

Habit Spectrum Self-Assessment Worksheet

Introduction: I've long held that addiction can be thought of as a habit – certainly a powerful, destructive and maladapted habit, but a habit nonetheless. This 'addiction habit' idea arose after evaluating my own struggle with addiction, then observing and working with countless others as they navigated into and through recovery. It's become increasingly clear to me that my thought processes, feelings and emotions, and attitudes are all deeply habituated, and it takes considerable effort to replace habits which don't serve me well with different ones that do. How do these arise? How do they so easily become my default way of thinking, feeling, and responding to life's ups and downs?

Together, these habituated cognitive features (thoughts, feelings, attitudes) are directly and profoundly responsible for driving behavior. It's easy to see how behaviors manifest from our cognitive processes – how can it be any other way? Who we are is a direct result of our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes; how we behave arises directly from how we perceive the world and our place in it. I've reimagined the traditional Cognitive Feedback Model (thoughts + feelings = behavior) to include attitudes; thoughts and feelings are fleeting, but attitudes are stable and enduring, and it's this more stable and enduring component of our nature which informs and creates stability in our behaviors. This is shown in Figure-1 below.

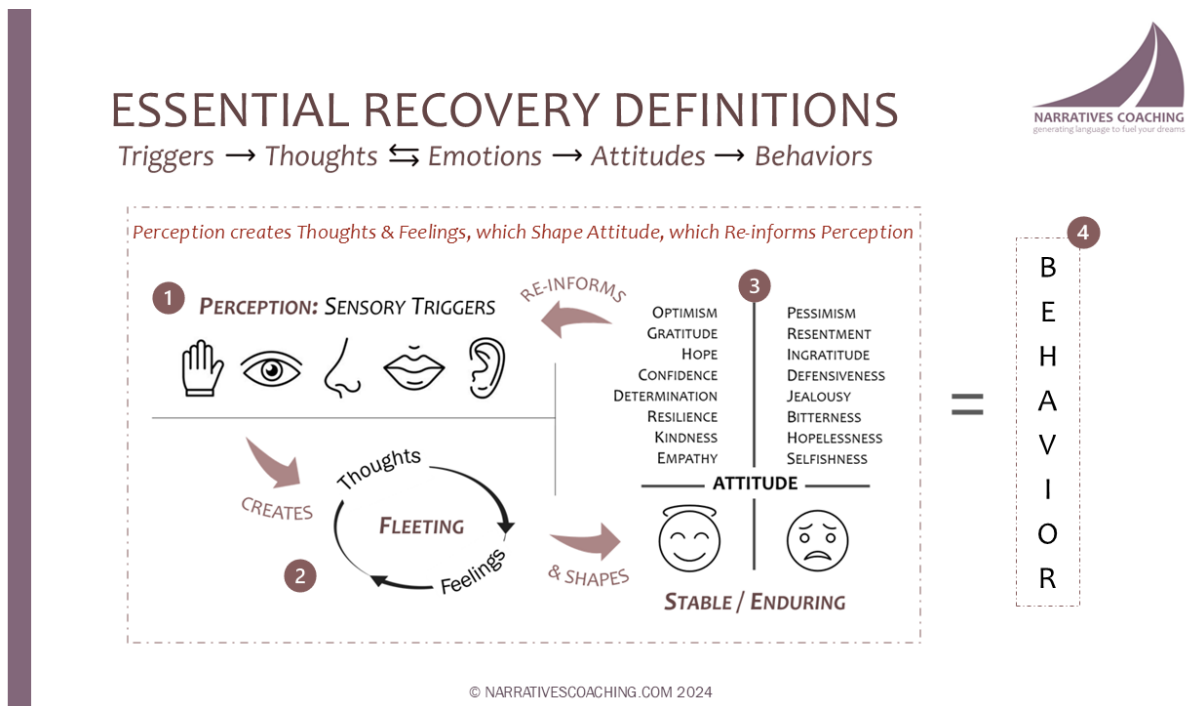


Figure 1: Modified Cognitive Feedback Model - Includes Attitude in the Creation of Behavior

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Habits are simply behaviors which we've practiced to the point they've become reflexive and automatic, requiring little (if any) conscious thought to initiate or complete. Because I'm proposing addiction can be seen as a form of maladapted habit, it's useful to propose a definition for 'habit' that meets the conditions of an addiction. Conversely, for this to be valid, the definition must meet all other typical conditions we would consider for a habit – in other words, it has to work for all examples of habit, or it can't be considered valid for any.

