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Back to Content Outline

ACTIVITY 7.2
Habit Formation

Concept

Students can learn to recognize how the human brain is designed to automate thoughts, behaviors, and actions in order to be more efficient. This can be a double-edged sword that promotes efficiency and productivity, but when it comes to negative habits it can contribute to unproductive or unhealthy patterns of behavior. Once a negative habit has been established it's very difficult to change. Students will learn how habits are developed when the brain strengthens associations between cues, routines, and rewards (Duhigg, 2012).

Units it could embed into

Cognition, Consciousness, Stress and Health, Learning

Learning Targets

1. Students will be able to describe the habit formation/maintenance cycle.
2. Students will be able to differentiate between cues and rewards.

Materials

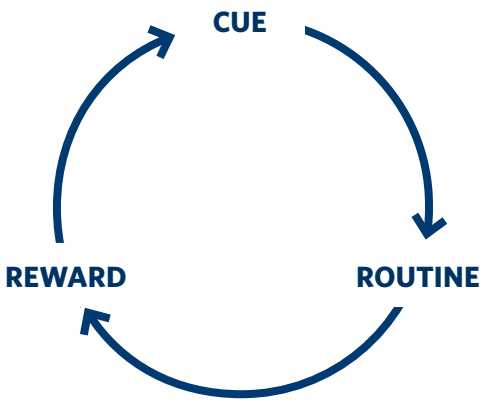
Handout 7.2: Habit Formation. You can also integrate journal entries over an extended period of time.

Time

30+ minutes. This activity can be expanded into small mini-lessons over an extended period of time that may involve several weeks if desired.

Instructions

- Engage students in a discussion of how habits are formed by using the pattern of behavior that is represented here. Facilitate the application of concrete examples where students understand the reinforcing power of Cue → Routine → Reward → Cue → Routine → Reward → Cue....
  - » Example, you feel your phone vibrating, you automatically look at your notifications, you watch a very funny 10 second video



- Explain that habits can become problematic when the automatic nature of these loops interfere with other activities, such as paying attention in class or focusing on the solution to a problem, or going to bed at night.
- Help students actively apply this knowledge. Guide students into identifying a habit they would like to change. Explain, *"If you have a hard time identifying a habit you would like to change, you can journal or ask family members to help you come up with a good habit to tackle."*

Back to Content Outline

- Guide students into being able to identify the following aspects of the habit:
  - When did the habit begin?
  - How has the habit changed overtime?
  - Is there a place, context, time of the day when the habit happens?
  - What else is happening around when you engage in the habit?
  - Does your habit impact other goals or relationships?
  - What does the habit do for you?
  - What aspects of the habit make you feel good?
  - What aspects of the habit make you feel bad?
- Share the Handout 7.2: Habit Formation instructing them to:
  - Write a single or multiple journal entries that would allow you to identify the multiple elements of your habit loop
  - Write a single or multiple journal entries documenting your habit over the course of a predetermined time period

Extension activities

- You can integrate this exercise as a single lesson or develop a more extensive theme across weeks during the academic year so that students can track their progress in terms of changing a habit.
- Invite students to observe the conscious and subconscious components of habits in their everyday lives and to document how they can effect change by applying strategies to regulate their behavior such as tracking, goal setting, and seeking support.
- You can extend this activity across multiple weeks in order to help students track the development and change of the elements associated with the target habit.
- Review how habits are formed when a pattern of behavior is created through the reinforcing power of Cue → Routine → Reward → Cue → Routine → Reward → Cue….
- Help students describe in detail how they have been able to put this knowledge into practice.

Alternative uses for the lesson

This lesson could be integrated into lessons regarding factors that directly impact academic performance such as procrastination, as well as general fitness, wellness, and nutrition.

Back to Content Outline

HANDOUT 7.2

Habit Formation

H	**Habit:** What is the habit?
C	**Cue:** What is/are the cue(s)?
R	**Routine:** What is your automatic response?
R	**Reward:** What is the Reward?
+	**Negative Consequences:** What are the negative consequences of your habit loop?