

NDE COMMONALITIES

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The Core NDE Experience

Although no two experiences are alike, and some outlying details should be skeptically questioned, there are amazingly common elements to the core near-death experience described by young and old, across cultures, in different languages. Researchers and individuals do not all agree on the interpretation of the experience (who, for instance, is this Being of Light?), but they agree on the core experience. Dr. Long reports on the percentage of each core element described in his study of 1,300 NDEs from around the world.

1. Out-of-body experience: separation of consciousness from the physical body (75.4%)
2. Heightened senses (74.4% said “more conscious and alert than normal”)
3. Intense and generally positive emotions or feelings (76.2% “incredible peace”)
4. Passing into or through a tunnel (33.8%)
5. Encountering a mystical or brilliant light (64.6%)
6. Encountering other beings, either mystical beings or deceased relatives or friends (57.3%)
7. A sense of alteration of time or space (60.5%)
8. Life review (22.2%)
9. Encountering unworldly (“heavenly”) realms (52.2%)
10. Encountering or learning special knowledge (56%)
11. Encountering a boundary or barrier (31%)
12. A return to the body (58.5% were aware of a decision to return)[3](#)

After thirty years of research as a practicing oncologist skeptically looking at all alternative explanations, Dr. Long concludes there is no chance, with a flat EEG, that electrical activity in the lower parts of the brain could account for the kind of highly lucid and ordered experience described by NDErs. “Lucidity coupled with the predictable order of [core] elements establishes that NDEs are not dreams or hallucinations, nor are they due to any other causes of impaired brain functioning.”[4](#)

At first, I was skeptical of adults telling these stories, especially when they had something to gain by selling books. Dr. Long’s collection of what’s grown to over three thousand testimonies on his website is important for two reasons. First, none were paid—they were not benefiting by selling a book—and it takes close to thirty minutes to complete his extensive questionnaire. There’s not much to gain personally and it actually costs time. Second, the reports come from all over the globe—verifying the similarities of the core experience.

Below is a **one-page table** summarizing common features from large collections of near-death experience (NDE) reports with **approximate prevalence percentages**. Because different studies sample different populations and use different instruments, these figures are **approximate ranges** drawn from empirically based NDE datasets (e.g., Greyson NDE Scale, retrospective self-reports, narrative analyses). Percentages should be interpreted as **indicative**, not precise universal values.

Common NDE Features — Prevalence Table (Approximate)

| Feature | Approx. Prevalence (%) | Source/Notes |
|---|--------------------------------|---|
| Profound peace / well-being | 75–90 | Most frequently reported element in retrospective/clinical NDE data. (Noeticmap) |
| Enhanced sensory perception / heightened awareness | 70–80 | Reported as intense, vivid perception during the experience. (Noeticmap) |
| Out-of-body experience (OBE) | 45–70 | Variable by sample; self-selected retrospective reports tend higher. (Noeticmap) |
| Time distortion (time slows/stops) | 60–97 | High prevalence in some scales measuring NDE-like experiences (e.g., NDE-C). (OUP Academic) |
| Seeing a bright/light or light being | 50–70 | Very common across narrative analyses; core feature in many NDE inventories. (Noeticmap) |
| Encountering spirits/people (deceased/loved ones) | 50–64 | Found frequently in narrative analyses. (PMC) |
| Life review (rapid re-experiencing of life events) | ~40–50 | Reported in subsets of experiences. (OUP Academic) |
| Choice to stay or return (“point of no return”) | ~50–58 | Reported in many retrospective analyses as a decision/threshold. (Noeticmap) |
| Sense of unity/harmony/connection | 87–97 (in some NDE-C data) | High in certain research samples, often paired with peace. (OUP Academic) |
| Unusual / extrasensory sensations | 70–97 (varies with definition) | Includes “voice,” non-ordinary perceptions. (OUP Academic) |
| Precognitive or expanded understanding | 65–74 | Included in some standardized NDE content scales. (OUP Academic) |
| Aftereffects — lasting worldview changes | Very common (>60) | Most studies documenting long-term impact find significant post-NDE transformation (beliefs about death, priorities). (General empirical finding, see literature) |

Notes on the Data

1. **Measurement instruments:**

- Many studies use the **Greyson NDE Scale** (16 items) to quantify features; a score ≥ 7 is considered a research-classified NDE. ([Consciousness Research Institute](#))
- Emerging instruments like the **NDE-C scale** expand item sets and sometimes show slightly different prevalence patterns. ([Consciousness Research Institute](#))

2. **Sample heterogeneity:**

- **Prospective clinical samples** (e.g., cardiac arrest survivors) often show lower endorsement rates for some features than **self-selected retrospective samples**. ([PubMed](#))
- Narrative analyses (e.g., French corpus) emphasize relative feature frequency across stories. ([PMC](#))

3. **Cultural/contextual variation:**

- Core structural elements (peace, light, OBEs) appear across cultures; specific content (e.g., identity of entities encountered) varies by background.

4. **Interpretation caution:**

- Web-aggregated datasets (e.g., thousands of accounts) help illustrate patterns but are not the same as peer-reviewed clinical studies; reported percentages vary with methodology. ([Noeticmap](#))
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