CORE GUIDE

The Screen Time Rules

Take control of your screen time and start achieving your goals

Format	PDF, letter size
Edition	2026 Edition
For	Take control of your screen time and start achieving your go

How to use this guide

Work through the modules in order. Each one ends with a concrete action, and the Action Workbook gives you space to complete it. Reading this guide without doing the exercises will not produce a result — the work is the point.

> Start with the Quick Start. It gets you a real result before you read the full guide.

Who this is for

Take control of your screen time and start achieving your goals

The moment this helps: The moment the current approach stops working.

What you have probably already tried: Free advice that was too generic to act on.

What is inside

#	Module	Format
1	Understanding the State of Distraction	PDF
2	Identifying Your Screen Time Triggers	PDF
3	Creating a Screen Time Budget	PDF
4	Implementing a Screen Time Schedule	PDF
5	Tracking Progress and Adjusting Habits	PDF
6	Avoiding Common Screen Time Traps	PDF
7	Building a Support Network	PDF
8	Overcoming Screen Time Cravings	PDF
9	Celebrating Small Wins	PDF
10	Addressing Common Obstacles	PDF
11	Maintaining Momentum	PDF
12	Reviewing and Refining Progress	PDF
13	Embracing a Growth Mindset	PDF
14	Building Resilience	PDF

15	Creating a Maintenance Plan	PDF
16	Sustaining Progress and Achieving Goals	PDF

Module 1. Understanding the State of Distraction

Your phone vibrates during a meeting, and before you realize it, you've lost the thread of the conversation. You open your laptop to write a report, but end up toggling between email, chat, and news headlines. These are not rare slip-ups - they are daily, routine examples of how distraction fragments your attention and erodes your ability to focus on what matters most. Distraction is not a single, dramatic interruption but a continuous, subtle process. Each time you switch from one task to another - whether it's checking a notification, glancing at a message, or opening a new browser tab - your brain pays a price. Scientific studies show that after each interruption, it can take over 20 minutes to regain your original level of concentration. If you are interrupted every few minutes, you never reach a state of deep focus, instead remaining in a shallow mode that feels busy but is unproductive. The devices you rely on for productivity are designed to capture your attention. Every notification, message, and update provides a tiny burst of dopamine, a neurotransmitter linked to reward and motivation. This makes checking your phone or computer feel satisfying, even when it derails your priorities. Over time, your brain forms a habit loop: you reach for your device automatically, often without conscious intention. This is not a sign of weak willpower; it's a predictable response to systems engineered to keep you engaged. Distraction blurs the line between work and leisure. When you use the same device for both, your brain struggles to switch modes. You may intend to finish a task but find yourself scrolling through unrelated content, responding to messages, or watching videos. This constant context switching prevents your brain from fully committing to a single mode of thinking, making sustained attention harder to achieve. The cost of distraction extends beyond lost minutes. It affects the quality of your thinking and the depth of your work. Deep work - solving complex problems, generating creative ideas, or making real progress on your goals - requires extended, uninterrupted focus. When you are constantly distracted, you skim the surface of tasks and rarely reach your full potential. You may feel productive because you are always busy, but real progress is limited. Emotional triggers play a significant role in distraction. You might check your phone when you're bored, anxious, frustrated, or avoiding a difficult task. These emotional states make you more susceptible to seeking novelty or relief through your devices. Recognizing these triggers is essential, because strategies based solely on willpower often fail to address the underlying emotional drivers. Your environment also shapes your ability to focus. If your phone is visible, you are more likely to check it. Active notifications, cluttered workspaces, and multiple open tabs all compete for your attention. Small environmental changes - such as moving your phone out of sight, closing unnecessary tabs, or setting specific times for checking messages - can significantly reduce distraction. It's important to distinguish between intentional, productive screen use and mindless, reactive scrolling. Not all screen time is equal. Activities like writing, researching, or focused communication move you toward your goals. In contrast, frequent social media checks, endless inbox refreshes, or unrelated video watching drain your focus and provide little value. The goal is to use screens with intention, not to eliminate them entirely. To take

control of distraction, you need to map your personal distraction landscape. This means identifying the specific triggers, contexts, and habits that lead you off course. Most people underestimate their screen time by a wide margin. By tracking your actual usage for a week, you'll uncover patterns you can't see otherwise. This awareness is the foundation for change. In this module, you will clarify where and when distraction hits hardest, track your real screen time, and begin to set boundaries that protect your attention. You'll audit your notifications, make physical changes to your workspace, and establish routines for checking email and social media. You'll also start journaling about your focus patterns, looking for connections between time of day, environment, and emotional state. By the end, you will have a detailed, personalized map of how distraction operates in your life and a strong foundation for building new habits.

What this module changes

You have a clear understanding of the concept of distraction, its underlying neurological and psychological causes, and the specific contexts in which it disrupts your focus and productivity. You can identify your main distraction triggers, recognize the impact of your environment and emotional state, and distinguish between productive and unproductive screen use.

Worked example

Marcus, a software developer, believed he spent about three hours per day on his phone. When he tracked his screen time for a week, he discovered he was actually spending five and a half hours per day, with two hours going to social media alone. He identified three main distraction contexts: (1) during coding sessions, when he checked his phone whenever he encountered a bug; (2) during lunch, when he scrolled social media instead of taking a real break; and (3) in the evening, when he watched YouTube videos in bed until midnight. Marcus set a boundary: no phone in the bedroom after 10 PM. He placed his phone in the kitchen overnight and bought an alarm clock for his nightstand. He turned off all notifications except calls and calendar alerts, reducing interruptions from 47 per day to 6. He moved his phone to a drawer during work hours, making it require a deliberate choice to check it. He set three times to check social media: 12:30 PM during lunch, 3 PM during his afternoon break, and 7 PM after dinner, using a 15-minute timer for each session. Marcus also identified his emotional triggers. He noticed he checked his phone during coding sessions when he felt frustrated or stuck. Instead of reaching for his phone, he committed to standing up, walking to the window, and looking outside for 60 seconds before returning to the problem. During lunch, he started eating in the break room with coworkers instead of scrolling alone at his desk. After one week, Marcus's average daily screen time dropped to three hours and forty minutes - a reduction of one hour and fifty minutes per day, or nearly thirteen hours per week. He noticed he solved coding problems faster because he stayed focused through difficult moments instead of reaching for his phone. His evening routine

improved because he read for 30 minutes before bed instead of scrolling, and he fell asleep more easily. The boundary around his bedroom was the single most effective change, eliminating 45 minutes of late-night phone use and improving his sleep quality. By the end of the week, he had identified a clear pattern: his distraction peaked between 2 PM and 4 PM, when his energy dipped, so he scheduled his most challenging coding tasks for the morning and used the afternoon for meetings and code reviews.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- List three specific contexts where you most often get distracted (for example: during focused work, while relaxing, or in social settings). For each, write one example of what typically pulls your attention away.
- Track your screen time for a full seven days using your device's built-in tracker or a third-party app. Record total hours, and break down which apps or activities occupy the most time.
- At the end of the week, compare your tracked screen time to your initial estimate. Write down any surprises or discrepancies, and note which apps or activities consumed more time than you expected.
- Set one clear, testable boundary between your work and personal life (such as no phone at the dinner table or no work email after a certain hour). Commit to this boundary for one week and keep a brief daily log of challenges or benefits.
- Audit all notification settings on your devices. Turn off every notification that is not essential for immediate action. Test this setup for at least three days, then adjust as needed.
- Make one physical change to your workspace to minimize distraction. This could be moving your phone out of sight, using a website blocker, or working in a different room. Implement this change immediately and observe the effect.
- Establish two or three fixed times per day to check email and social media. Set a timer (e.g., 15 minutes) for each session to prevent open-ended browsing. Write these times on a sticky note and place it in your workspace.
- Schedule three 10-minute, screen-free breaks during your workday. Use these breaks to move, stretch, or look outside. Set calendar reminders to ensure you take each break.
- Identify one recurring distraction you have not yet addressed (such as checking your phone upon waking or keeping too many browser tabs open). Brainstorm two ways to reduce its pull and test one solution for three days.
- At the end of each day for one week, spend two minutes journaling about when you felt most focused and when you felt most distracted. Look for patterns in time, environment, or mood,

and summarize any recurring themes after five days.

- List at least two emotional states (e.g., boredom, anxiety, frustration, avoidance) that make you vulnerable to distraction. For each, write down a healthier response you can try (such as taking a walk or deep breathing) and commit to testing these responses.
- Share your main distraction triggers and new boundaries with at least one person who interacts with you regularly (partner, roommate, coworker). Use a provided script to explain your approach and invite their support.
- Run a one-week experiment: remove one major distraction source entirely (such as deleting a social media app, turning off your phone during meals, or working offline for the first hour each day). Record the impact on your focus and mood daily.

Common mistakes at this step

- Believing that distraction is only a matter of willpower and not recognizing the powerful neurological and environmental factors at play. Fix: Learn about how your brain and environment shape your attention.
- Tracking screen time for less than a full week and assuming you understand your habits, missing important patterns that emerge over several days. Fix: Commit to a full seven-day tracking period.
- Setting vague or unmeasurable boundaries like 'use my phone less,' which makes it impossible to know if you are making progress. Fix: Define clear, testable rules (e.g., 'no phone after 9 PM in the bedroom').
- Turning off only a few notifications while leaving many others active, resulting in continued interruptions. Fix: Audit every app and notification setting, and turn off all but the truly essential alerts.

