The Science of
Creating
Healthy Habits

HOW HABITS ARE FORMED AND HOW TO MAKE HEALTHY HABITS STICK.

TERRA
HEALTH COACHING

HABIT BUILDING 101
How it happens

If you've tried to quit smoking, cut back on screen time, or start a new exercise routine, you know breaking an old habit or creating a new one, is easier said than done.

Over time, habits become hard-wired. We can end up doing them on autopilot, without even trying.

Luckily, there is a science behind habits. And understanding the science makes it *much* easier to ditch old habits, or cement new ones.

What is a Habit?

Habits are rituals or routines we do consistently, without much conscious effort.

As you know, habits can be helpful like getting 8 hours of sleep -- or unhelpful like swinging by a drive thru on the way home from work.

The more consistently we perform these habits, the more they become second nature. That's why old habits can be hard to break.

Hard, but *not* impossible! This guide will walk you through the science behind how habits are formed. This will help you gain clarity on any unhelpful habits you'd like to change and give you tools to make new healthy habits stick.

How Long Does it Take to Build a Habit?

It can take anywhere from 18 to 254 days to form a new habit. But **on average, it takes around 66 days**. The simpler a habit is, the easier it is to form.

THE SCIENCE OF HABITS
How it works

Habits are formed through repetition and are triggered by cues in our surroundings. **Cues can be a time of day, location, event, emotion, or another person**. Here are a few examples to give you an idea:

Cue		Habit
Feel stressed at work	·······················>	Smoke a cigarette
Wake up in the morning	·······················>	Have a cup of coffee
Walk by co-worker's candy dish	·······················>	Eat candy
Set gratitude journal on bedside table	·······················>	Write in gratitude journal before bed
Spend time with a friend who likes to drink	·······················>	End up drinking too much

When you repeat habits consistently, they become automatic. Meaning, they can override your willpower, even if you intend a different behavior.

Take a moment to reflect on some of *your* habits, whether good or bad. See if you can pinpoint the cue that triggers them:

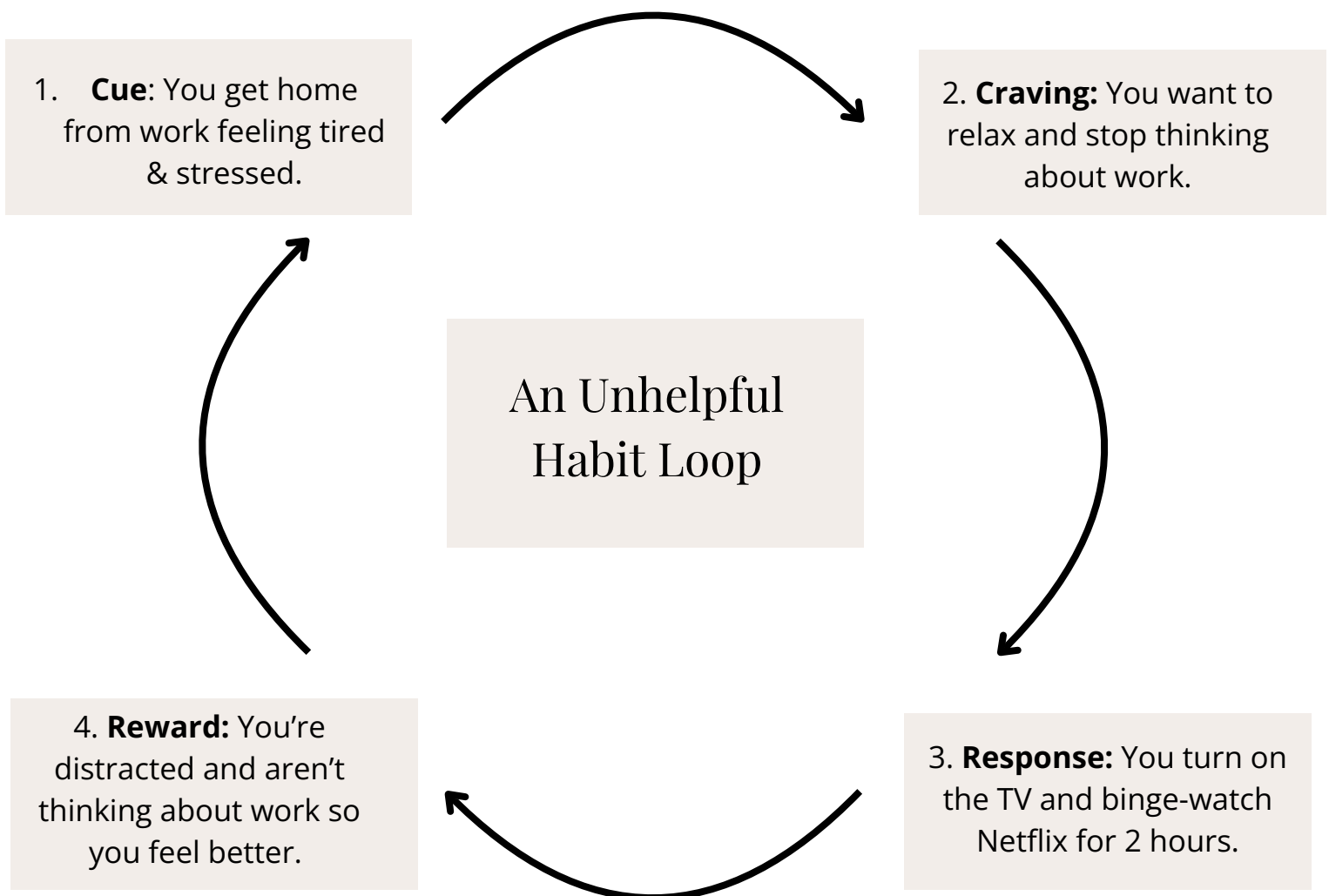| Cue		Habit
_____	···········>	_____
_____	···········>	_____

