

# GUIDE TO THE FOLLOW-UP SESSION

## Update the Chronological History

By keeping a chronological history of the client's symptoms and results, a practitioner makes it easy to follow-up with clients and track progress. Your notes seek to make clear the difference in effects between the prior session(s) and the current session. Each session, you need to ascertain:

- What are the effects the client notices, during, directly after, and long afterward?
- How long do the positive effects (or side effects) endure?
- What changes persisted, even after initial obvious effects wore off?

In general, how the client feels at the beginning of a follow-up visit is less relevant than how they felt after the prior session, and for how long those feelings persisted.

***\*A NOTE ON NOTES:** Jotting down specifics is essential for tracking client progress. Asking for feedback on a 1-10 scale, such as "level 7 anxiety while at post office," will help make comparisons over time easy. Remember to return to these specifics in the next session.\**

## Assess Improvement

**REMEMBER: Improvement is both temporary and relative.**

After a first neurofeedback session, we cannot reasonably expect a client to feel *no* anxiety, but are looking for a drop in anxiety or improvement of symptoms. Using a 1-10 or other quantitative scale helps track these radical changes.

Particularly in the first few sessions, improvements will be **temporary**. Clients may do well for the first few days, and then see a return to their symptoms as the session wears off. Repeated, successful sessions should cause changes to persist longer.

***\*NOTE: Preferably, a client should come in at least twice a week for the first 10-15 sessions. This allows the brain to quickly adapt to changes and "forget" pathological patterns of activity. It also makes establishing a history of symptoms easier, as a practitioner can quickly amass notes on patient symptoms, and the duration and strength of effects.\****

## Communicating about Improvement to Clients

Sometimes the most useful question is very simple:

“What was different since before starting neurofeedback?”

Without focusing on particular symptoms, the client is more likely to take notice of and remember changes that they might dismiss as trivial. If a client seems focused on the negative or lack of progress, acknowledge their concerns but guide them toward recognizing progress. Encourage them to acknowledge even small or temporary improvements as baby steps.

- 1. Temper client expectations.** If improvements are initially dramatic, (common in the first session) caution clients that future sessions may not repeat such dramatic change.
- 2. Remember that improvement is relative,** so clients may still experience anxiety, pain, or other symptoms. Improvements can be subtle or indirect — take notes on similar circumstances and how the client behaves or feels in them as treatment progresses.
- 3. Walk through the day with the client** after the session. Although a client may “feel good” after the session, they may report that it wore off quickly. The clinician should go through the *activities* of the day following treatment, noting changes in behavior and feeling that may be subtle.
- 4. Don’t ask questions for questions’ sake.** Clinicians do not need extensive information on clients’ lives and feelings, and should not take on a therapeutic role. Focus on discovering how their nervous system responds to neurofeedback — their relaxation, resilience, reactivity, pain, and other related symptoms.
- 5. Distinguish between neurofeedback treatment and other factors.** Clients may change their medications (under supervision of their doctors), stop taking supplements, or undergo life changes that affect their moods and symptoms. Menstrual hormone cycles may make observations less effective until months of data are collected. Note where both positive and negative changes may be a result of extraneous factors.
- 6. Assure clients that any change (even side effects!) are positive.** Clients may be disheartened by overstimulation, side effects, or temporary deterioration. However,

remind them that any of these changes are evidence that the nervous system is responding — we just have to get the right dose!

## Continuing Improvement Progress

In the first sessions, we are not concerned with how long the changes lasted — instead, focusing on cataloging the responses to stimulation and side effects of overstimulation. As we move forward in future sessions and begin to see progress, it is time to ask clients to note how long the changes last. We expect to see improvements gradually lasting longer, and the client establishing a baseline that is better than their initial symptom baseline.

After improvement in the first sessions, the client may subsequently dip *below* the baseline, temporarily experiencing a bout of worse symptoms. This rarely recurs (and if so, to a lesser degree) as sessions progress.

**\*\*\*NOTE:** *One theory that you may share with clients is that their brain, in reaction to neurofeedback, used up its limited stores of neurotransmitters (dopamine, serotonin). This is a temporary state, as the brain quickly notes the deficit and works to increase production.\*\*\**

As clients' symptoms and functioning improve, it will be important to track the interplay between symptoms, functioning, and client understanding.

For example, a client might report being “depressed,” but your history should distinguish between persisting symptoms of clinical depression (lack of energy, anhedonia, sleep disturbance) and states such as despair. Remember to elicit information about specific feelings and behaviors.

In another case, a client suffering from bouts of anxiety or chronic pain might find their symptoms less frequent, but more difficult to deal with simply because they are now experiencing more consistent relief. Stay in communication with your clients about their progress to make it clear how improvement is going.

## Assess Side Effects

With regard to side effects, we seek to identify negative symptoms, note their nature and duration, figure out if they are from treatment or from something else (*e.g.* a migraine headache), and adjust stimulation and organization of the session to minimize them.

## Questions for Clients about Side Effects

1. **When did the side effects begin?** The delay (if any) between treatment and effects is usually quite consistent for a client. It can be helpful to stop stimulation early so that the clinician can observe effects and talk to the client about symptoms of overstimulation or positive effects. If the symptoms began more than 24 hours after a session, it is unlikely that CDN was the cause.
2. **How long did the side effects last?** Similarly, the length of effects is fairly consistent for a client from one session to the next. If a negative effect (such as a headache) persists for many days longer than neurofeedback effects usually last, it is unlikely to be related to the treatment.
3. **How dramatic were the side effects?** Dramatic or severe side effects (such as feeling “spaced out” an hour after CDN) should be monitored closely in future sessions. Consider waiting to see side effects in the next session before deciding to give more stimulation.
4. **After side effects wore off, were there improvements?** Often, temporary improvements may follow directly afterward. Be sure to ask about and document improvement even while addressing side effects.
5. **Are these side effects evidence of a “transitional state,” or simply overstimulation?** A gain in function accompanying negative side effects suggests that stimulation is making progress. In particular, new and uncommon side effects are more probably indicators that presage clear-cut improvement in the future. On the other hand, signs of overstimulation (tired, wired, spacey, headache) without concomitant improvement may suggest simple overstimulation and require adjustment of strength.