Before you move on

✓ Did I identify at least three specific contexts where I get distracted and write down examples for each?

✓ Did I track my screen time for a full seven days and review the data in detail?

✓ Did I compare my actual screen time to my estimate and find at least one significant gap or surprise?

✓ Did I set a clear, specific boundary between work and personal life and test it for a week?

✓ Did I audit all notification settings and turn off non-essential notifications on every device?

✓ Did I make at least one physical change to my workspace to reduce distractions?

- ✓ Did I set fixed times for checking email and social media, and use a timer to limit those sessions?
- ✓ Did I schedule and consistently take at least three screen-free breaks each workday?
- ✓ Did I identify a recurring distraction I had not addressed and test a solution for at least three days?
- ✓ Did I journal about my focus and distraction patterns for at least five days and identify recurring themes?
- ✓ Did I list at least two emotional states that make me vulnerable to distraction and write down healthier responses?
- ✓ Did I share my boundaries and focus goals with someone who interacts with me regularly and invite their support?

Module 2. Identifying Your Screen Time Triggers

Screen time triggers are the specific cues and patterns that prompt you to reach for your phone, tablet, or computer - often without conscious intention. To regain control, you must go beyond simply tracking your usage and instead map the moments, emotions, and environments that nudge you toward mindless consumption. Begin by observing your daily routine closely. Notice every instance you pick up a device or open a browser, especially when you don't have a clear, specific task. Write down what you were doing immediately before, your emotional state, and the setting. This process reveals not just how much time you spend on screens, but why and when you do it. The goal is to catch the pattern before it catches you. Triggers generally fall into five categories: emotional (such as boredom, stress, or loneliness), environmental (devices in easy reach, persistent notifications), social (group chats, fear of missing out), habitual (automatic routines like checking email upon waking), and transitional (moments between activities, like waiting or finishing a task). Often, multiple triggers overlap. For example, after a stressful meeting (emotional), you might find yourself in the break room with your phone on the table (environmental), leading to 20 minutes of scrolling while you decompress (habitual). Each layer reinforces the next, making the behavior feel automatic. The most effective way to interrupt automatic screen use is to catch the moment just before it happens. Ask yourself: What just occurred? How am I feeling? What am I trying to avoid or escape? Many people use screens to manage discomfort or uncertainty, rather than for genuine enjoyment or connection. You might be procrastinating, avoiding a tough conversation, or simply uncomfortable with silence. The screen becomes a numbing agent, not a tool. It's important to distinguish between productive screen time (using your device for a clear purpose, with a defined endpoint) and mindless consumption (open-ended scrolling, binge-watching, or news refreshing). Your triggers almost always lead to the latter, which tends to expand to fill any available time. Productive use has a finish line; mindless use has none. Emotional triggers are particularly powerful because they operate below conscious awareness. You might feel a vague sense of unease and reach for your phone before you've even identified the feeling. Common emotional triggers include anxiety about unfinished work, loneliness after a social interaction ends, frustration with a difficult task, or the restless energy that comes from transitioning between activities. Each emotion creates a specific urge pattern. Anxiety might drive you to check email repeatedly. Loneliness might pull you toward social media. Boredom might lead to news sites or video platforms. Environmental triggers are the physical cues in your surroundings. A phone sitting face-up on your desk. A laptop open on the couch. A notification sound from across the room. The muscle memory of reaching for your pocket when you sit down. These cues bypass your decision-making process entirely - your hand moves before your brain registers the choice. The closer and more visible your device, the stronger the pull. Social triggers involve other people and your relationship to them. A group chat that pings constantly. A friend who always shares links. The fear that you'll miss an important update or inside joke. The pressure to respond quickly to messages. Social

triggers are tricky because they feel like connection, but they often replace deeper, more satisfying interactions with shallow, fragmented exchanges. Habitual triggers are the routines you've built over months or years. Checking your phone the moment you wake up. Opening your email before you've had coffee. Scrolling while you eat lunch. Watching videos while you brush your teeth. These behaviors have become so automatic that you perform them without any conscious decision. Your brain has linked the context (waking up, eating, brushing teeth) with the behavior (screen use), creating a loop that fires every time the context appears. Transitional triggers occur in the gaps between activities. Waiting for a meeting to start. Standing in line. Finishing one task before beginning another. Sitting down after putting the kids to bed. These in-between moments feel empty, and your brain reaches for stimulation to fill them. The problem is that a 30-second wait can turn into a 20-minute session if the content is engaging enough. By systematically mapping your triggers, you can design targeted interventions. This isn't about eliminating all screen time - it's about making your usage intentional and aligned with your values and goals. You'll learn to recognize the cues that drive your habits, prepare alternatives in advance, and gradually shift your routines so that screens serve you, not the other way around. The key is specificity: vague awareness produces vague results, but detailed tracking produces actionable insights.

What this module changes

You have identified your screen time triggers and are ready to make changes to your behavior.

Worked example

Sarah, a marketing specialist, was struggling to find a balance between her work and personal life. She found that her screen time triggers were related to her work schedule. She started by reviewing her daily routine and identifying the times of day when she tended to reach for her phone or computer. She tracked her screen time for 10 days using her iPhone's Screen Time feature and kept a small notebook to record context. She discovered she picked up her phone 47 times per day on average, with peak times at 7-8 AM (checking email in bed), 12-1 PM (scrolling during lunch), and 7-10 PM (the worst period, averaging 2.5 hours of mixed email checking, social media, and streaming). By analyzing her habits and routines, Sarah identified that she was using her phone and computer to escape from stress and boredom. Specifically, her evening pattern started with checking work email around 7 PM (habitual trigger - she'd done this for 3 years), which made her anxious about unfinished projects (emotional trigger), which led her to 'decompress' by scrolling Instagram (another 30 minutes), which led to YouTube recommendations (another 90 minutes of autoplay). She realized the email check was the first domino that knocked down all the others. Sarah created a schedule for her personal time, replacing screen time with reading and exercise. She set a rule: no work email after 6 PM, and she moved her phone charger

to the kitchen so her phone stayed there overnight. For her lunch scrolling, she started bringing a book to the break room and sitting at a different table where she couldn't see her phone. For her evening routine, she laid out her running shoes by the door and committed to a 20-minute walk immediately after dinner, before sitting down. She also set her social media apps to allow only 15 minutes per day (using iPhone's App Limits), scheduled for 8-8:15 PM only. When the limit hit, the apps locked and required her to consciously override it - which she did twice in the first week, but the friction made her aware of the behavior. By the third week, she stopped overriding it. For her morning email habit, Sarah set her alarm 15 minutes earlier and placed her phone across the room. When the alarm went off, she had to get out of bed to turn it off, which broke the automatic reach-for-phone pattern. She replaced the email check with a 10-minute morning routine: make coffee, do 5 minutes of stretching, then check email at her desk (not in bed) at 8 AM. By doing so, Sarah reduced her evening screen time from an average of 2.5 hours to 45 minutes over 4 weeks, and her total daily screen time dropped from 6.5 hours to 3.2 hours. She reported feeling less anxious, sleeping better, and finishing two books in the first month - something she hadn't done in over a year. Her morning routine change alone saved her 30 minutes per day, which she used for a proper breakfast and planning her day.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Review your daily routine and upcoming schedule for the next 24 hours. Each time you pick up your phone or open a browser, immediately jot down what you were doing just before, what you felt, and what prompted the urge. Use a small notebook or note app that's faster to access than your usual screen activities.
- Pinpoint the times of day when you most often reach for your device without a clear purpose. Mark these as high-risk windows in your calendar or planner, noting the specific hour and what you're typically doing then (e.g., '7-8 PM, after dinner, sitting on couch').
- Track your screen time for the next 7-10 days using your device's built-in tracker or a dedicated app. For each session longer than 5 minutes, record not just the duration, but also what you were doing immediately before, your emotional state, your location, and whether you had a specific task in mind when you started.
- At the end of the tracking period, analyze your notes. Group your screen sessions by patterns - look for repeated emotional states (e.g., stress, boredom, loneliness), specific locations (e.g., couch, bed, kitchen table), times of day, or activities that precede device use. Use tally marks or a simple spreadsheet to count how often each pattern appears.
- For each trigger you identify, write a detailed description: the specific emotion or situation (e.g., 'anxious after a difficult meeting'), the environment (e.g., 'phone on coffee table within

arm's reach'), and the resulting screen behavior (e.g., 'scroll Instagram for 30 minutes, then YouTube for another 20'). Include what you were hoping to feel or accomplish.

