they do paying attention to the present. What appears as imaginary playtime projections is actually "rehearsal time," enabling them to learn how to prepare in advance for what is to come. This is necessary for a healthy integration into society.

The exact same thing happens not only to near-death experiencers but also to any experiencer of an impactful transformative state. Upon "coming back," we begin to foresee, or become comfortable with, snatches of futuristic events. We suddenly have future access, as if we journeyed through some kind of portal. This futuristic knowledge or even short glimpses can become rather spooky, maybe scary, until we get used to it. What I've noticed is that *this ability to access the future actually prepares one to live that future*. Like with kids, we have an opportunity to rehearse in advance so we can be ready to handle what lies ahead. Experiencers change, many to a significant degree. What I see happening here, is that *we revert back to the same behaviors we had as a child, and for the same reason - adjustment*. This characteristic lessens once it is no longer needed.

Table 10 illustrates what I have attempted to explain. Notice what seems to be a greater purpose for futuristic access, both with young children and experiencers of transformative states.

Table 10.

Brain development comparison between three-to-five-year-olds and brain shift experiencers

Three-To-Five-Year-Olds	Brain Shift Experiencers
<u>Temporal Lobe Development</u>	<u>Temporal Lobe Expansion</u>
Emerging Consciousness	Enlarging Consciousness
Prelive the future on a regular basis, spend more time in future than in present	Prelive the future on a regular basis through dream states, visions, future memory episodes, clairsentience.
Play with futuristic possibilities as a way of "getting ready," rehearse in advance demands soon to be made upon them.	Preexperience life's challenges and opportunities before they occur as a way of preparing for demands they will soon face.
No natural understanding of time-space states; consider "future" an aspect of "now." Gain perspective and continuity by establishing the validity of action/reaction or "future" (continuous scenery and connected wholes).	No longer restricted by a sense of time- space states; an awareness of simultaneity and the importance of "now." Embrace broader dimensions of experience beyond that of "future" (unlimited perspectives held in tandem with the continuity of stable reference points).
Progress from archetypal mental models to stereotypical ones, in a process of self-discovery.	Progress from stereotypical mental models to individuation processes in a journey of soul discovery.
The Birth of Imagination	The Rebirth of Imagination

Child experiencers

With child experiencers of near-death states, cases linked to birth trauma, babies, and toddlers are more common than you might think. The very young usually open up about what happened to them once they can speak fairly well or draw or act out their memories. Family and social pressures can weaken those memories; in some cases, cause the child to block out or tuck away the experience. Children's episodes are usually brief and encompass few elements; the closer a child is to puberty, though, the greater the chance for longer, more complex scenarios.

Children of any age have the same type of experiences, with the same elements and components in their scenarios, encounter and adjust to the same spread of aftereffects - as do adults. Similarities, for the most part, end there.

To understand children's cases we need to keep in mind that kids are tuned to different harmonics than adults. Concepts of life and death leave them with puzzled faces. "I don't end or begin anywhere," a youngster once told me. "I just reach out and catch the next wave that goes by and hop a ride. That's how I got here."

Child experiencers, even more so than with average youngsters, speak in the language of "other worlds," one that is less verbal and more akin to synesthesia (multiple sensing). They can seem as if multi-sensory, multi-channelers, who live in a multi-verse. Thus, they easily giggle with angels, play with ghosts, talk to sky beings, see colors around people that change with mood, access and sometimes prelive the future, hear sounds when nothing and no one visible is present. This can alarm or panic parents. Such worrisome behavior may well have a logical explanation: near-death states expand faculties normal to us, enabling experiencers to access more of the electromagnetic spectrum.

Small children, via expressions, movements, and responses, can show signs that suggest they may have identified with or been imprinted by the otherworldly imagery and behaviors they were once exposed to during their episode. Their earthly family and environs, things normal and typical to culture and place, may

seem somehow foreign to them or at least of little interest. Imprinting, in this regard, means to "fix firmly in the mind," and that is what I am referring to - children who fixed their sense of existence "elsewhere."

