

Alpha-Theta Neurofeedback Training

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Neurofeedback training can be used for two separate purposes. The first is to stabilize the physiology of the brain. This usually results in a person having less dramatic reactions to stressors and returning to a calm, focused place after the stress is resolved. The brain becomes more stable, resilient, and flexible. The second purpose is to resolve deep psychological issues in the unconscious mind. It's called Alpha-theta training and is commonly recommended after 20 sessions of neurofeedback for physiological stability.

Alpha-theta training sometimes is referred to as altered states training due to its similarity to hypnosis. The client and I create a script for what they want to focus on. Often the script is about the type of person they want to become and they are asked to use visualization. With this type of training, the brain increases the motivation (approach) and decreases the fear (avoidance).

I see it as creating a conscious evolution for yourself. As examples, you may want to improve your creativity, be calm in all situations, get rid of that last bit of background negativity, be able to talk openly to your family, lose your anger, eliminate jealousy, start your own business, or be more outgoing.

I place the sensors on the back on the head and ask you to close your eyes. I spend the first 5-10 minutes going over the imagery you are to consciously focus on during the session. I then turn the feedback on and leave the room. The tones will guide you into the elusive alpha theta state. This state of consciousness is experienced as being in between the states of awake and sleep. It's the twilight state. Normally you fall asleep if left on your own. The tones you hear coming from the computer holds you in that normally fleeting state of conscious.

It has all the benefits of hypnosis because you're re-programming your subconscious mind, but with the added feature that hypnosis can't get to. It clears out the traumatic experiences that have put on the brakes on your ability to progress. Everyone has outdated negative, life limiting beliefs. They reside in the unconscious where a person doesn't know that they don't know. The brain operates as if these beliefs are still true.

Alpha-theta training is commonly used for alcoholism and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In 1989 Eugene Peniston published his now famous study using alpha theta training to treat chronic alcoholics in an inpatient setting. He achieved an 80% rate of recovery. These were men from a VA hospital who were also Vietnam vets. They were reporting that not only did they stop drinking, but they stopped obsessing about the war. Also, many negative aspects of their personality cleared up. That led to another study of just working with PTSD. They found the same thing happened. The PTSD went away. The rough edges of personality mellowed. Several MMPI scores moved to within normal limits.

Every person has had some trauma during their lifetime. Therefore, just about anyone can benefit from alpha theta training. We all have limitations that hold us back. Have you noticed how you stop yourself from achieving what you say you want? Even if a person believes they know what stops them, the real reason is buried in the unconscious. Common resistance include fear of failing, being abandoned, guilt over surpassing your parents or siblings, wanting to be taken care of by others, not wanting to grow up, etc. It's pure fear and it has to do with early family dynamics, belief systems, and trauma. Alpha-theta training helps the non-conscious mind to reprocess these early experiences even if it never becomes conscious. The brain, while idling in 6-9 cycles per second, resolves the issues.

Thomas Edison had his own version of this method. When he would get stuck on a problem after hours of focusing on it, he would go to his office for a "power nap". He would recline in his chair with metal ball bearings in the palm of both hands. He got as close to sleep as he possibly could without actually falling asleep. If he did, the ball bearings would drop and make a loud noise, waking him up. He would drift into the twilight state until the solution to the problem arose spontaneously, then jump up and go back to work. It was low tech biofeedback at its finest.

Many of my clients start alpha theta training after they complete 20 sessions of neurofeedback for physiological stability. Many of these individuals have made significant changes in their life as a result. The results often go way beyond what psychotherapy offers and with greater depth. Most people need 20 to 25 alpha theta sessions to achieve the best results.