Altered states of consciousness—one in which the outside world seems to fade out of awareness. In some altered states, the person may experience changes in the sense of time (time may seem to stand still or speed up) and in sensory experiences (colors may seem more vibrant or, as in some drug-induced states, the person may hear voices or see visions). In Modules 4.2 to 4.4, we explore the range of human consciousness, from states of sleep and wakefulness to altered states of consciousness.

Concept Chart 4.1 offers an overview of the states of consciousness.

**Concept 4.6**
Altered states of consciousness may be induced in different ways, such as by practicing meditation or undergoing hypnosis, or by using mind-altering drugs.

**MODULE 4.1 REVIEW**

**States of Consciousness**

**REVIEW IT**

Consciousness refers to our awareness of ourselves and of the world around us. States of consciousness shift as our level of awareness changes during the course of a day. Focused awareness is a state of heightened alertness we experience when completely absorbed in a task or activity. Because such a state is difficult to maintain, we may after a while enter a state of drifting consciousness, which can lead to daydreaming. At times, we may divide our consciousness, such as when driving and talking to a passenger. Much of our behavior occurs automatically without conscious awareness or direction. Sleeping and dreaming are states of unconsciousness in which we are relatively unaware of our external surroundings. States of deep unconsciousness result from head trauma, surgical anesthesia, or coma. Practicing meditation, undergoing hypnosis, and using mind-altering drugs are among the ways people experience altered states of consciousness.

**RECALL IT**

1. The nineteenth-century psychologist William James likened consciousness to
   a. water flowing continuously down a river.
   b. a drifting cloud.
   c. a swirling ocean.
   d. a state of tranquility.

2. The ______ of consciousness allows us to focus on meaningful stimuli, events, and experiences.

3. The state of awareness in which we are completely alert and engrossed in a task is known as
   a. daydreaming.
   b. divided consciousness.
   c. altered consciousness.
   d. focused awareness.