The temporal lobes in the brain (above the ear and around the temples) build "libraries" of shape, size, sound, smell, color, movement, taste, from the input they receive and are exposed to, so we will know what things are and how best to respond. These libraries alter to suit our needs from the day we are born to the day we die. Yet, if the child's near-death experience was associated with birth, or occurred during the early months and years of life, it is possible for those budding libraries to accommodate otherworldly models of identification, rather than those of earth. This imprinting can be augmented by sensory responses and intuitive knowing to the extent that the child may seem wise beyond his or her years when, in fact, the youngster is simply responding to what feels natural. Family and friends are at a loss to understand this, of having a model of life and living different from their own; nor do psychologists/counselors have training in how to interpret what may have happened. I noticed throughout my research that it is *normal* for young experiencers to lose parent/child bonding. This does *not* mean children cease to be loving and thoughtful, but it does indicate that they can become somewhat silent or "distant," independent, or unusually mature and detached. Bonding can be re-established through patience and the willingness of both child and parent to share and respect *feelings*, as they explore their differing worldviews.

The majority of child experiencers come back as if possessed of an adult's mind in a child's body. This finding broaches topics like reincarnation (the young can speak of past lives as casually and confidently as they might inquire about dinner), also physical afflictions ("I knew that I was a powerful, spiritual being that chose to have a short, but marvelous, mortal existence" - a quote from an older child born with cystic fibrosis).

Over half of the child experiencers in my research could remember their birth. Whenever possible I checked out these stories with parents, mostly mothers; never found an error. One-third had pre-birth memory - most of those beginning at about six to seven months in utero. Medically, it has been shown that the fetus at 26 weeks or six months gestation experiences many sensations, including pain. This medical discovery of fetal awareness directly applies to my research. Those with pre-birth memory (when older) reported the beginnings of their memory as a *soul resident in human form while still inside the womb*. Some had recall earlier than month six in utero, even of their conception, and of actively taking part as a spirit in choosing their own DNA. Most of those who spoke of remembering their conception, also said they "floated" in and out of their mother's womb until finally "settling in" when fetal formation was more complete (around the seventh to eighth month).

It is scary, certainly embarrassing, what some children remember from their pre-birth experience. Things like heated debates and arguments, conditions in the home, even how their mother felt about her own life - and her thoughts! Emotionally charged issues were remembered more readily, especially if the child's welfare was threatened (like the possibility of an abortion or because of an accident or an assault on the mother). And with missing twins, that "extra" who was never born or died at birth or was reabsorbed by the mother because of being damaged or malformed - whoever is "missing" can return in a near-death scenario, to either a child or adult experiencer. On occasion, the one who was aborted reappears.

The span of ages involved in my study of children was from birth to 15 years. I had a large cluster between three to not-quite six years of age, and yet another between birth and 15 months. The only clustering, age-wise, of cases with adults was between 27 to 32 years. When I took another look at this, I discovered some interesting correlations between age factors and what typically occurs at that age for the average child. The timeframe between ages three and five (shown on the chart which follows) is the same timeframe when normal kids are more prone to speak of sighting aliens, fairies, angels, monsters, and all manner of the strange and oddly different, and in my research - have a near-death experience, as well. As you saw in the previous table, this period in a child's life is the birth of imagination, and, the time when long-

term memory begins and storytelling has the greatest influence. Most kids during this period are almost entirely future oriented; temporal lobe development predominates.

Table 11.

Clustering of ages. Found in reported cases of a Near-Death-Experience

Age Clusters	Correlations
Children and Young Adults:	
Birth to 15 months*	When the actual wiring of the brain is determined and synapse formation increases 20-fold; utilizes twice the energy of an adult brain.
3 to 5 years*	Time of temporal lobe development; explore and experiment with possible roles, future patterns, and continuity of environment.
10 to 14 years	Time of puberty; hormone fluctuations, sexuality questioned, identity crisis.
Mature Adults:	
27 to 32 years*	Cross-over time between adherence to values of friends, family, and the pressures of the workplace and the urge to establish self as an independent and mature ego; social crisis.

Other clusters not as tight with mature adults, but did notice slight clusterings around the ages of 39, 49, and 59. Kids data based on 1997 analysis; adults of 1994 analysis. Asterisks with children show where the largest clusters were with the near-death research I conducted; same is true with adults. Strongest evidence for genius with experiencers was from birth to 15 months. Most alien, fairy, and monster sightings *with typical children* usually occur between 3 to 5 years of age (same timeframe for most of the NDE reports from kids).

In Table 12 there are some statistics with the 277 child experiencers in my study, age span from birth to 15 years, as concerns intelligence and creativity. There is no doubt in my mind that the younger the child the greater the effect from a near-death state, as you will see in the table to follow.

Table 12.