- **Habit:** *the repeated and reflexive return to a specific thought pattern, attitude or behavior, which supports or sabotages our goals, formed and sustained by beliefs, attitudes and narratives.*

This definition works for good habits, bad habits, and addiction habits. The characteristics shift subtly from good, bad, and addiction, but the core definition fits all three. Figure-2 below shows habits on a spectrum, from good to bad to addiction, with control (personal agency) being the distinguishing feature. I've also included definitions for each.

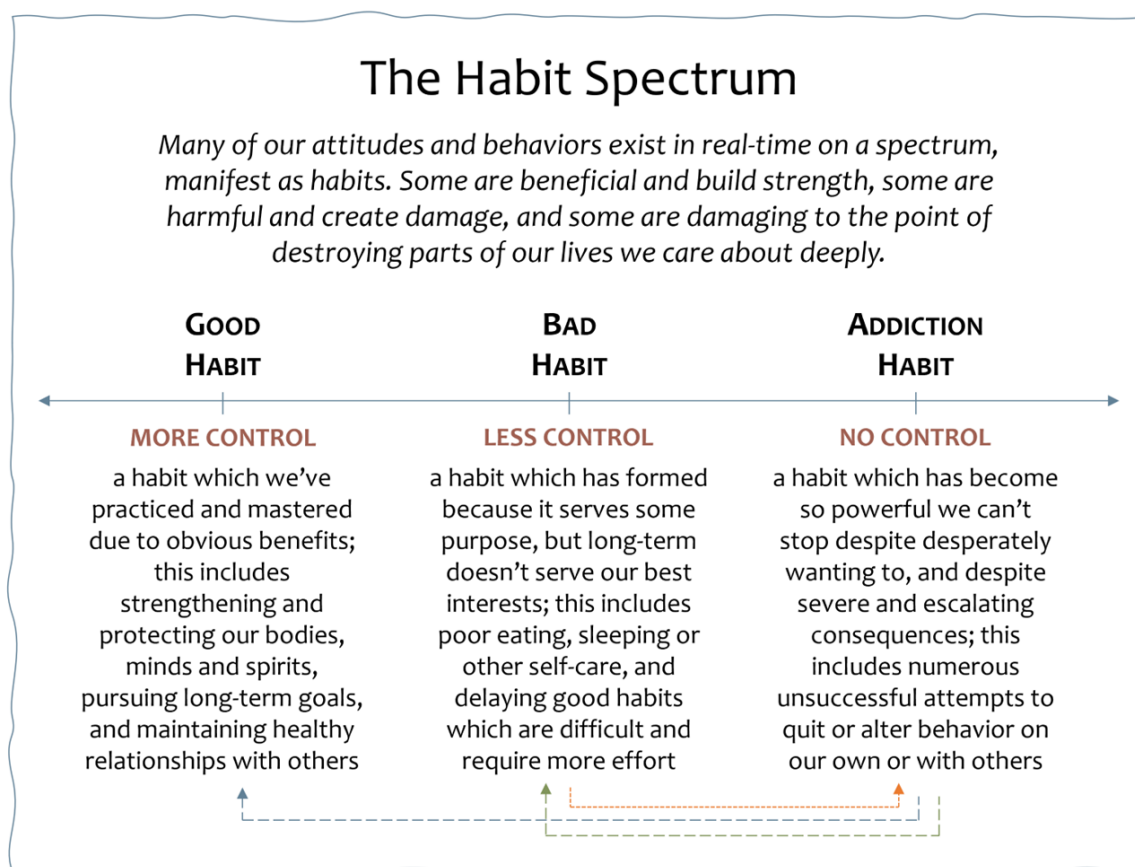


Figure 2: The Habit Spectrum with Personal Agency as the Distinguishing Feature

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A normal, healthy habit is, “*the repeated and reflexive return to a specific thought pattern, attitude or behavior, which supports or sabotages our goals, formed and sustained by beliefs, attitudes and narratives*”, with the following characteristics:

