

HARM REDUCTION & SAFETY PROTOCOL GUIDE

For Ayahuasca Ceremonies

Santos & The Crystal Visions

“Safety is not optional. It is the foundation of everything we do.”

Danny Santos, Founder & Ceremony Maestro

This guide is intended for staff, volunteers, facilitators, and participants of Santos & The Crystal Visions. It complements the Church Handbook, Code of Conduct, and Facilitator Code of Ethics, and does not replace licensed medical, psychiatric, or emergency care. Where a conflict exists, applicable law controls.

Our Harm Reduction Philosophy

Ayahuasca is a sacred plant medicine, not a recreational substance, and it carries real physiological and psychological risk. Our first responsibility, above every other consideration, is the safety and well-being of our participants. This guide exists so that every person who serves or participates in our ceremonies understands how to prevent harm, how to recognize a problem early, and how to respond decisively when something goes wrong.

— **Safety is not optional.** As facilitators and volunteers, you are not only holding space — you are holding lives, nervous systems, and transformational thresholds.

— **Fear should never delay care.** A significant share of harm in entheogenic ceremonies worldwide is traced not to the medicine itself, but to negligence and to hesitation — the fear of calling for help. Your call can save a life.

— **You are protected when you help.** Good Samaritan laws generally protect people who provide emergency care in good faith from civil liability. This protection is in place specifically so that fear does not stand between a person in crisis and the help they need.

— **Honesty with responders saves lives.** You are never required to volunteer details about religious practice or plant medicine to a 911 operator or first responder, but you must never lie about what substances were consumed, when, or in what amount. Inaccurate information can be dangerous or fatal — treating professionals need the truth to treat the person in front of them.

Pre-Ceremony Screening & Medical Contraindications

Ayahuasca contains harmala alkaloids that act as monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs). This is the single most important medical fact governing ceremony safety: combined with certain medications, substances, or foods, this interaction can become life-threatening. Thorough screening before ceremony is not optional — it is the foundation of a safe container.

Medications & Substances That Must Be Disclosed

Do not allow anyone to participate in ceremony if they are taking, or have recently taken, any of the following, without explicit medical clearance and a documented washout period:

- SSRIs (e.g., Prozac, Zoloft, Lexapro, Celexa, Paxil) — generally require several weeks of discontinuation under a physician's guidance before ceremony.
- SNRIs (e.g., Effexor, Cymbalta, Pristiq).
- Other MAOIs or MAO-inhibiting substances (e.g., moclobemide, selegiline, linezolid, St. John's Wort).
- Tricyclic antidepressants, SARIs, antipsychotics, mood stabilizers such as lithium, and barbiturates or other CNS depressants.
- Stimulants, including cocaine, amphetamines, and MDMA — combining these with an MAOI can cause a severe, potentially fatal spike in blood pressure.
- Other serotonergic psychedelics (LSD, psilocybin) used within the prior one to two weeks.

When in doubt, disclose. Participants and staff must be told clearly: always disclose every medication, supplement, and recreational substance during screening. Nothing shared in a medical screening is used to judge or shame a participant — it is used to keep them alive.

Health Conditions That Require Exclusion or Medical Clearance

- Personal or family history of psychosis, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder with mania — ayahuasca can precipitate or worsen these conditions.
- Severe or uncontrolled cardiovascular conditions, including serious hypertension, recent cardiac events, or unmanaged arrhythmia.
- Pregnancy or breastfeeding — this is a contraindication with no exceptions.
- Severe untreated mental health conditions, active suicidality, or recent psychiatric hospitalization.
- Known severe allergies without an available EpiPen, or uncontrolled seizure disorders.

The Dieta

Participants and staff follow the dietary and preparation guidelines set by the Maestro in the days before ceremony. This is a matter of physical safety, not personal preference. Tyramine-rich foods — aged cheese, cured or smoked meats, fermented foods, and alcohol — become dangerous once MAO-A is inhibited by the medicine, because the body can no longer safely break tyramine down. The dieta also typically limits sugar, excess fat, caffeine, and recreational substances in order to support the body through the ceremony.

On-Site Vital Checks

Blood pressure should be checked before medicine is offered. As a general safety range, nothing below 80/50 and nothing above 160/100 is considered safe to receive the sacrament. A participant's well-being is sacred — if their body is telling us it isn't ready, we listen.

Every participant should be asked directly about food allergies and sensitivities, and should be encouraged to bring their own EpiPen or rescue inhaler if they have a history requiring one. Small steps like these prevent emergencies.