Soaring Intelligence and Creativity with Child Experiencers

Mind works different from before	84%
Significant enhancement of intellect	68%
Mind tested out or considered on genius level (birth to age 15) IQ score between 150 to 160	48%
Birth to not quite 6, tested out on genius level IQ score between 150 to 160	81%
Birth to just 15 months (especially if in dark/black light) IQ score begins at around 180 and on up	Nearly all of them
Drawn to and highly proficient in math/science/history	93%
Professionally employed in math/science/history	25%
School:	
-Easier after experience	34%
-Harder after experience	23%
-Rejected school discipline	30%

Note: School figures are partial as 43% claimed either to have blocked out school memories or just couldn't recall

After their near-death experience, the children's learning ability in most cases reversed: instead of continuing on with the normal developmental curve, from concrete (details) to abstract (concepts), they returned to life immersed in broad conceptual reasoning styles and had to learn how to go from abstract back to concrete. The learning curve reversed !!!

I found no difference between males and females with regard to enhanced intelligence and spatial and mathematical abilities. With the majority, IQ scores obtained when they were old enough to take the tests, that depicted genius, were between 150 to 160, some to 174. The exception was with those who had a dark or black light experience by 15 months of age. Scores for these began at 180 and ran into the 200s. Enhancements in music were almost as high as those in math (93%). The regions for math and music in the brain are next to each other. It is as if both of these regions were enhanced together *as if they were a single unit* (another argument for academia – provide musical instruction if you want kids who are good in math).

Near-death kids, almost all of them, come back abstracting (so do many adults, but with children it is more noticeable). This implies that the normal learning curve is somehow reversed. The ability to abstract, educators tell us, does not begin until the late teens, mostly in the twenties and thirties (if at all). Young experiencers must switch or reverse their ability to learn, to cope with the concrete methods all schools teach. What is the result? Far too often we lose their genius. Refer to the last table 12 - proficient in math/science/history, 93%; actually employed in those fields when older, 25%.

I have to ask this question: can kids, if near-death states are intense enough, undergo temporal lobe enhancement in advance of temporal lobe development? Would that account for the phenomenal abstractions a child displays afterwards? What if the learning reversals so apparent in child experiencers are the direct result of the brain being "charged" by the intensity of either a "light" or "dark" power surge at critical junctures in its growth? Is it possible that near-death states can cause a "second birth," and for adults as well?

Medical mistakes are witnessed by near-death experiencers quite often. You see this more often with children. The mistakes may be individual incidents, as when the patient while out-of-body witnesses what the doctor or nurse really did. Or mistakes may be an alert to an unusual up-surge of people "dying" from a non-threatening procedure - like what happened with children across the country who were being overdosed with ether during tonsillectomies (this occurred from early to mid-1900's). The accuracy of these reports suggests that the range of human faculties is as non-local as the mind.

Personal transformations

The majority of near-death experiencers come back positive "can doers," ready to transform themselves, their families, their careers, their religion, their politics, their pocket books. Almost immediately worlds collide. The world they glimpsed during their episode does not match the one they left. Incredible joy for what was gained mixes with incredible sadness for what was lost. A great love can blend with deep grief.

This needs to be said upfront so no one misunderstands: the phenomenon *reorders* (not disorders); you *adjust* (not recover); you now have a *new reality* (not pathology). Mental health professionals completely miss this. Give experiencers a supportive environment, good listeners, information about the phenomenon, and time to "feel" their way through the many conflicts that occur, and they will amaze everyone with how readily they are able to integrate their experience into their daily life.

Therein lies the challenge: how many actually receive any degree of support or validation? *Not veterans* - military experiencers are virtually ignored; those who dare to talk about near-death states are usually diagnosed as mentally ill or hallucinating. *Not fundamentalists of any religion (especially Muslims)* - still today these folk consider the phenomenon the work of the devil; experiencers are either ignored, ridiculed, or punished; families curse children who have them (Muslims can and do target them for murder to "protect the family's honor").

Integration is like walking through a door that will no longer close.

Divorce. Between 75 to 78% of the experiencers in my research divorced, most within six to 12 years after their episode. This figure is much higher than the national average. Of interest, both spouses usually voiced the same complaint: "I don't know that person anymore." The non-experiencer wants what he or she once had. The experiencer no longer relates in that manner, nor is the past of any real interest.

Misunderstandings between people could be cut substantially if enough information about the phenomenon were readily available.