- Identify environmental triggers by walking through your home and workspace. Note where your devices are most accessible and where you tend to use them mindlessly. Take photos of these locations if it helps you see the setup objectively. Remove or relocate devices from at least one high-trigger area (e.g., move your phone charger out of the bedroom, close your laptop and put it in a drawer when not in use).
- Create a schedule for your personal time that includes alternatives to screen use. Assign a specific activity to each trigger (e.g., if you scroll out of boredom in the living room, keep a book or puzzle within reach there; if you check your phone when anxious, keep a stress ball or journal nearby). Write these alternatives directly into your calendar or planner.
- Set clear boundaries for checking work emails and social media. Decide on specific times (such as 'email at 9 AM, 1 PM, and 5 PM only' or 'social media for 15 minutes at 8 PM') and use app timers or website blockers to help enforce these limits. Write these boundaries down and post them where you'll see them during high-trigger times.
- Test one trigger intervention at a time for 3 days. For example, if you usually check your phone after dinner, try replacing that with a walk or another activity. Observe whether this change reduces your screen time, and note any discomfort or urges that arise. Don't judge the urges - just record them.
- Prepare alternative activities in advance for your most common triggers. Place a book, journal, craft project, or exercise gear in high-trigger locations so they're easier to access than your device. If your trigger is emotional (like stress), prepare a list of 3-5 quick activities that address that emotion (like a 5-minute breathing exercise, a phone call to a friend, or a short walk).
- Create and use a trigger log template with columns for time, location, preceding activity, emotion, screen behavior, and duration. Fill it out immediately after each screen session for accuracy - waiting until the end of the day will cause you to forget crucial details. Keep this log in the same place you keep your device so you can't miss it.
- Review your trigger log and personal schedule weekly. Look for new patterns or triggers you may have missed, and adjust your interventions as needed to better align your habits with your goals. Celebrate any reduction in mindless screen time, even if it's just 10 minutes per day - small wins compound over time.

Common mistakes at this step

- Assuming you know your screen time patterns without tracking - memory is unreliable and will miss crucial triggers, especially the emotional ones that happen below conscious awareness.

Fix: Use real-time tracking and context notes for at least a week, recording immediately after each session.

- Trying to reduce screen time without addressing the underlying habits or routines - this leads to frustration and rapid relapse because the triggers remain active. Fix: Pair every trigger with a planned alternative activity that addresses the same need (e.g., if you scroll when bored, prepare an engaging non-screen activity).
- Failing to create a specific, written schedule for personal time - vague intentions like 'I'll read more' rarely work because they require decision-making in the moment when your willpower is low. Fix: Block time for alternatives and set reminders, treating them as non-negotiable appointments.
- Tracking only the amount of time spent on screens, not the context or emotion - this misses the 'why' behind your usage, which is the key to changing it. Fix: Always record what you were feeling and doing before each session, even if it takes an extra 30 seconds.

Before you move on

✓ Have you reviewed your daily routine and noted what you were doing before each screen session for at least one full day?

✓ Can you identify at least 3-5 specific times of day when you tend to use your device without a clear purpose?

✓ Have you tracked your screen time for at least 7 days, including context such as emotion, location, and preceding activity for most sessions?

✓ Can you name at least 3 emotional triggers (such as boredom, stress, or loneliness) that commonly lead you to use screens?

✓ Can you identify at least 2 environmental triggers (such as your phone on the nightstand or laptop open on the couch) that make screen use automatic?

✓ Have you created a written schedule specifying when you will and won't check work email and social media?

✓ Have you identified at least 3 alternative activities to replace screen time, and made them physically accessible in high-trigger locations?

✓ Have you removed or relocated at least one device from a high-trigger location in your home or workspace?

✓ Can you clearly describe the difference between your productive screen time and your mindless consumption patterns?

✓ Have you tested at least one specific trigger intervention for 3 consecutive days and recorded whether it reduced your screen time?

Module 3. Creating a Screen Time Budget

Screen time budgets are concrete, actionable documents: physical worksheets, spreadsheets, or printed cards that break down your digital activities by device, category, and actual minutes spent. You will handle tangible devices - phones, tablets, laptops, desktops, e-readers, smart TVs, and gaming consoles - and extract precise usage data from each. The result is a comprehensive reference that assigns target times for every app, website, or digital tool, with explicit instructions for off-limits periods and a flexible allowance for unexpected needs. Start by gathering every device you use, not just your main phone or laptop. This includes work-issued devices, backup phones, shared family tablets, e-readers, smart TVs, and gaming consoles. Physically lay these out in one place - on a table or workspace - so you can see the full scope of your digital environment. This visual inventory helps you avoid missing devices that quietly contribute to your screen time, such as a kitchen tablet used for recipes or a TV used for background news. Missing even one device can skew your budget and conceal overages, so be thorough. Systematically review each device. Unlock each one and scan the home screens, app drawers, bookmarks, browser extensions, and shortcuts. Write down every app, website, or tool you use in a typical week. Include work tools (email, Slack, spreadsheets), communication (texts, calls, messaging apps), shopping, news, entertainment (streaming, games, YouTube), hobbies (music, reading apps), and even background apps or widgets that send notifications. For each activity, note which device(s) you use. This comprehensive inventory prevents blind spots and forms the backbone of your budget. Extract actual usage data for the past 7 days from each device. Use built-in tools: iOS (Settings > Screen Time), Android (Digital Wellbeing & Parental Controls), Windows or Mac (RescueTime, ManicTime, or browser histories), and check for usage stats on smart TVs or gaming consoles. For devices without built-in tracking, estimate based on logs or your best records, but flag these for later verification. For each activity, add up the time spent across all devices. For example, if you use Instagram on both your phone and tablet, combine those times. Avoid relying on memory - most people underestimate their usage. Double-check for overlap or duplicate entries, especially for activities that span multiple devices. Create a worksheet or spreadsheet to organize your data. For each activity, include columns for the activity name, devices used, actual time spent (last 7 days), your target time, and the difference. Use one row per activity, even if it appears on multiple devices. This format makes it easy to spot high-use categories, track progress, and identify where adjustments are needed. Keep this worksheet accessible for ongoing updates and revisions - print it, save it to your desktop, or keep a physical copy nearby. Reflect on each activity listed. Ask yourself: does this activity support your current goals and priorities? Assign a realistic target time for each, aiming for a 20-30% reduction in high-use categories. For example, if you spend 90 minutes daily on Instagram but want to cut back, set a target of 30 minutes daily or 3.5 hours weekly. Reallocate saved time to activities you value more, such as learning, family, or exercise. Clearly mark non-negotiable obligations (work, family commitments) - these form your baseline. Don't forget to

include communication (texting, messaging, calls) and work-related screen time, as these can add up quickly and are often overlooked. Break your weekly targets into specific daily blocks with defined start and end times. Instead of vague goals like "30 minutes of social media per day," specify "12:15-12:30pm Instagram" and "8:00-8:15pm Instagram." Match block sizes to your real usage patterns - longer for TV shows or deep work, shorter for quick check-ins. Adjust for days with different routines, such as weekends versus weekdays. This level of detail helps you notice when you drift over budget and makes compliance more achievable. (For integrating these blocks into your daily schedule, see module 4.) For all unassigned periods, write explicit instructions such as "no recreational screens," "phone in another room," or "work screens only." Pair each no-screen period with a planned replacement activity to prevent defaulting back to screens - e.g., "6-7pm: no recreational screens (cook dinner and listen to a podcast)." This step is crucial for making no-screen time sustainable and enjoyable. Write these instructions directly into your worksheet or schedule for clarity. Add a flex allowance - typically 2-3 hours per week - for unexpected but legitimate screen needs. Track your use of this flex time and note what you used it for. If you consistently use all of it, your budget may be too strict; if you rarely use it, consider reallocating those hours. Decide in advance what qualifies as flex use (e.g., urgent work, last-minute research, family emergencies) and write these criteria into your budget. Flex time is not a loophole, but a safety net for real life. Transfer your completed budget to a visible, tangible format. Options include writing it on paper and taping it to your monitor, using a whiteboard, printing a laminated card, or setting it as your phone's lock screen. The key is daily visibility - budgets hidden in folders or apps are quickly forgotten. If you work in multiple locations, consider portable formats such as a wallet card or a sticky note in your bag. Seeing your budget frequently keeps it top-of-mind and supports habit change. Set up reminders for transitions between activities. Five minutes before each scheduled block ends, set a phone alarm or timer labeled with the activity and "ends in 5 min." This helps you wrap up smoothly and avoid abrupt cutoffs. For longer activities, set halfway reminders to check your progress. Use custom labels so you know which block is ending. If your device allows recurring alarms, set these once to repeat daily. Consider using app blockers or focus modes to reinforce your boundaries and prevent accidental overages. For one full week, track your real usage each evening. Compare actual usage to your budgeted amounts for each activity and record whether you stayed within budget, went over, or came under, noting the difference in minutes. Do not treat this as a test of willpower - this is a diagnostic phase to see where your budget is realistic and where it needs adjustment. After 7 days, review your data. Highlight any activity where you consistently exceeded your target by more than 10 minutes per day. These are your pressure points: either your budget is too strict, or you need additional support tools such as stricter app limits, accountability, or more engaging replacement activities. Make budget review a weekly ritual. Schedule a recurring 10-minute event (e.g., Sunday evening) to review your data, reflect on what worked and what didn't, and revise your budget. Open your screen time reports, compare actual to budgeted for each activity, adjust next week's budget based on the data, and set reminders for new time blocks. Over time, your

budget will evolve as your habits and goals shift. The weekly review ensures your budget remains a living document, not a static rule you abandon after the first failure. If you miss your review, reschedule within 24 hours to stay on track. A screen time budget is a practical tool for aligning your digital life with your values and priorities. By making your usage visible, specific, and actionable, you gain control over your time and create space for what matters most. This process will help you identify patterns, set boundaries, and make intentional choices about how you spend your digital hours. Over several weeks, you'll see patterns emerge and can refine your budget to better fit your real needs and aspirations.

