

# Near-Death Experiences



Near-death experiences (NDEs) have been widely reported all over the world. They have been intensely studied for about 30 years.

IANDS, the International Association for Near-Death Studies ([iands.org](http://iands.org)) is a major non-profit organization studying NDEs. They publish the peer-reviewed *Journal of Near-Death Studies*.



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What is an NDE?

- A profound psychological event sometimes experienced during a near-death episode.
- In a *near-death episode*, a person is either clinically dead, near death, or in a situation where death is likely or expected.

Stages of bodily death:

- Clinical death: cessation of blood circulation, breathing, and outward signs of consciousness (reversible)
- Flat EEG: clinical death + no measurable brain activity (reversible).
- Biological death (irreversible)

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Some common characteristics of NDEs:

- Intense emotions: most commonly of profound peace, well-being, love; sometimes (roughly 10-20% of NDEs) of fear, horror, isolation, or loss.
- Perception of seeing one's body from above (an out-of-body experience, or OBE).
- Movement through darkness toward an indescribable light.
- Incredibly rapid, sharp thinking and observations.
- Encounters with deceased loved ones or sacred figures, with whom communication is mind-to-mind.
- A life review.
- A decision to “go back” or a sense of being “sent back,” often reluctantly.

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Four phases of a “typical” pleasurable NDE

- A sense of disassociation with one’s physical body, of detachment and peace.
- Next, in the naturalistic phase, NDErs become aware of their “natural” surroundings—typically their bodies and the surrounding area—from a perspective outside their own bodies. Things look and sound normal, but are unusually clear and vivid. NDErs often describe being able to see through walls and to “hear” the unspoken thoughts of people nearby.
- Next, in the supernatural phase, the NDErs encounters beings or environments they do not consider to be part of the “natural” world. They may meet deceased loved ones, angels, or divine beings. They often move rapidly through a tunnel toward a light perceived to be a being of immense power and love. They may experience a life review..
- Finally, there is return to the physical body.



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## Frequency of NDEs:

- Due to medical advances bringing more people back from the brink, NDE reports have become more common in recent decades.
- NDEs are reported among all cultures, regardless of gender, religious background, education level, socioeconomic status, or age.
- Depending on how restrictively an NDE is defined, studies have indicated that between 12% and 40% of those who go through a near-death episode experience an NDE.
- Interestingly, people who have an NDE during a *suicide* attempt are much *less likely* to try again. They generally say they have learned from the experience that their lives had purpose.

## Cultural variation:

- There is noticeable cultural and religious variation regarding the specific interpretation of certain common NDE details, e.g., the nature of the “tunnel” and the identities of the divine beings encountered.

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Of special importance for us are those cases of NDEs that involve **veridical perception**.

- In such cases, the NDEr provides an accurate description of specific, unique events happening around the NDEr's body that the person could not have seen or heard or figured out through reasoning and logic.