Preparation, Roles & the Ceremony Space

The Maestro

Danny Santos serves as the ceremony Maestro and holds final authority over the ceremony space — including medicine administration and dosing, the dieta, who may serve and in what role, the pacing of ceremony, and how any safety or medical situation is handled. All facilitators, staff, volunteers, and participants follow the Maestro's direction during ceremony without exception. Disagreement with a decision made in ceremony is raised afterward with the Maestro or a retreat lead, never contested in the moment.

Roles on the Safety Team

- Retreat lead — responsible for the overall flow of the retreat and must be present from start to finish.
- Ceremony support — assists in the ceremony space, may help participants and manage music, and may serve alongside the Maestro's direction.
- Sober safety staff — do not take medicine and remain fully alert to respond to any medical, psychological, or safety need throughout the night. Anyone not currently drinking medicine is expected to be part of this sober safety net.

Only take a facilitator dose if you can remain fully functional and of service throughout ceremony. A second or third dose requires the Maestro's prior approval — we have had increasing issues with facilitators becoming unavailable because they entered their own process.

Items to Remove From the Ceremony Space

- Cellphones, smart watches, and fitness trackers — turned off and stored securely with a designated guardian before ceremony begins.
- Personal bags and purses — kept in a designated, staff-supervised area; access during ceremony requires staff assistance.
- Weapons of any kind, including pocket knives, razors, and similar items.
- Vape pens and smoking materials.

Keeping participants in an altered state away from communication devices, drugs, and weapons is a matter of basic safety, not control.

Ceremony Etiquette

- Everyone is present in the ceremony space before the medicine carrier enters; once the medicine carrier arrives, conversation stops.
- No recreational drugs, cannabis, or alcohol in anyone's system during retreat or ceremony.

- Never touch the medicine itself. Do not request a second cup unless it is offered directly by the Maestro.
- Move slowly and quietly through the space; avoid rushing.
- Do not initiate singing or play an instrument unless specifically invited to do so.
- Avoid touching or speaking to participants unless it is necessary for their safety, and always obtain consent before physical contact — a participant's altered state does not diminish their right to bodily autonomy.
- If you begin to feel emotional or overwhelmed as a staff member, step away from the ceremony space and find another facilitator to cover for you.

What “Holding Space” Means

Holding space means keeping someone's body safe while they move through a deep process. It does not mean coaching, interpreting, or emotionally merging with their experience.

- Be present and attentive without narrating, coaching, or offering interpretation.
- Listen without adding to the conversation; a person in ceremony is often not speaking to you directly.
- Do not judge the person or the content of their experience.
- Keep your own emotions regulated. If you cannot stay grounded, or are not confident the person will be okay, step back and find a facilitator to take your place.

Recognizing Spiritual Grandiosity

Powerful medicine experiences can sometimes produce grandiose or destabilizing beliefs in participants or staff — for example, a conviction that one has been chosen as a healer without training, or has received a special mission or unique powers. These ideas should be treated gently and never reinforced or repeated to other participants. If someone is expressing this kind of thinking, stay calm, do not argue, and loop in the Maestro or retreat lead — this can be an early sign that a person needs additional grounding or professional support.

Emergency Response — General Protocol

1. What To Do In Any Ceremony Emergency

- Stay calm and assess the situation.
- Ensure the immediate safety of the individual and do not leave them alone.
- Call 911 — don't hesitate.
- Notify the Maestro, retreat lead, and your co-facilitators immediately.
- Provide reassurance and support to others present.
- Document the situation once the person is safe.

2. What Information To Give the 911 Operator

- Your exact location, including address, landmarks, or GPS coordinates.
- The nature of the emergency and the number of people involved.
- The age and condition of the person, and any known substances or relevant medical history.
- Your name and a callback number.

3. What To Do When Help Arrives

- Stay calm and step back to give responders room to work.
- Provide a clear, honest handoff and answer all questions truthfully.
- Follow the instructions of first responders and offer support and space to others.

First responders are not there to arrest anyone. You do not have to volunteer that a ceremony or a religious practice was underway — but you must be completely honest about the substance consumed, timing, and symptoms. Never deceive law enforcement or medical personnel; withholding or distorting that information can cost a life.

Hands-Only CPR & AED

Many regions no longer require rescue breaths from bystanders due to the risk of exposure to fentanyl and other potent substances that can be present on a person's breath or lips. Hands-only CPR — chest compressions only — is effective in many emergency situations for bystanders without rescue-breathing training.