What this module changes

You have created a screen time budget that allocates specific time slots for different categories of screen time, with clear targets, tracking, and review processes.

Worked example

Marcus works a desk job and wants to spend more time on his side business and less time on YouTube and Twitter. He opens his iPhone's Settings > Screen Time and reviews the past 7 days. He sees he spent 9 hours on work apps, 6.5 hours on YouTube, 4 hours on Twitter, 2 hours on messaging, and 1 hour on news sites last week. His goal is to add 5 hours a week to his side business. He decides to cut YouTube from 6.5 hours to 3 hours (saving 3.5 hours) and Twitter from 4 hours to 1.5 hours (saving 2.5 hours), giving him 6 hours of freed time. He'll use 5 hours for the business and keep 1 hour as flex time. Marcus creates this budget: Mon-Fri: - Work screens: 9am-12pm, 1pm-5pm (8 hours/day, 40 hours/week) - Twitter: 12:15-12:30pm (15 min/day, 1.25 hours/week) - YouTube: 8-8:30pm if side business task done (30 min/day, 2.5 hours/week) - Messaging: check at 12pm, 5pm, 8pm (estimated 20 min/day, 1.7 hours/week) - Side business: 6-7:30pm (1.5 hours/day, 7.5 hours/week) - No recreational screens: 5-6pm (dinner prep), 7:30-8pm (family time) Sat-Sun: - Twitter: 10-10:15am (15 min/day, 0.5 hours/week) - YouTube: 8-8:45pm (45 min/day, 1.5 hours/week) - Messaging: as needed (estimated 30 min/day, 1 hour/week) - Side business: Sat 9am-12pm (3 hours/week) - No recreational screens: all day Sunday Weekly totals: Work 40 hours, Twitter 1.75 hours, YouTube 4 hours, Messaging 2.7 hours, Side business 10.5 hours. Flex allowance: 2 hours for unexpected needs. Marcus writes this on an index card and tapes it to his monitor. He opens his iPhone's Settings > Screen Time > App Limits and sets daily limits: Twitter 20 min/day, YouTube 35 min/day (slightly over budget to avoid feeling restricted). He sets iPhone reminders for "Twitter ends in 5 min" at 12:25pm and "YouTube ends in 5 min" at 8:25pm. After 7 days, Marcus checks his Screen Time data. He stayed in budget on work screens (40 hours), went over on Twitter (2.5 hours vs 1.75 budgeted), under on YouTube (3 hours vs 4 budgeted), and hit his side business target (10 hours). He used 1 hour of flex time for a work emergency. Marcus adjusts: he

increases Twitter to 2 hours/week (adds 5 minutes at 7pm Mon-Fri) because 15 minutes felt too restrictive and he kept ignoring it. He keeps YouTube at 4 hours budgeted since he came in under. He notes that the 6-7:30pm side business block works well, so he'll keep it. Total freed time: still 5+ hours/week for his business, which was the goal.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Physically gather every device you use regularly - phones, tablets, laptops, desktops, e-readers, gaming consoles, smart TVs, or others. Lay them out together to ensure none are missed, including work devices or shared household screens.
- On each device, systematically review home screens, app drawers, bookmarks, browser extensions, and shortcuts. List every app, website, and digital tool you use in a typical week - including work, communication, entertainment, shopping, news, hobbies, and background apps.
- Create a worksheet or spreadsheet. For each activity, note the device(s) used. Add columns for actual time (last 7 days), target time, and the difference. List each activity separately, even if used on multiple devices.
- Extract actual usage data for the past 7 days from each device. Use built-in tools (e.g., iOS Screen Time, Android Digital Wellbeing) or install tracking software for computers. Record exact hours and minutes spent on each activity.
- Sum usage across all devices for each activity. For example, if you use Instagram on both phone and tablet, add the times together. Double-check for overlap or duplicate entries to avoid undercounting or double-counting.
- Review each activity: does it support your goals? Assign a realistic target time for each, aiming for a 20-30% reduction in high-use categories. Reallocate saved time to higher-value activities. Mark non-negotiable obligations clearly and include all communication and work-related screen time.
- Break weekly targets into specific daily blocks with clear start and end times (e.g., '7:45-8:15am news', '12:15-12:30pm social media'). Adjust block sizes for your real routines and differentiate between weekdays and weekends.
- For all unassigned periods, write explicit instructions (e.g., 'no recreational screens', 'phone in another room') and pair each with a planned replacement activity. Add these directly to your schedule or worksheet for clarity.
- Add a flex allowance of 2-3 hours per week for unexpected but necessary screen use. Record this at the bottom of your budget and track how much you use and for what. Define in advance

what qualifies as flex use and write these criteria into your budget.

- Transfer your completed budget to a highly visible location: paper on your desk, whiteboard, laminated card, or your phone's lock screen. Ensure you see it multiple times daily without extra effort, and consider portable formats if you work in different locations.
- Set up reminders or alarms for 5 minutes before each scheduled screen block ends. Label each with the activity name and 'ends in 5 min' to prompt smooth transitions. Use recurring alarms and halfway reminders for longer blocks. Consider app blockers or focus modes as additional supports.
- Track your actual usage for 7 consecutive days. Each evening, note for every activity whether you stayed within budget, went over, or came under, and record the difference in minutes. Do not adjust your behavior mid-week; just observe and record to identify realistic patterns.
- At the end of the week, review your budget versus actual usage. Highlight any activity where you exceeded your target by more than 10 minutes per day. Decide whether to adjust your budget, add support tools, or revise your approach based on the data.
- Schedule a recurring 10-minute review (e.g., every Sunday evening) to reflect on your data, update your budget, and plan improvements for the next week. Make this a non-negotiable appointment. If you miss it, reschedule within 24 hours to keep your budget active and relevant.

Common mistakes at this step

- Budgeting only for obvious problem areas (like social media) while ignoring work, communication, or hobby screens. Fix: Include every category of screen use, even those that seem harmless or necessary.
- Using round numbers or guesses for time blocks instead of matching actual activity durations. Fix: Use your device's real usage data and budget for the true length of activities.
- Making the budget too rigid or idealized, requiring perfect days to follow. Fix: Build in flexibility and a weekly allowance for unexpected needs.
- Not planning replacement activities for no-screen periods, leading to boredom or defaulting back to devices. Fix: Write down a specific alternative for each no-screen block.

Before you move on

✓ You have listed every screen-based activity you use in a typical week, including less obvious ones like online shopping, news, or hobby apps.

✓ You have checked and recorded actual usage data from every device you use, not relying on estimates or memory.

- ✓ You have summed usage across all devices for each activity to avoid underestimating total time spent.
- ✓ You have set target times for each activity based on your current goals, and at least three targets are lower than your actual usage.
- ✓ Your budget specifies exact start and end times for each activity block, not just total daily or weekly amounts.
- ✓ You have written clear instructions for all unassigned periods (e.g., 'no recreational screens'), and each has a planned replacement activity.
- ✓ You have included a flex allowance of 2-3 hours per week for unexpected screen needs, and it is written in your budget.
- ✓ Your budget is posted or displayed in a place you see multiple times per day without extra effort (not hidden away or only digital).
- ✓ You have set reminders or alarms for 5 minutes before each scheduled screen block ends, with custom labels.
- ✓ You tracked your actual usage for 7 days and recorded whether you stayed within budget for each activity each day.
- ✓ You have completed a weekly review comparing your planned budget to your actual usage, and made at least one adjustment based on your findings.
- ✓ You have a clear plan for what to do if you exceed a budgeted block (e.g., use flex time, adjust next week's budget, or add a support tool).
- ✓ You have included screen-based communication (texting, messaging, calls) in your budget, not just entertainment or social media.
- ✓ You have checked for differences between weekday and weekend routines and adjusted your budget accordingly.
- ✓ You have double-checked that activities used on multiple devices are not double-counted or missed.