- follows the **Cue–Routine–Reward** cycle
- driven by **context** (environment, social setting, emotions, thoughts)
- synaptic strengthening & dopamine tone are central features
[neuro-plastic habituation changes brains in structure & function]

The characteristics of an addiction habit shift subtly, and can be seen as, “*the repeated and reflexive return to a negative thought pattern, attitude or behavior, which directly sabotages our goals, formed and sustained by distorted beliefs, attitudes and narratives*”, with the following features:

- shifts to a **Trigger–Ritual–Relief** cycle
- driven by the same context; increasingly structured around guilt and shame
- neuro-plastic habituation changes brains in structure & function; new features of uncontrollable obsessive thinking and compulsive behavior become primary – loss of agency (choice) becomes the rule

With a basic definition developed with enough features to encompass good, bad and addiction habits, we can now move into the worksheet portion of this document. [Appendix A](#) provides examples of various habits to which most will recognize and relate. Pick from any of these, or test the worksheet using your own examples.

The goal is to identify a habit, run the habit through an 11-point query system scoring 1-5, tally the results, then reflect on how to proceed. For good habits (scored 11-22) we want to try and expand on the benefits. For bad habits (scored 22-33) we’ll look for ways to make small adjustments which, over time, will shift the habit towards better outcomes. For addiction habits (scored 44-55) we’ll look for what help and support is needed to intercept the addiction and move towards a path of recovery. This may entail simple peer-based or mutual aid community support, or may require assistance from a trained professional to deal with any clinical concerns.

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Purpose: This worksheet helps you assess your habits, recognize patterns, and determine whether a habit is beneficial, neutral, problematic, or potentially an addiction.

Step 1: Identify the Habit

Choose one habit you want to assess and write it down below (see list Appendix A).





Habit to Assess: _____

Step 2: Habit Evaluation Quiz

Rate each statement on a scale from **1 (Not at all)** to **5 (Very much so)**. Check the box number that best describes your habit.

Questions (biased towards negative implications)	1	2	3	4	5
Does this habit sabotage my long-term goals and well-being?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do I struggle to control when and how I engage in this habit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do I experience discomfort when trying to stop this habit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does this habit have primarily negative consequences?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have I ever tried to quit or change this habit but failed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do I engage in this habit when I feel stress, emotions, or problems?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has this habit caused harm to my health, relationships, or finances?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do I feel guilty or regretful after engaging in this habit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has this habit increased in frequency, intensity, or severity over time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have I ever tried (or do I actively try) to hide this habit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have others expressed concern about this habit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Step 3: Scoring & Interpretation

- **Mostly 1-2s:**  Likely a **Good Habit** (healthy and beneficial)
- **Mixed 2-3s:**  Could be a **Bad Habit** (needs improvement)
- **Mostly 3-4s:**  Possibly an **Addiction Habit** (needs intervention)
- **Multiple 5s:**  **High risk for addiction or compulsive behavior** (seek help now)

NOTE: If you scored high in loss of control, harm, or failed attempts to stop, it may be time to seek support or professional guidance.

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Step 4: Reflection & Next Steps

- **If Good Habit** → How can I further reinforce this habit? What other habits can I 'stack' or chain onto this habit to create more positive effects?
- **If Bad Habit** → What small changes can I make to improve? How can I practice these small changes consistently? Where might I need help beyond simple willpower?
- **If Addiction Habit** → What support or strategies do I need to regain control? Who can help me identify a program of recovery? Which program aligns best with my values and beliefs?