HABIT LOOPS
What are they?

A habit loop is a way to understand how habits are formed. According to James Clear, author of the best-selling book Atomic Habits, there are four elements that make up habit loops:

4 Parts of a Habit Loop

1. **Cue -** what triggers your brain to do a behavior
2. **Craving -** motivation or desire behind each habit (ex. relieve boredom, feel connected, boost mood, ease stress, distract from fear)
3. **Response -** the habit or behavior
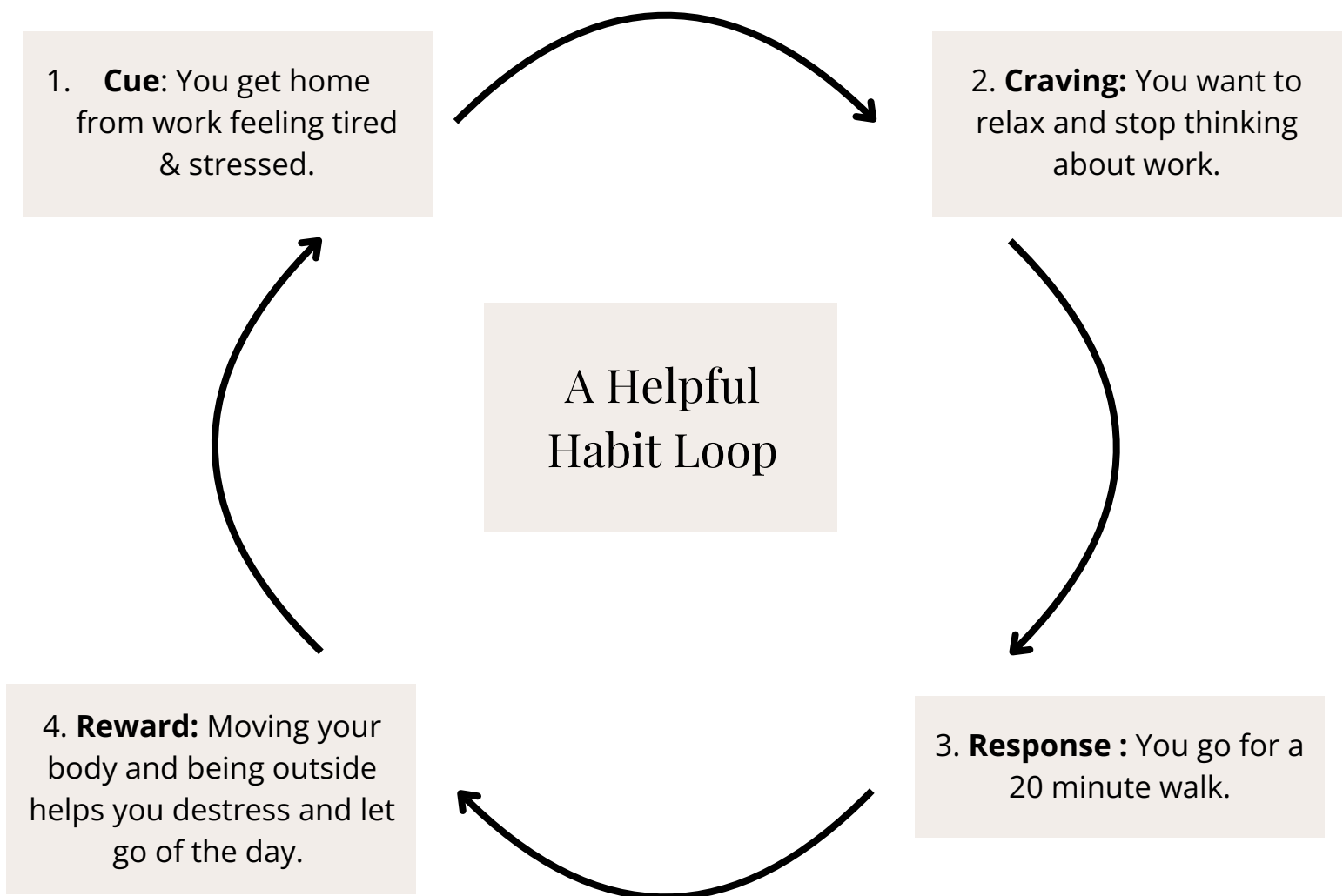4. **Reward -** what the behavior does for you (the benefit)

1. **Cue**: You get home from work feeling tired & stressed.

2. **Craving:** You want to relax and stop thinking about work.

An Unhelpful Habit Loop

4. **Reward:** You're distracted and aren't thinking about work so you feel better.

3. **Response:** You turn on the TV and binge-watch Netflix for 2 hours.

In a habit loop, **your brain creates an association between the behavior and reward.** The more you perform the habit, the stronger that association gets.

Luckily, there is a way to make habit loops *for* you: Find a healthier way to satisfy the craving and deliver the reward.

Here's an example on how to change a habit loop for the better:

1. **Cue**: You get home from work feeling tired & stressed.

2. **Craving:** You want to relax and stop thinking about work.

A Helpful
Habit Loop

4. **Reward:** Moving your body and being outside helps you destress and let go of the day.

3. **Response :** You go for a 20 minute walk.

See how it works? Taking a walk relieved the same craving and delivered a similar reward. It just did it in a healthier, more positive way.

HABIT LOOP PRACTICE
Your Turn!

Think of an unhelpful habit you'd like to change. What cue triggers this habit? What craving does it fulfill? And what reward does it deliver?

Fill out the habit loop below to get clear:

1. **Cue**: _____
_____
_____

2. **Craving:** _____
_____
_____

My Habit Loop

4. **Reward:** _____
_____
_____
_____
_____
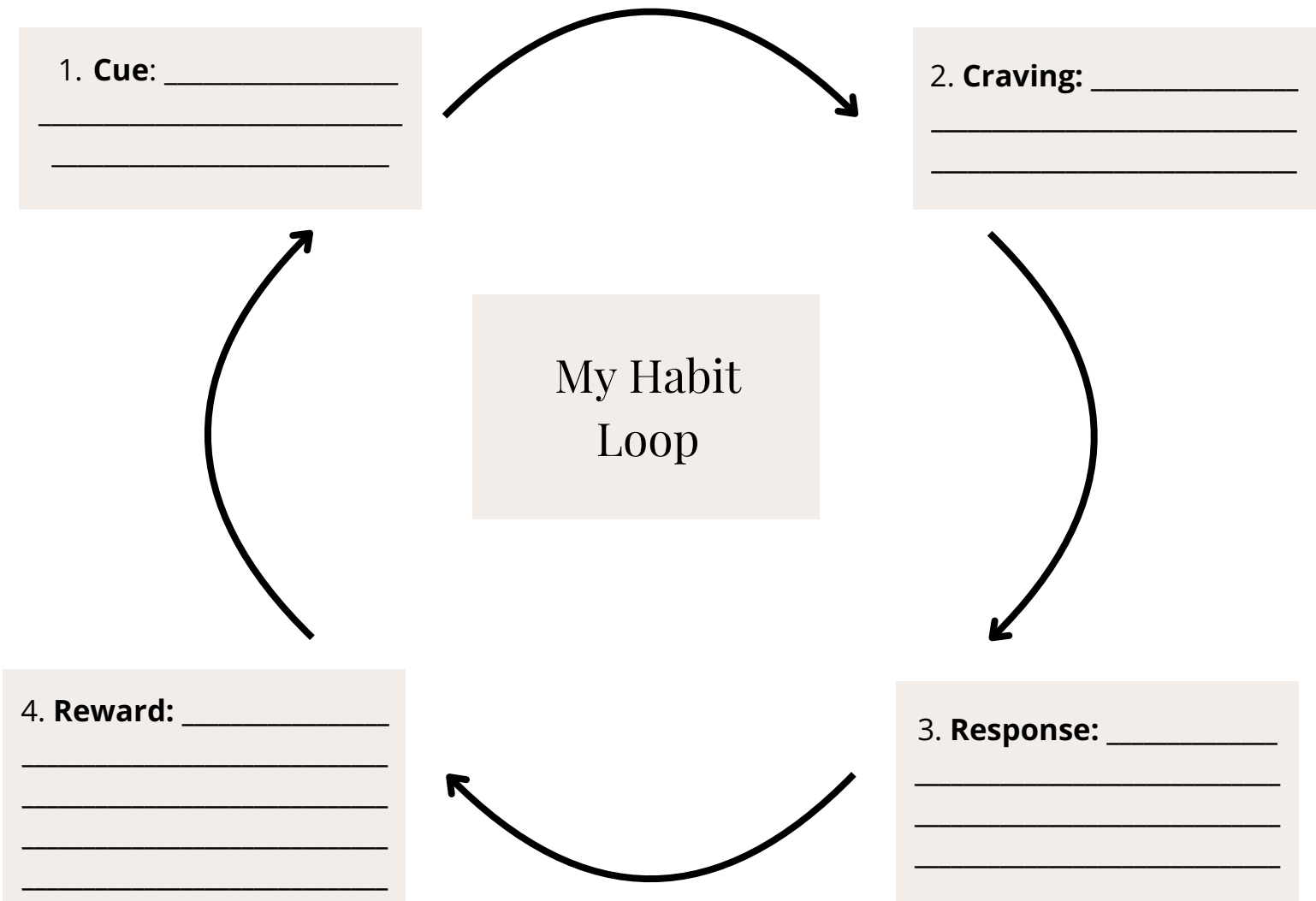
3. **Response:** _____
_____
_____
_____

Now think of another more positive response (behavior) that would deliver a similar benefit. Jot it down below:

NEW RESPONSE: _____

HABIT TOOL #1: SUBSTITUTION
Swap it out

Now let's cover some tools that can help shift your habits for the better. The first one is substitution, which we touched on earlier. To do this, you simply replace an unhealthy habit with a healthy habit that delivers a similar benefit/reward.

All habits, even smoking, provide some benefit. Whether it's to destress, feel connected, feel comforted, or relieve boredom - there's always a hidden benefit at play.