Module 4. Implementing a Screen Time Schedule

Printed daily schedules on your fridge, color-coded calendar entries, and app-based time limits are the backbone of a successful screen time schedule. In this module, you'll learn to translate your intentions into concrete, visible plans: assigning exact clock times to each screen activity, using digital and physical cues, and setting up enforcement mechanisms that make your schedule hard to ignore. You'll work with tools like app limits, Do Not Disturb, browser blockers, and strategic device placement, and you'll learn to pair each activity with a specific location and a clear, observable end cue - such as a timer, the end of a show, or completing a set task. A screen time schedule is a written or digital document that specifies exactly when you'll use screens, for what, and for how long. By assigning clock times (for example, 7:00-7:20 AM for news, 12:00-12:30 PM for social media, or 9:00-10:00 PM for streaming), you create structure and reduce the need for on-the-fly decisions. This helps you avoid the slippery slope of "just a few more minutes" and makes your intentions visible and enforceable. Your schedule should be something you can point to, share, and update - not a vague wish or mental note. Begin by tracking your screen time for a full week using your device's built-in reporting tools (such as Settings > Screen Time on iOS or Digital Wellbeing on Android) or a cross-device app if you use several devices. Record not only your total hours but also which apps or activities dominate your time, and the specific times of day you're most likely to use them. Notice patterns: do you check email in short bursts all day, or binge-watch videos in the evening? Be sure to include both weekdays and weekends, as your habits may change. Next, highlight your three highest-usage windows each day. These are the periods where your screen habits are most entrenched, and where a schedule will have the biggest impact. Rather than trying to control every minute, focus first on these leverage points. For instance, if you spend 90 minutes on social media scattered through the afternoon, consolidate this into two scheduled 20-minute blocks. This approach reduces total usage and mental clutter, and gives you a clear starting point for change. Assign exact clock times to each screen activity. Write your schedule on paper or in your calendar app, using specific times like "Social media: 12:00-12:20 PM, 7:00-7:30 PM" or "Work email: 9:00 AM, 1:00 PM, 4:00 PM." Avoid vague phrases such as "after dinner" or "when I'm done with work" - these make it easy to rationalize breaking your own rules. If your current usage is high, don't try to cut it to zero immediately. Instead, reduce in manageable steps: schedule shorter blocks and gradually trim them over several weeks, so the change feels sustainable. (If you need help with budgeting your total screen time, see module 3.) Set up enforcement tools so you don't have to rely on memory or willpower. Use your phone's app limits to block access outside scheduled windows. Enable Do Not Disturb during screen-free periods. Move your phone to another room during meals or family time. On computers, install browser extensions (such as Freedom, Cold Turkey, or LeechBlock) to block distracting sites during certain hours. Set these tools up in advance, not when you're already tempted. The goal is to make it easier to follow your schedule than to break it. Prioritize your most important non-screen activities by blocking time for them

first. Reserve time for exercise, reading, or family dinners before adding screen blocks. Write these non-screen activities on the same schedule so you can see your whole day at a glance. This ensures that screens don't crowd out what matters most. For example, if you want to read before bed, block 9:30-10:00 PM as screen-free reading time, and schedule any evening screen use before that window. Each screen block should have a clear, observable end cue. This could be a timer, the end of a video episode, or finishing a specific task (like reading three articles or scrolling through your feed once). Avoid subjective cues like "when I feel done" - these make it easy to keep going. Timers or app locks can help enforce these limits automatically. Write the end cue next to each block on your schedule. Build five-minute buffer zones after each screen block. If your social media block ends at 12:20 PM, don't schedule a meeting at 12:25 PM. Use the buffer to close apps, put your device away, and mentally transition. During the buffer, do something physical: stand up, stretch, walk to another room, or write down one task for your next block. These actions help your brain switch gears and prevent spillover. Assign each screen activity to a specific physical location. For example, check social media only on the couch, email only at your desk, and stream video only in the living room. This creates friction if you try to use screens in the wrong place and helps your brain associate locations with specific activities, making your schedule easier to follow. Create separate schedules for weekdays and weekends. Your workday rhythm may require short, focused screen blocks, while weekends might allow for longer, more relaxed sessions. Write out both versions and switch according to the day. This flexibility helps you adapt to real-life changes without abandoning your plan. Communicate your schedule to those around you. Tell family, friends, and coworkers when you'll be unavailable and why. This sets expectations and reduces pressure to respond instantly. Most people will respect your boundaries if you make them clear. Use a simple script to explain your plan. Write down exception rules for situations like travel, illness, or emergencies. For example, "On travel days, I can shift blocks by up to two hours but must stay within my daily total," or "During illness, I can add one extra 30-minute block for distraction but must still observe screen-free bedtime." Having these rules in advance means you can adapt without feeling like you've failed or abandoning your schedule entirely. Review your schedule and screen time data every week - ideally on the same day and time. Compare your actual usage to your plan. If you repeatedly violate a block, adjust it to fit your real routine. Treat each week as an experiment: if you break a rule four times out of seven, that block needs to move or change. Use the data to refine your system, not to judge yourself. Test your schedule for a full week before making major changes. Patterns only emerge over several days, and one bad day doesn't mean the schedule is broken. Adjust only the blocks that consistently don't work. For example, if you scheduled social media for 7:00-7:20 AM but violated it five times, move it to a later time or consolidate it with another block. Use visual cues to reinforce your schedule. Place sticky notes, set lock screen reminders, or hang a printed schedule where you usually reach for your phone. These cues catch you in the moment between impulse and action, making it easier to stick to your plan. Batch similar activities into the same screen block. For example, check email, respond to messages, and update documents during a

single work block instead of spreading them out. This reduces context-switching and makes your blocks more productive. Notice your natural energy levels throughout the day and adjust your screen blocks accordingly. If you're most alert in the morning, schedule high-focus work then and save screen entertainment for lower-energy periods like late afternoon or evening. Matching your schedule to your energy prevents you from using screens as a crutch when you're exhausted. Recognize that your schedule will need to evolve. Review it monthly to adjust for life changes - new jobs, school schedules, or family needs. If you keep breaking the same block for weeks, change it. A flexible schedule survives; a rigid one breaks. When your circumstances shift, update your schedule within a day or two so you don't drift into unstructured screen use while you figure out what to do next. Go beyond simply writing your schedule - actively test and refine it. After your first week, reflect on which blocks were hardest to keep and write a short note about why. Use this insight to make targeted adjustments for the next week. Over time, your schedule will become a living document that adapts to your real habits and priorities. To deepen your implementation, consider adding a daily check-in. Each evening, ask yourself: "Did I keep to my screen blocks today?" Note any triggers that led to violations, and brainstorm one small tweak for tomorrow. If you find yourself repeatedly breaking a specific block, experiment with changing the activity, location, or end cue for that block the next day. Over several weeks, these micro-adjustments will help you shape a schedule that truly fits your life. Finally, use accountability to strengthen your commitment. Ask a friend or family member to check in with you weekly about your schedule. Share your biggest win and one challenge each week. This social reinforcement makes it more likely you'll stick with your plan, and gives you a sounding board for troubleshooting persistent obstacles. To further reinforce your new habits, consider posting your schedule in multiple locations - such as your fridge, desk, and bathroom mirror - so you encounter reminders throughout your day. If you work in different locations, keep a portable card or digital copy on your phone's lock screen. Routinely update your schedule as your commitments shift, and involve household members in reviewing shared screen-free times. If you share devices, set up separate user profiles or time limits for each person to avoid accidental violations. When you travel or your routine changes, proactively block time for adaptation, and communicate any temporary changes to those affected. Over time, these practices will make your screen time schedule an integral, flexible part of your daily life. To make your schedule even more actionable, use color-coding for different types of activities (work, social, entertainment, learning) in your calendar or on your printed schedule. This visual distinction helps you quickly see if your day is balanced or if one category is crowding out others. If you notice a category dominating, adjust block lengths or move less important activities to lower-priority times. Consider integrating alarms or recurring reminders for the start and end of each screen block. Set device alarms to vibrate or sound at the beginning and end of each scheduled period. This removes the need to watch the clock and provides a clear, external signal to switch activities. If you live with others, create a shared schedule for screen-free family times. Post this in a common area and discuss it at the start of each week. If your household includes children, involve them in

choosing which blocks are screen-free and which are shared screen activities. This increases buy-in and reduces conflict over device use. If you work remotely or have an irregular schedule, review your planned screen blocks each morning and adjust as needed for meetings, appointments, or deadlines. Write down any changes and communicate them to those affected, so your schedule remains realistic and respected. Keep a log of schedule adjustments and the reasons for each change. This running record helps you spot patterns - such as certain blocks always needing to move - and refine your system over time. At your monthly review, look for trends and consider more permanent changes for blocks that rarely work as planned. Finally, celebrate your progress. After each week of following your schedule, reward yourself with a non-screen treat - such as a favorite meal, extra reading time, or a walk outdoors. Recognizing your effort reinforces the habit and makes the process more enjoyable. To further deepen your mastery, review your schedule for balance between screen and non-screen activities. If you notice that screen blocks are creeping into previously screen-free times, revisit your priorities and adjust accordingly. Regularly ask yourself if your schedule still aligns with your goals and values, and don't hesitate to make small adjustments as your needs evolve.

What this module changes

The reader has created a screen time schedule that works for them, is visible, enforced, and regularly refined based on real usage and life changes. They actively review their adherence daily and weekly, make micro-adjustments as needed, and use accountability to stay on track.