Action Plan:

1. I will take the following steps to improve or change this habit:

2. I will seek accountability from:

3. I will track my progress by:

Bonus: Coaching Questions

For deeper reflection, consider working with a Recovery Coach to answer these questions:

- How does this habit **serve** me in the short term?
- What are the **long-term consequences** of maintaining this habit?
- What **Cues (Triggers)** this habit, and how can I disrupt the cycle? What **Routine (Ritual)** is associated with this habit? What is the **Reward (Relief)** which returns me to this behavior reflexively?
- Who can **support me** in making changes?
- What alternative habits would I like to **replace this with**?

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APPENDIX A

Good Habits (More Control)

Habits that **reinforce positive behaviors**, contribute to long-term well-being, and are practiced deliberately.

Physical Health

- ✓ Exercising regularly (e.g., morning runs, weight training)
- ✓ Eating a balanced diet (e.g., mindful eating, meal prepping)
- ✓ Maintaining a consistent sleep schedule
- ✓ Staying hydrated throughout the day
- ✓ Practicing good hygiene (e.g., brushing teeth, skincare routine)

Mental & Emotional Well-Being

- ✓ Journaling for self-reflection
- ✓ Practicing gratitude daily
- ✓ Meditating or engaging in mindfulness exercises
- ✓ Setting boundaries to protect personal energy
- ✓ Reading regularly for personal growth

Productivity & Success

- ✓ Prioritizing tasks using time management systems (e.g., Pomodoro technique)
- ✓ Setting and tracking progress on goals
- ✓ Maintaining financial discipline (e.g., budgeting, saving, investing)
- ✓ Networking and maintaining professional relationships

Social & Relational Health

- ✓ Regularly checking in with family and friends
- ✓ Expressing appreciation in relationships
- ✓ Listening actively and communicating effectively

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Bad Habits (Less Control)

Habits that serve a **short-term purpose** but have negative long-term consequences. These can often be adjusted with **moderate effort**.

Physical Health

- ⚠ Overeating unhealthy foods (e.g., frequent fast food, emotional eating)
- ⚠ Inconsistent sleep patterns (e.g., staying up too late)
- ⚠ Skipping workouts due to procrastination
- ⚠ Drinking soda/energy drinks instead of water
- ⚠ Postponing medical check-ups

Mental & Emotional Well-Being

- ⚠ Doomscrolling on social media
- ⚠ Comparing oneself to others online
- ⚠ Bottling up emotions instead of addressing them
- ⚠ Engaging in negative self-talk
- ⚠ Avoiding difficult conversations out of fear

Productivity & Success

- ⚠ Procrastinating on important tasks
- ⚠ Spending impulsively without budgeting
- ⚠ Not maintaining a clean and organized workspace
- ⚠ Frequently being late to commitments

Social & Relational Health

- ⚠ Interrupting others in conversation
- ⚠ Cancelling plans too often due to laziness
- ⚠ Gossiping or complaining excessively

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Addiction Habits (No Control)

Habits that **have escalated to compulsivity**, where a person continues despite severe consequences and repeated failed attempts to quit.

Substance-Related Addictions

- ✗ Alcohol dependence (e.g., drinking despite health risks)
- ✗ Nicotine addiction (e.g., cigarettes, vaping)
- ✗ Drug addiction (e.g., opioids, stimulants, cannabis use disorder)

Behavioral Addictions

- ✗ Gambling disorder (e.g., betting money despite financial ruin)
- ✗ Compulsive shopping (e.g., shopping sprees despite debt)
- ✗ Binge eating disorder (e.g., eating large quantities despite negative health effects)
- ✗ Pornography addiction (e.g., excessive use despite harm to relationships)
- ✗ Video game addiction (e.g., gaming for excessive hours, neglecting responsibilities)
- ✗ Social media addiction (e.g., compulsive checking despite anxiety/depression effects)

Harmful Relationship Addictions

- ✗ Codependency (e.g., staying in toxic relationships despite knowing it's unhealthy)
- ✗ Love/sex addiction (e.g., compulsive relationship-seeking despite consequences)
- ✗ Workaholism (e.g., working to escape problems, leading to burnout)