



“Ayahuasca Helped Me Connect With My Parents on a Deeper Level”

ADELE LAFRANCE, PHD, A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST AND RESEARCH SCIENTIST, BONDED WITH HER MOM AND DAD IN A WHOLE NEW WAY AFTER THEY SHARED A VERY UNIQUE EXPERIENCE TOGETHER.

Illustrated by Josephine Rais

My first ayahuasca ceremony was life-changing. I had no history with psychedelics before attending a retreat in the jungle in March 2014. I’m an eating disorder therapist and researcher, and I’d heard about the tea’s use as an addiction treatment. Since eating disorders and substance abuse have some similarities, I wanted to learn more about how it could potentially help my patients.

During my first ceremony, I personally examined a lot of the pain I was holding on to from my childhood, particularly the way my parents handled some of our family’s challenges. By the end of the ceremony, though, I felt a level of understanding toward my parents that was so deep, forgiveness wasn’t necessary. It was beautiful.

I knew I wanted to share this healing experience with my mom and dad, but I never truly thought they

would join me on that path, much less in an actual ceremony. We were raised to believe these substances were dangerous, and frankly, my parents were a little uncomfortable with my new interest. When I first suggested they try it, they declined. But when my dad was struggling with back pain, I offered up the idea one more time, knowing that ayahuasca could potentially aid in pain management. He decided to go for it, and my mom went along, not wanting to miss out.

As we sat in a traditional Amazonian house called a *maloca*, getting ready to drink together for the first time, I felt nervous. I was worried that if I was having a rough time and purging (the vomiting that some people experience after taking ayahuasca), my parents would be distracted or distressed. I also worried about their physical safety. Overwhelmed by it all, I cried as I took my first drink of the tea that night and braced myself, really hoping it would be positive for everyone. And it was.

The next day, when we sat in a circle and shared our experiences, my parents both said that they could recognize my breath from across the space, and that they felt deep love for and from me as they

listened to me gently inhale and exhale. It was the first time we had talked about love between us in such a vulnerable way. I will never forget that day. Since that retreat, my parents have gone back to ceremony as part of their routine medical care.

When my mom was diagnosed with cancer for a third time, the ayahuasca visions helped her see how best to approach her treatment, including how to prepare mentally, physically, and spiritually, which gave me such solace. When I later talked to her about my fears surrounding her cancer, she simply said, “Even when I’m gone, my love will be in the air that you breathe and you’ll know how to find me: through ceremony.”

Ayahuasca has given our family a very unique shared language. It planted the seeds for deeper emotional intimacy; there’s a sweetness between us now. I’m continually amazed by how psychedelics can support healthier connections between people, and most important, between family members. I’m now involved in research studies that aim to incorporate family members in psychedelic treatments. And I’m so thankful I’ve been able to share this medicine with those I care about the most. —As told to Kristin Canning

CEREMONY-CURIOUS? Look for ayahuasca retreats and centers that advertise a clear and comprehensive screening procedure for facilitators, as well as for potential participants. Also, search for ones that provide or direct you to support for preparation pre-retreat and therapeutic integration post-event. Check for facilitators that have medical, psychiatric, and/or psychotherapeutic training/credentials, too, for a safe and optimal experience.