Money. The desire for and interest in money often fades afterward. A commitment to service and helping others, working because you enjoy the work, replaces prior fixations on the corporate model of "profit first." This can free the individual to live a simple life more in tune with spiritual values, or it can open the door to extremes of poverty, sacrifice, and perplexing behaviors. One male experiencer committed suicide out of the shame he felt for mismanaging the family's money and losing everything - when all he wanted to do was to make everyone happy.

Suicide. For the most part, near-death experiences are a suicide deterrent - but not always. With adult experiencers, between 4 to 5% attempted suicide after their episode *to get back to the Other Side*. These people found the integration process too difficult. With child experiencers, 21% attempted suicide within about 15 years of their experience. Some within five years. *This is a tragedy that could be avoided if more information were available.* We don't recognize how a child thinks. Their logic goes like this: "I was in a bright-filled world with loving people when I wasn't breathing. Now that I am breathing again, the bright ones are gone. The way to get back to them is to stop my breathing." A child does not see this logic as harmful, or hurtful to parents and family. To a child, this makes perfect sense. An easy way to counterbalance this thinking is to teach the child how to "get back" through guided visualizations: calming the heart and mind in a brief meditation, seeing once again that wonderful world, being there for a while, and then returning to full consciousness, wide awake and refreshed. The child should be encouraged to do this simple exercise occasionally, but not too often, as this life, where we are now in consciousness, is where we need to remain.

Table 13.

Integration Phases Near-Death Experiencers "Grow" Through

Phase	Age
One	<i>First 3 years</i> Impersonal, detached from ego identity/personality traits. Caught up in desire to express unconditional love and oneness with all life. Fearless, knowing, vivid psychic displays, substantially more or less energy, more or less sexual, spontaneous surges of energy, a hunger to learn more and do more. Child-like mannerisms with adults/adult-like behaviors with children, a heightened sense of curiosity and wonder, IQ enhancements, much confusion, challenged with communication. REBIRTHING.
Two*	<i>Next 4 years</i> Rediscovery of and concerned with relationships, family, and community. Service and healing oriented. Interested in projects development and work environment. Tend to realign or alter life roles; seek to reconnect with one's fellows, especially in a moral or spiritual way.

Three	Unusually more or less active/contemplative. Can resume former lifestyle, but more desirous of carrying out "mission." RETRAINING. <i>After about the 7th year</i> More practical and discerning, often back-to-work but with a broader worldview and a confident attitude. Aware of self-worth and of "real" identity (soul). Tend toward self-governance and self-responsibility. Spiritual development an ongoing priority, along with sharing one's story and its meaning. Dedicated. Strong sense of spiritual values. REBORN.
Four**	<i>Around 15th year (with some the 20th year or so)</i> Immense fluctuations in mood and hormonal levels. Often discouraged or depressed while go through a period of "grieving" reassessing gains and losses from the experience, while fearful that effects are fading. Many problems with relationships, money, and debts. A crisis of "self." If can negotiate "the darkness light can bring," a depth of spiritual maturity and confidence emerges that is unique to the long-term effects of a transformation of consciousness. BORN AGAIN.

Note:

*Child experiencers in my study who turned to alcohol for solace (1/3), began drinking during this phase.

**Child experiencers who attempted suicide (21%), did so in this phase

Opposite Reactions

Child experiencers do not integrate near-death experiences as do teenagers and adults. A child's job is to survive, grow, and learn. Anything that obstructs this instinct is either ignored, repressed, set aside, forgotten, or jumbled. When children try to tell their parents, siblings, relatives, or friends about their episode, they are most often rebuked, yelled at, or punished. "It's just your imagination," a parent would say, or "Shut up." This need to communicate but inability to do so can drive a child into a lonely silence, or acting out at school, or turning to alcohol for solace. One-third of those I contacted had real problems with alcohol within five years of their episode. We're talking about kids, here. Social relationships in school and afterward also posed a unique situation, since the child experiencer could usually "see through" what others were planning to do or what might be the outcome of any given situation.

Adult experiencers take an average of seven to 10 years to integrate their experience. With children, it's 20 to 30 years. Experiencers of any age may be able to deny or hide their experience, but they cannot stop the aftereffects. "Connecting the dots" between the episode and what happens afterward is not always a simple thing. Thus, kids seldom evidence the same distinctive shifts that adults do until Phase Four.