Identifying that benefit can help you replace that habit with a healthier option that fulfills the same need.

HOW TO SUBSTITUTE A HABIT: EXAMPLES

Old habit: You binge eat junk food after a long day at work.

Benefit: Relieves stress

New habit: When you get home from work, you spend 10 minutes doing breathwork exercises or go for a walk.

Old habit: You check your email dozens of times a day.

Benefit: Helps you feel connected

New habit: When you feel the urge to check your email, you text a friend or family member instead.

Now think of an unhelpful habit you'd like to change. What benefit do you get from it? And what new habit can you swap it out for? Use the space below to brainstorm.

OLD HABIT: _____

BENEFIT: _____

NEW HABIT: _____

HABIT TOOL #2: ENVIRONMENT
Change it up

Your surroundings can either support your goals or sabotage them. Luckily, you have the power to change your environment. These changes can make an unhealthy habit harder, or cue a new, healthy habit. Here are a few examples:

Make Your Old Habit Harder

Example 1: You waste too much time on social media. So you remove the apps from your phone's main screen (or even from your phone altogether).

Example 2: You tend to binge watch TV after dinner. So you hide the remote in a drawer or closet (or even take the batteries out).

Example 3: You want to eat healthier, but you crave chips and cookies. So you purge your pantry of junk food and replace them with healthy options.

Make Your New Habit Easier

Example 1: You want to start your day with 15 minutes of exercise. So you lay your workout clothes by your bed the night before.

Example 2: You want to drink at least 64 ounces of water every day. So you buy a 64-ounce water bottle and keep it at your desk.

Example 3: You want to say affirmations every day. So you post sticky notes with them on your bathroom mirror or on your fridge.

Now, think about how you can change *your* environment to ditch old habits or solidify new ones. Make a plan in the space below:

NEW HABITS

_____

_____

_____

OLD HABITS

_____

_____

_____

HABIT TOOL #3: HABIT STACKING

Stack it up

Habit stacking is another tool that makes habit building easier. All you do is tack new habit onto one that's already part of your routine. This makes it much easier to form your new habit, because it takes less mental effort.

Examples of Habit Stacking

You want to start gratitude journaling every day. Each morning you already start your day with a cup of coffee.

STACK IT: Sip on your coffee while you jot down three things you're grateful for.

You want to start a meditation practice, but have trouble squeezing it into your day.

STACK IT: Right after you make your bed, sit down and mediate for 5 min.

Think of the routines you already do every day without fail (ex. brushing your teeth, eating dinner, getting out of bed, having a morning cup of coffee, driving to work, etc.)

Now think of two new healthy habits you can stack onto some old routines.

Habit Stacking in Action

I already... _____   I want to... _____

STACK IT: _____

I already... _____   I want to... _____

STACK IT: _____

HABIT TOOL #4: GROW THE APPEAL
Make it fun

Another way to make new habits stick is to insert some joy into them. When habits are fun and don't feel like a chore, it's easier to stick to them!

Here are some examples to give you an idea...

How to Grow the Appeal

- You want to keep your home tidier. So you blast your favorite music and have a karaoke fest while you clean.
- You want to exercise more. So you buy some new workout clothes to make sweat sessions more fun.
- You want to go to bed by 10 pm. So you turn off electronics at 9 pm and read a book by your favorite author.

- You want to go for a walk every day. So you listen to your favorite podcast while you get your steps in.
- You want to lift weights 3 times a week. So you watch your favorite show while you're pumping iron.
- You want to eat more protein. So you find some fun new high protein recipes to try.

Your turn! What are some new habits you'd like to cement? Use the space below to brainstorm some ways to make them more appealing.

How Will You Bring More Joy to Your Habits?

_____

_____

_____

_____

HABIT TRACKER

Habit tracking helps you see your progress and reminds you to act. Use this habit tracker to track up to 8 new habits you'd like to create:

HABIT	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
2.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
3.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
4.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
6.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
7.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
8.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

CELEBRATIONS

WHAT TO IMPROVE