Worked example

Emily. Emily tracked her screen time for seven days and found she was averaging a certain number of hours per day across her phone and tablet. Her highest-usage windows were 7:00-8:00 AM (scrolling news and social media in bed), 12:00-1:00 PM (watching videos during lunch), and 9:00-11:00 PM (streaming shows and scrolling before bed). She wanted to reduce her usage within two months. Emily checked her phone's screen time report and saw her seven-day average. She decided on a target that represented a reduction she could sustain. She planned to cut a specific amount per week to reach her goal gradually. Her first-week target was her baseline minus her chosen weekly reduction. Her three highest-usage windows totaled a significant portion of her daily usage, so she focused her schedule there. Emily created this schedule: 7:00-7:20 AM for news only (no social media), 12:00-12:30 PM for one video or social media during lunch, and 9:00-10:00 PM for streaming (phone off at 10:00 PM, no scrolling in bed). She paired each block with an end cue: "when the timer goes off" for the morning block, "when I finish one video or scroll through my feed once" for the lunch block, and "when the current episode ends" for the evening block. She added five-minute buffer zones after each block: 7:20-7:25 AM to put her phone in the kitchen and start breakfast, 12:30-12:35 PM to close apps and return to work,

and 10:00-10:05 PM to plug in her phone in the kitchen and get ready for bed. She enabled app limits on her phone: social media blocked except 12:00-12:30 PM and 7:00-7:20 AM, streaming apps blocked except 9:00-10:00 PM. She put her phone in the kitchen at 10:00 PM every night and bought an alarm clock so she wouldn't need her phone by the bed. She told her husband and her sister about her schedule so they'd know she wouldn't respond to texts after 10:00 PM. She linked each activity to a location: news reading in bed (7:00-7:20 AM only), lunch videos at the kitchen table, and streaming on the living room couch (never in bed). She put a sticky note on her nightstand that said "Phone stays in kitchen after 10 PM" to catch herself before reaching for it out of habit. After one week, Emily checked her screen time report and saw she'd reduced her usage. She violated her morning block twice by scrolling social media past her scheduled end time, so in week two she moved that block to 7:10-7:25 AM to give herself more morning time and changed the end cue to "when I've read three articles" instead of relying on the timer alone. By week six, she was meeting her target and had added a screen-free family dinner from 6:00-7:00 PM. She reported feeling more rested because she was reading instead of scrolling before bed, and her husband noticed she was more present during meals. She created a separate weekend schedule that allowed two longer blocks instead of three shorter blocks, which felt more natural on Saturdays and Sundays. In month three, when her work schedule changed and she started earlier, she reviewed her schedule monthly and shifted her morning block to 6:30-6:50 AM to match her new routine. This ongoing review kept her schedule realistic and effective. Emily also began a daily check-in each evening, noting if she stayed within her blocks and writing one tweak for the next day. She asked her sister to check in weekly, sharing her biggest win and one challenge, which helped her stay accountable and adjust her schedule as her life changed.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Track your screen time for seven consecutive days using your phone's built-in reports or a tracking app, recording total hours, top apps, and the times of day you use screens most. Include both weekdays and weekends for a complete picture.
- Review your data and highlight the three highest-usage windows in your day - these are the periods where you'll get the biggest reduction. Write down what you typically do during these windows.
- Assign specific time blocks to specific screen activities using exact clock times (e.g., social media 12:00-12:20 PM and 7:00-7:30 PM only), and write them on paper or in a calendar app. Avoid vague phrases and ensure each block has a clear start and end time.

- Enable app limits, Do Not Disturb modes, and browser blockers that automatically enforce your scheduled blocks so you don't rely on willpower alone. Set these up in advance for all your devices.
- Place your phone in a different room during meals, family time, or any activity you've designated as screen-free - physical separation prevents automatic reaching. Decide on a storage spot for each screen-free period.
- Schedule your highest-value non-screen activities first (exercise, reading, family time) by blocking specific times for them, then fit screen blocks around them so screens don't claim all available time. Write these activities on your schedule in a different color or highlight.
- Pair each scheduled screen block with a specific end cue (e.g., when the timer goes off, when you finish the current video, when you've scrolled through your feed once) so you don't drift into unplanned usage. Write the end cue next to each block.
- Build five-minute buffer zones after each screen block before your next scheduled activity to prevent spillover and give yourself time to transition. Plan a simple physical or mental reset for each buffer.
- Link each screen activity to a specific physical location (social media on the couch, email at your desk, streaming in the living room) to create automatic friction when you're outside your scheduled blocks. Make a note of the assigned location for each activity.
- Create separate schedules for weekdays and weekends that reflect the different rhythms of those days, and switch between them based on the day of the week. Adjust block lengths and times as needed.
- Communicate your schedule to family, friends, and coworkers by telling them when you're available and when you're not, so they stop expecting instant responses. Use a prepared script or message.
- Write down exception rules for travel, illness, or special events that let you adjust your blocks or suspend the schedule temporarily without abandoning the system entirely. Review these rules monthly.
- Review your screen time data every Sunday at the same time, compare it to the previous week, and adjust your schedule based on which blocks you kept and which you violated. Treat this as a routine experiment.
- Test your schedule for one full week before making major changes, treating violations as data rather than failures, and only adjusting blocks you violate four or more times in seven days.
- Set up visual cues (sticky notes, lock screen reminders, printed schedules) in the places where you most often reach for your phone out of habit. Refresh these cues weekly so they remain noticeable.

- Batch similar screen activities (email, messages, document updates) into the same block to reduce context-switching and make each block feel more productive. List all activities included in each block.
- Review your energy levels throughout the day and adjust your screen blocks so that high-focus work happens when you're most alert, and screen entertainment is scheduled for lower-energy periods.
- During each five-minute buffer zone, do something physical (stand up, stretch, walk to another room, write down one task) to help your brain transition to the next activity. Rotate buffer activities to keep them effective.
- Post your written or printed schedule in a visible location (such as your fridge, desk, or nightstand) so you are reminded of your plan throughout the day. Replace or update the schedule as your routine changes.
- After your first week, reflect on which blocks were hardest to keep and write a short note about why - use this to decide what to adjust for week two. Keep these notes for future reference.
- Schedule a monthly review to check if your life circumstances have changed (like new work hours or family routines) and update your screen time schedule within two days if needed. Set a recurring reminder.
- Each evening, do a quick check-in: Did you stay within your scheduled screen blocks today? If not, note what triggered the violation and brainstorm one tweak for tomorrow.
- Ask a friend or family member to check in with you weekly about your schedule. Share your biggest win and one challenge each week to build accountability.
- Color-code your schedule by activity type (work, social, entertainment, learning) to quickly see if your day is balanced. Adjust if you see one category dominating.
- Set alarms or reminders for the start and end of each screen block to provide a clear external signal and reduce the need to watch the clock.
- If you share your household, create and post a shared schedule for screen-free family times. Discuss it each week and involve others in choosing shared and individual screen blocks.
- If your daily routine changes frequently, review your planned screen blocks each morning and adjust for that day. Communicate any changes to those affected.
- Keep a log of any schedule adjustments you make and the reasons for each change. Review this log monthly to spot patterns and refine your system.
- Reward yourself with a non-screen treat each week you follow your schedule, reinforcing your commitment and making the process enjoyable.

Common mistakes at this step

- Setting a schedule that cuts your current screen time too aggressively in the first week, which triggers rebellion and leads to abandoning the system within days. Fix: Check your tracking data to find your current average, then reduce it by a percentage you can sustain - test different reduction rates weekly to find what works for you.
- Creating a schedule with no flexibility for exceptions, so the first disruption (travel, illness, family emergency) breaks the system permanently. Fix: Write down exception rules in advance that let you adjust blocks without abandoning daily limits.
- Scheduling screen blocks but not enforcing them with app limits or physical separation, relying entirely on willpower. Fix: Enable automatic blockers and move devices out of reach during screen-free periods.
- Tracking screen time for only two or three days, which misses weekend patterns or weekly cycles and gives you incomplete data. Fix: Track for a full seven days including both weekdays and weekend days.

Before you move on

✓ You have tracked your screen time for seven consecutive days and recorded the data, including both weekdays and weekends.

✓ You have identified the three highest-usage windows in your day from your tracking data and written down what you typically do during those times.

✓ You have written down specific time blocks with exact clock times for each screen activity you engage in regularly, avoiding vague phrases.

✓ You have set app limits or blockers on all your devices that automatically enforce your scheduled blocks.

✓ You have designated at least one daily period as completely screen-free and removed devices from that space, with a chosen storage spot.

✓ You have scheduled your highest-value non-screen activities before assigning any screen time blocks, and highlighted them on your schedule.

✓ You have paired each screen block with a specific, observable end cue that tells you when to stop, and written it next to each block.

✓ You have built five-minute buffer zones after each screen block and planned a simple transition activity for each buffer.

✓ You have linked at least two screen activities to specific physical locations to create automatic friction, and noted these locations.