Reasons why this might be so:

ADULTS deal with changes afterward, and the necessity of finding new reference points. They are challenged to redefine themselves and the life they live from another perspective. Before-and-after comparisons can be made and the results are off times quite striking. For many, it is as if they go through a process similar to rebirthing and rediscovery.

CHILDREN deal with the strangeness that what they encounter in the world around them does not match what they know and can identify with. They are challenged to recognize the source of their uniqueness and accept the validity of what they gained from their experience. Seldom can comparisons be made, because what happened to them is the basis of what they know. With the very young, there is no "before-and-after," only what applies in the "now moment" and is usable.

Adults integrate. Children compensate/adjust so they can "fit in."

Children are perfectly capable of balancing two differing worldviews in a healthy manner, if they have supportive parents or relatives who are good listeners. Where psychologists and counselors slip up is in

not realizing that the young tend to bond with spirit beings and imprint to "other worlds." This is *not* imagination gone wild.

An invaluable project for child experiencers of any age is to "make their book." Encourage them to get paper, color crayons, pencils or ink pens, and tell the whole story of what happened to them - commit it to paper - and leave extra blank pages at the end for additional thoughts as time goes by. Put in newspaper clippings if there are any, and other people's comments if they were there and witnessed any part of the episode. Bind the book with a ribbon or some way of holding pages together. Have a cover and title it. I've seen miracles happen when experiencers did this. It is incredibly healing. One woman said that making her book was almost as powerful as her near-death state.

Conclusion

While I strive for perspective, that context undergirding phenomena that might explain it, my peers strive for details that can be listed, compared, tested, and duplicated. I believe that both methods of research are not only necessary but crucial. As science turns more to the study of consciousness as primary, the need for broader skill-sets will demand that people such as shamans, bioengineers, DNA experts, psychics, musicians, electrical and plasma experts, dowzers, kinesiologists, symbologists, historians, philosophers, energy medicine practitioners, and ministers come forward to work side by side in cooperative projects. Team studies linking people of multiple disciplines is the way of future research.

The three great mysteries facing science are: what is consciousness? what is time? what is free will? Human evolution cannot explain self-awareness. Intelligent design misses the point. In-depth research, on near-death episodes and other transformative states, may finally open the door to the real mystery and the real power of direct perception. To this possibility I offer my work.

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P. M. H. Atwater, L.H.D., PhD is one of the original researchers in the field of near-death studies, having begun her work in 1978. She is a pioneer in subjects like near-death experiences, the aftereffects of spiritual experiences, transformations of consciousness, reality shifts, future memory, and modern generations of children and how they differ from previous generations. Atwater is a noted authority on near-death experiences (NDEs), especially on the after-effects of NDEs, on NDEs in children and on hellish NDEs. She has experienced three NDEs herself and has interviewed nearly 4,000 adult and child near-death experiencers. She is a current member and a former Board Member of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). In 2001, her work on NDE after-effects was cited in *The Lancet*. In 2005 she was awarded with the Outstanding Service Award from IANDS and with the Lifetime Achievement Award from NATH (National Association of Transpersonal Hypnotherapists) and in 2010 she was also awarded with the Nancy E. Bush Award for Literary Excellence and the Lifetime Achievement and Special Services Award from IANDS. As a result of her writings, she has been invited to speak around the world. Atwater calls the entire field of NDE to recognize near-death states as part of the larger genre of transformations of consciousness and how they change people. Her latest book on this subject, which gives her summation, is *Near-Death Experiences: The Rest of The Story* (2011). Other major books of the author are *Children of the Fifth World: A Guide to the Coming Changes in Human Consciousness* (2012), *I Died Three Times in 1977 - The Complete Story* (2010), *The Big Book of Near-Death Experiences: the ultimate guide to what happens when we die* (2007), *Beyond the Indigo Children: The New Children and the Coming of the Fifth World* (2005), *We Live Forever: the real truth about death* (2004), *The New Children and Near-Death Experiences* (2003), *Coming Back to Life: The After-Effects of the Near-Death Experience* (2001), *Children of the New Millennium: children's near-death experiences and the evolution of humankind* (1999) *Future Memory* (1999) and *Beyond the Light: what isn't being said about near-death experience* (1994). Besides her books she has recorded several CDs/DVDs. The most relevant; *As You Die – talks to the dying person through physical death as it occurs and the soul's separation*.

E-mail: atwater@cinemind.com Website: www.pmhatwater.com Blog: <http://pmhatwater.blogspot.com>