- Check responsiveness and breathing for no more than 10 seconds; if there's no breathing or only gasping, call 911 immediately.
- Begin chest compressions immediately: push hard and fast in the center of the chest, 100-120 compressions per minute, and continue until help arrives or the person recovers.
- Use an AED if one is available — turn it on and follow the voice prompts.
- If breathing returns, place the person in the recovery position on their side and monitor them closely.
- Stay with the person until professional help arrives, offering calm reassurance throughout.

Recognizing & Responding to Specific Emergencies

Serotonin Syndrome

This is the most important medical risk specific to ayahuasca, caused by dangerously excessive serotonin activity when the medicine's MAOIs interact with serotonergic substances or medications. Symptoms can appear within hours and progress rapidly.

- Watch for: agitation or confusion, rapid heart rate, dilated pupils, heavy sweating or shivering, muscle twitching or rigidity, high fever, nausea or diarrhea, loss of coordination, and in severe cases, seizures or unconsciousness.

— If suspected: call 911 immediately, move the person to a cool, quiet environment, do not give them anything to eat or drink if vomiting or altered, and inform responders that serotonin syndrome is suspected, sharing everything you know about substances and medications taken.

Choking / Vomit Aspiration

Vomiting is common in ayahuasca ceremony and is not itself an emergency — but an unmanaged airway is.

- Never allow a participant to lie flat on their back; position them on their side (recovery position) so vomit can drain.
- Listen for gurgling sounds, which can indicate a blocked airway. Gently clear visible vomit or debris from the mouth without blind sweeping.
- If they cannot breathe, sit them upright, clear the airway, and call 911 while beginning CPR if trained and needed.
- Never leave a choking or vomiting participant unattended.

Seizure

- Stay calm, ease the person to the ground, and clear the area of anything that could hurt them.
- Do not restrain them and do not put anything in their mouth.
- Once the seizure stops, turn them onto their side and monitor breathing closely until they are fully alert.
- Call 911 if the seizure lasts longer than five minutes, if it is their first seizure, if breathing does not resume, or if another seizure follows.
- Do not let the person sleep alone afterward — someone should stay with them and monitor for further seizures.

Head Injury / Concussion

- Anyone who sustains a head injury should be evaluated by a trained staff member, even though vomiting, confusion, and dilated pupils can overlap with normal ceremony effects and complicate assessment.
- Do not leave them unattended, keep them sitting rather than lying flat, and if they fall asleep, wake them roughly every 30 minutes to check responsiveness.
- Call 911 immediately for uncontrolled bleeding, loss of consciousness, a worsening headache, fluid draining from the nose or ears, or an inability to wake the person.

Unconsciousness or Unresponsiveness

- Call their name, gently move their body, and check for a response using a firm sternal rub or a tug on the toes.
- Check and clear the airway, then position them on their side and monitor vital signs, using a pulse oximeter if available.

- If opioid use is suspected — and it is worth keeping naloxone (Narcan) on hand regardless — administer it and call 911 immediately.
- Bring the Maestro and any trained medical staff to the person immediately, and call 911 if they are not breathing.

Cardiac Event

- If someone shows signs of a heart attack (chest pain or pressure, shortness of breath, pain radiating to the arm or jaw, nausea, cold sweat), call 911 immediately.
- If they become unresponsive and stop breathing normally, begin hands-only CPR and use an AED if available.

Psychosis vs. Spiritual Emergency

Both can involve intense shifts in perception, emotion, and identity — the difference lies in the person's connection to reality and how they respond to support. A spiritual emergency is usually temporary, retains some connection to reality, and improves with grounding, reassurance, and presence. Psychosis is a disconnection from reality that persists and does not improve with reassurance alone, and it needs clinical evaluation.

- For either: stay calm, grounded, and present; ensure a safe environment; speak slowly and gently; do not argue with or try to talk someone out of what they're experiencing.
- Do not leave the person alone. Encourage grounding through breath and the senses.
- Seek professional help if the person cannot care for themselves, is a danger to themselves or others, or symptoms persist or worsen. When in doubt, choose safety and involve a psychiatrist or call 911.

Suicide Risk

Entheogenic experiences can surface intense emotion and unresolved pain. Thoughtful screening, preparation, and post-ceremony integration support all reduce this risk, but staff must be able to recognize and respond to warning signs in the moment.