- ✓ You have created separate schedules for weekdays and weekends that reflect the different rhythms of those days.
- ✓ You have told at least two people (family, friends, or coworkers) about your screen time schedule and when you'll be unavailable, using a clear script or message.
- ✓ You have written down exception rules that let you adjust your schedule for travel, illness, or special events without abandoning it, and reviewed them this month.
- ✓ You have reviewed your screen time data at least once in the past week and made at least one adjustment to your schedule based on what actually happened.
- ✓ You have tested your schedule for at least seven full days before judging whether it works, treating violations as data.
- ✓ You have placed at least one visual cue (sticky note, lock screen reminder, or printed schedule) where you often reach for your phone out of habit, and refreshed it recently.
- ✓ You have batched at least two similar screen activities into the same block to minimize context-switching, and listed them together.
- ✓ You have adjusted your screen blocks to match your natural energy levels throughout the day.
- ✓ You have posted your written or printed schedule in a visible location and updated it as your routine changed.
- ✓ After your first week, you reflected on which blocks were hardest to keep, wrote a note about why, and kept these notes for future adjustments.
- ✓ You have scheduled a monthly review and updated your schedule within two days if your routine changed, using a recurring reminder.
- ✓ You have done a daily check-in each evening for the past week, noting any triggers for violations and planning a tweak for the next day.
- ✓ You have an accountability partner who checks in with you weekly, and you share your wins and challenges with them.
- ✓ You have color-coded your schedule by activity type and adjusted if one category was dominating your day.
- ✓ You have set alarms or reminders for the start and end of each screen block.
- ✓ If you share your household, you have created and posted a shared screen-free schedule and discussed it with others.
- ✓ You have kept a log of schedule adjustments and reviewed it for patterns during your monthly review.

✓ You have rewarded yourself with a non-screen treat after a week of following your schedule.

Module 5. Tracking Progress and Adjusting Habits

Screen time tracking gives you real, actionable data about your habits - not just guesses or hopes. Most people underestimate their usage by hours, so measuring is the only way to know what's actually happening. Without concrete numbers and context, you risk making adjustments that don't address your real triggers or problem periods. Begin by selecting a single tracking method you'll use every day for at least two weeks. You can use your phone's built-in tools (like iOS Screen Time or Android Digital Wellbeing), a habit tracker app, or a spreadsheet you design yourself. The specific tool is less important than your consistency. Set a daily reminder - ideally at the same time each night, such as before bed - so tracking becomes a routine, not a chore. Track two kinds of information: the numbers and the context. Record your total screen time for the day, but also jot down what you were doing just before you picked up your device, what time it was, and how you felt. For example: "2h 15m total. Grabbed phone at 8 PM after work call. Felt stressed. Scrolled Instagram for 45 minutes." This context helps you spot emotional or situational triggers that drive your habits. Each week, set aside a specific 15-minute window to review your data. Block this time in your calendar - Sunday evening or Friday afternoon work well for many people. During your review, calculate your daily average, note your highest and lowest days, and look for patterns. Don't just skim - write down what you notice. Patterns like "I always spike on Tuesdays" or "My screen time doubles when I skip exercise" only emerge over time and with intentional review. When you adjust, change only one variable at a time. If your data shows that evenings (7-9 PM) are your danger zone, try moving your phone charger out of the bedroom during those hours, or set a 30-minute timer for screen use. If social media is the main drain, reduce your app's daily limit by 10 minutes. Avoid making multiple changes at once; otherwise, you won't know which adjustment made the difference. Expect your progress to be uneven. Some weeks you'll hit your target most days; other weeks, you'll miss it entirely. The key is to treat high-usage days as diagnostic data, not as evidence of failure. When you have a spike, ask yourself what happened that day and what you might adjust next. This mindset keeps you learning and improving, even when the numbers aren't perfect. Set progressive, not fixed, targets. If your baseline is 4 hours, aim for 3 hours 40 minutes the first week. Once you hit that consistently, drop to 3 hours 20 minutes. Small, steady reductions are more sustainable and less discouraging than trying to cut your time in half overnight. Track your wins and your replacement behaviors, not just your screen use. When you choose a walk over scrolling, or read for 20 minutes instead of watching videos, write it down. Each time you resist a craving or have a full conversation without checking your phone, mark it. These positive actions are the foundation of your new habits. Your data should answer three questions every week: What's my average? What pattern did I notice? What will I adjust? If you can't answer all three, you're collecting data but not using it. The goal isn't perfect records - it's to generate insight that leads to a specific, practical change. If you miss a day, estimate what you remember and keep going. Don't let a gap break your streak. Imperfect data over a month is far more useful than perfect data for just a few

days. Consistency over time is what reveals true patterns. Keep your tracking neutral and practical. High screen time isn't a moral failing - it's just information. The moment you start judging yourself harshly, you risk quitting tracking altogether. Approach your data as a detective, not a critic. As your data grows, you'll notice subtle shifts: your danger zones may move, your triggers may change, or your replacement activities may start to stick. Use your review sessions to update your approach and celebrate small improvements. Over time, your tracking log becomes a record of your progress and a tool for ongoing self-awareness.

What this module changes

you have a clear understanding of how to track your progress and make adjustments to your habits.

Worked example

Emily has been trying to cut back on screen time but feels stuck. She checks her phone's screen time feature and sees she averaged 4 hours 10 minutes daily over the past week. She wants to get down to 2 hours eventually, but decides to start with a realistic first target. Emily sets up a simple spreadsheet with columns for date, total screen time, context, and feelings. She sets her week-one target at 3 hours 40 minutes - about 30 minutes less than her baseline. She sets a 9:30 PM alarm to remind her to log her data each night. After one week, Emily's daily screen time looks like this: Monday 3h 50m, Tuesday 4h 10m, Wednesday 3h 20m, Thursday 4h 45m, Friday 3h 35m, Saturday 4h 30m, Sunday 3h 55m. She calculates her average: (230 + 250 + 200 + 285 + 215 + 270 + 235) ÷ 7 = 240.7 minutes, or 4 hours 1 minute. That's only 9 minutes less than her baseline. During her Sunday evening review, Emily sees she met her 3h 40m target only twice (Wednesday and Friday). But instead of feeling discouraged, she reads her context notes. Thursday (4h 45m) came after a stressful work presentation. Saturday (4h 30m) followed an argument with her sister. Both high-screen-time days happened after stressful events. She also notices that Wednesday - her best day at 3h 20m - was when she went to a yoga class right after work. Emily identifies her pattern: stress triggers phone use. For week two, she makes one specific adjustment: she schedules three evening activities (yoga Monday, a walk with a friend Wednesday, and a cooking session Friday) to give herself an alternative to post-stress scrolling. She keeps her target at 3 hours 40 minutes. By the end of week two, Emily's average drops to 3 hours 28 minutes. She met her target five out of seven days. More importantly, she now knows her trigger (stress) and has started building alternative responses. On her bad days, she doesn't quit - she writes down what happened and uses it to plan her next adjustment. For week three, Emily adjusts her target to 3 hours 15 minutes and adds one more change: she moves her phone charger to the kitchen after 8 PM so she can't scroll in bed. She continues tracking daily and reviewing weekly, making one small

adjustment each time based on what her data shows.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Select one tracking method today - use your phone's built-in screen time feature, a habit tracker app, or a spreadsheet with columns for date, total screen time, context notes, and feelings. Set it up now, enable tracking in your device settings if needed, and log your baseline number before bed.
- Break your overall screen time goal into a specific, measurable target for this week. For example, if your baseline is 4 hours daily, set your target at 3 hours 40 minutes. Write this target somewhere visible, such as on a sticky note or at the top of your tracking sheet.
- Set a daily alarm - such as 9:30 PM or another consistent time - to remind you to log your data. Each night, record your total minutes, a brief note about your highest-use period, and one thing you did instead of using a screen.
- Track both your screen time and your context: note what you were doing before picking up your device, what time it was, and how you felt. This adds depth to your data and helps you spot emotional or situational triggers.
- Schedule a recurring 15-minute weekly review session in your calendar. During this session, calculate your average daily screen time, identify your best and worst days, and write down at least one pattern you notice in a dedicated review document or journal.
- Based on your review, adjust one specific variable for the coming week. For example, if evenings are your danger zone, move your phone charger to another room after 8 PM; if social media is the main drain, reduce the app limit by 10 minutes. Change only one thing at a time.
- Track your replacement behaviors alongside screen time. Each time you choose a walk, a book, or a conversation over scrolling, mark it in your tracker. Use a symbol or note to make these wins visible.
- After each high-screen-time day, write down what happened before you reached for your phone - were you stressed, bored, or triggered by something specific? Label this as 'diagnostic data' for your next review.
- Calculate your weekly success rate: how many days did you meet your target? Write down your percentage and note what you did right on successful days.
- Update your target progressively. If you hit your goal most days, reduce your daily limit by another 10-15% for the next week. If not, keep your target steady and focus on adjusting your strategy.

- If you miss a day of tracking, estimate your usage for that day, clearly label it as an estimate, and continue as usual. One missed entry is not a reason to abandon your progress.
- At the end of 30 days, review your full month of data: look for long-term patterns, celebrate your wins, and decide on your next adjustment. Use your log as a record of progress and a tool for future planning.

Common mistakes at this step

- Setting an unrealistic target, such as cutting your screen time in half immediately, and feeling discouraged when you can't reach it. Fix: Start with a target that's 10-15% below your baseline and only reduce further after consistent success.
- Only tracking on 'good' days, which hides your real patterns and prevents you from identifying your true triggers. Fix: Track every day, especially on high-usage days, as these provide the most valuable insights.
- Recording only the total screen time without any context, making it impossible to see what drives your usage. Fix: Add a brief note each day about what you were doing and feeling before picking up your device.
- Making several changes at once after a review - adjusting app limits, moving your phone, and adding new activities - so you can't tell which change made a difference. Fix: Change only one variable per week and observe the result.