- Warning signs include talking about wanting to die, hopelessness, giving away possessions, sudden calm after deep distress, or expressing no reason to go on.
- Stay calm, present, and non-judgmental. Listen and validate their feelings without leaving them alone or arguing with them.
- Remove access to anything that could be used for self-harm.
- Contact a trained mental health professional or psychiatrist immediately, call 988 (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), and call 911 if there is immediate danger.
- Stay with the person until professional help arrives, and ensure they have ongoing support and integration care afterward.

Aggressive or Unsafe Behavior

If a participant becomes aggressive, prioritize the safety of the group first and your own safety as a staff member.

- Calmly separate them from other participants where possible, without engaging in argument or making prolonged eye contact.
- Speak gently and avoid escalating the situation; give them space rather than crowding them.
- Never attempt physical restraint except to prevent immediate, serious harm to the person or someone else, and only if you have training to do so safely. Restraint of a competent adult against their will can carry legal as well as safety risk.
- Two staff members of the same gender as the participant should stay engaged with the situation, and the Maestro or retreat lead must be notified immediately.
- If there is any risk of the situation escalating to violence, call 911.

A Participant Wants to Leave the Ceremony Space

In an altered state, disorientation can lead someone to wander. The goal is proactive prevention and gentle redirection — never force.

- Assign staff to monitor exits and pathways throughout ceremony, ideally in pairs.
- If someone gets up to leave, calmly and gently invite them back; walk with them rather than physically blocking or restraining them.
- If they insist on leaving the immediate area, do not let them go alone — accompany them and keep them in sight, and notify the Maestro or retreat lead right away.
- If someone leaves the property and cannot be safely located, call 911 and provide a clear description and last known direction.

Effects Lasting Hours or Days After Ceremony

- The Maestro and retreat lead are responsible for guidance if someone is not emerging from the medicine, is difficult to reach, or reports distressing after-effects.
- Do not give cacao or any other substance not approved by the Maestro immediately after ceremony — certain substances can potentially reactivate the medicine in an unsafe way.
- Do not speculate about a participant's experience, administer anything without approval, or allow the person to drive.
- If any of these situations occur, make sure the person is never left unattended.

First Aid Kit & Equipment Checklist

Every ceremony space should have a stocked first aid kit and a clearly designated person responsible for it.

- Adhesive bandages (various sizes), sterile gauze pads and rolls, medical tape.

- Antiseptic and alcohol prep wipes, antibacterial ointment, disposable gloves.
- Scissors and tweezers, instant cold pack, burn gel or burn pads.
- Saline solution, CPR face shield or barrier device, thermometer.
- Emergency blanket, pen and notepad for documentation.
- A blood pressure cuff and pulse oximeter.
- Naloxone (Narcan), and any EpiPens or rescue inhalers disclosed by participants during screening.
- An AED, where feasible, and at least one staff member current on CPR/BLS/AED certification at every ceremony.

Be prepared. Be empowered. Save lives. Safety is sacred, knowledge is power, and compassion is action.

Post-Ceremony Integration & Aftercare

Ceremony does not end when the ceremony closes. Integration is the process of bringing insight safely into daily life, and it is part of harm reduction, not separate from it.

- Encourage reflection, journaling, community, therapy, and time in nature as integration tools.
- Check in with participants in the hours and days following ceremony, especially anyone who had a difficult experience.
- Connect participants who need it to qualified professional support — our spiritual practices are not a substitute for licensed medical, psychiatric, or psychological care.
- If a participant is not emerging normally from the ceremony, or reports ongoing distress, contact the Maestro or retreat lead without delay.

Preparedness, presence, and compassion can save a life.

Acknowledgment

I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed this Harm Reduction & Safety Protocol Guide. I understand that, as a participant, staff member, volunteer, or facilitator with Santos & The Crystal Visions, I am responsible for following these protocols, and that for staff and volunteers, compliance is a condition of continued service.

Name: _____ Role: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Sources & Further Reading

ICEERS (International Center for Ethnobotanical Education, Research and Service), "Towards Better Ayahuasca Practices: A Guide for Organizers and Participants," iceers.org

MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies) and the Zendo Project, [psychodelic harm reduction principles, maps.org](http://psychodelic-harm-reduction-principles.maps.org)

Medical guidelines on ayahuasca contraindications, drug interactions, and serotonin syndrome risk compiled from published retreat-center and clinical safety guidance.

This guide is offered as a framework for training and preparedness. It does not replace CPR/BLS/AED certification, licensed medical or psychiatric care, or applicable law. In a genuine emergency, always call 911 first.