Before you move on

✓ You have chosen a specific tracking method and logged at least three consecutive days of screen time data, including both numbers and context notes.

✓ Your weekly target is written down and is 10-20% less than your baseline, not an extreme reduction.

✓ You are logging your screen time at the same time each day, including notes about triggers, activities, and feelings.

✓ You have a recurring weekly review session scheduled and have completed at least one review, calculating your average, best and worst days, and noting a pattern.

✓ You have made one specific, measurable adjustment to your habits based on your tracking data, rather than changing multiple things at once.

✓ You are marking your wins - such as days you met your target or chose a replacement activity - in your tracker with a symbol, highlight, or note.

✓ After a high-usage day, you record what triggered it within 24 hours and use it as diagnostic information, not as evidence of failure.

- ✓ You have tracked your data for at least one full week without quitting, even if you missed a day or didn't meet your target every day.
- ✓ You can clearly identify at least one pattern in your data (e.g., time of day, emotional state, or specific situation that increases your usage).
- ✓ You are focusing on measurable progress - such as reduced average screen time or increased replacement behaviors - rather than expecting perfection.

Module 6. Avoiding Common Screen Time Traps

Social media feeds, endless news updates, and constant notifications can easily lure you into unplanned, unproductive screen time. These screen time traps often leave you feeling frustrated, behind on your goals, and less connected to your real priorities. The 'scrolling loop' is a frequent pitfall: you open an app for a quick update, but end up losing track of time as you scroll through endless content. This often leads to regret, guilt, and a sense that your time was wasted. To avoid this, pay close attention to what draws you in and set up clear, practical boundaries - such as app timers or device-free zones. Notice which apps or websites are hardest to leave and consider uninstalling or moving them off your home screen for added friction. Another trap is the 'comparison trap.' When you compare your daily life to the curated highlights of others online, you may feel inadequate or envious. This can sap your motivation and make your own achievements feel small. Combat this by consciously focusing on your own progress and setting personal, meaningful goals. Regularly remind yourself that social media rarely shows the full picture. Consider unfollowing or muting accounts that trigger negative self-comparisons, and intentionally seek out content that inspires or uplifts you. The 'distraction trap' occurs when you use screens to avoid uncomfortable feelings or tasks. This avoidance can quickly become a habit, leading to procrastination and unfinished responsibilities. To break this pattern, notice what emotions or tasks you're dodging, and experiment with healthier coping strategies, such as taking a walk, journaling your thoughts, or using a short breathing exercise. Set up reminders to check in with yourself before you reach for your device in these moments. The 'boredom trap' is another common issue: you reach for your phone or tablet simply because you're bored, not because you have a purpose. This can erode your motivation and sense of purpose over time. Prepare a list of enjoyable, screen-free activities to turn to when boredom strikes - like reading, exercising, cooking, or connecting with a friend. Keep this list visible and add new options regularly to keep it fresh and appealing. Other less obvious traps include the 'notification trap,' where frequent alerts interrupt your focus and pull you into apps you didn't intend to use. To avoid this, audit your notification settings and disable non-essential alerts. The 'auto-play trap' - where videos or stories automatically continue - can also extend your screen time far beyond what you planned. Turn off auto-play features where possible and set a visible timer before you start watching. To avoid these traps, you need a combination of self-awareness, practical boundaries, alternative activities, and ongoing reflection. By taking small, concrete steps, you can regain control over your screen time and direct your attention toward what truly matters to you. Consistently applying these strategies will help you build new habits and reduce the pull of digital distractions.

What this module changes

You will have identified your screen time triggers, recognized common traps, and developed a concrete, actionable plan to avoid them. You will know how to set up boundaries, prepare alternative activities, and reflect on your progress to make ongoing improvements.

Worked example

Emily had been feeling overwhelmed and stressed out lately, especially after work. She noticed that every time she felt anxious or bored, she would reach for her phone and start scrolling through social media. One evening, she intended to check her notifications for five minutes, but ended up spending 90 minutes scrolling, missing her planned workout and feeling guilty afterward. Emily decided to track her screen time for three days and realized she was falling into the 'scrolling loop' and 'distraction trap' after work. She wrote down her main triggers: stress, boredom, and habit. To address this, Emily set a boundary: no social media after 7pm, and she used her phone's built-in timer to enforce this. She also made a list of alternative activities, such as taking a walk, calling a friend, or reading. The next time she felt the urge to scroll, Emily checked her list and chose to read a chapter of a novel instead. She still slipped up occasionally, but by reviewing her progress weekly and adjusting her plan, she gradually reduced her evening screen time from 90 minutes to 30 minutes. For example, if her phone timer showed 90 minutes of social media use on Monday, she aimed for 60 minutes on Wednesday and 30 minutes by the end of the week. She felt more in control, less guilty, and more connected to her real-life goals.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Observe your daily screen time patterns for three days, noting when, where, and why you reach for your device. Record both the time and your mood or situation.
- List your most frequent screen time triggers (e.g., boredom, stress, habit, notifications, procrastination). Be specific about what precedes your device use.
- Identify which traps (scrolling loop, comparison, distraction, boredom, notification, auto-play) you fall into most often and in what situations. Write down concrete examples.
- Set clear boundaries for device use, such as specific hours for checking social media or email, device-free zones (e.g., bedroom, dinner table), and communicate these boundaries to people who may expect immediate responses.
- Use built-in device features or third-party apps to set daily limits for specific apps or websites. Review your usage at the end of each day and adjust limits as needed.
- Audit your notification settings and turn off non-essential alerts to reduce interruptions. Move distracting apps off your home screen or uninstall them if possible.
- Create a menu of at least five alternative, screen-free activities you genuinely enjoy and can access easily when tempted to use your device. Keep this list visible and add new ideas regularly.

- Notice and write down any negative thoughts or emotions that arise before or during screen use (e.g., 'I'm missing out,' 'I'm too stressed to focus'). Challenge these thoughts by asking if they are true or helpful, and reframe them if possible.
- Schedule regular, intentional screen-free breaks throughout your day, even if only for 10-15 minutes at a time. Use alarms or calendar reminders to prompt these breaks.
- Ask a friend or family member to support your screen time boundaries or join you in a screen-free activity. Share your goals and check in with them regularly.
- Reflect weekly on your progress, noting what works, what doesn't, and adjusting your plan as needed. Celebrate small wins and identify one area to improve each week.
- Practice self-compassion if you slip up, and use setbacks as learning opportunities rather than reasons to give up. Write down what triggered the slip and how you might respond differently next time.

Common mistakes at this step

- Assuming that you can't stop scrolling because you're 'addicted' - instead, recognize that small changes and boundaries can make a big difference. Start with one manageable adjustment.
- Thinking you can multitask effectively while checking social media or emails - focus on one task at a time to improve productivity and reduce mindless use. Turn off notifications during focused work.
- Believing you need to be constantly connected to stay productive - set intentional check-in times and communicate these to others. Use out-of-office or status messages if needed.
- Ignoring your emotional triggers for screen use - take time to notice what you're feeling before you reach for your device. Keep a feelings journal for a week.

Before you move on

✓ Have you tracked your screen time and identified your main triggers for overuse?

✓ Can you name at least two specific traps you fall into and describe the situations where they happen?

✓ Did you set specific, written boundaries for your device use, and are you following them most days?

✓ Are you using a tool or app to monitor your screen time, and do you review the data regularly?

✓ Have you audited your notification settings and reduced unnecessary alerts?

- ✓ Do you have a list of alternative activities ready and accessible for moments of boredom or stress?
- ✓ Have you noticed and challenged negative thoughts or emotions that drive your screen use?
- ✓ Are you scheduling and taking regular screen-free breaks?
- ✓ Have you asked someone to support your boundaries or join you in screen-free activities?
- ✓ Do you review your plan weekly and make adjustments based on what you learn?

Module 7. Building a Support Network

Support for your screen time rules works best when it is practical, specific, and easy for others to give. You need at least one person who will physically move your device if it turns up in the wrong place - without commentary, lectures, or conversations about your willpower. This is structural support: it is about actions, not opinions. Most people approach support by asking for accountability or advice, but this backfires. Requests like "Can you help me with my screen time?" or "Will you hold me accountable?" invite debate, resentment, or emotional labor. Instead, you give a simple, physical instruction: "If you see my phone in the bedroom after 8 PM, just put it back on the kitchen counter." This removes judgment and keeps the conversation neutral. Keep your ask short and clear: one sentence, one device, one location. Avoid vague requests or explanations. The person you ask does not need to understand your motivations, triggers, or long-term goals. They only need to know what to do if they see your device in the wrong place. This clarity makes it easy for them to help without feeling responsible for your choices. Use a written rule as your reminder. Write your rule on an index card and tape it to a visible spot, like the fridge. When you ask someone for support, point to the card. This shifts the authority from you to the rule itself, reducing the chance of nagging or personal tension. If your device ends up in the wrong spot, your support person is simply following the card - not policing your behavior. You are not building an accountability group. You are enlisting two or three people for small, specific roles. One moves the device if needed; one runs a parallel rule and checks in briefly; one benefits from your rule without enforcing it. This is much easier to sustain than a group that requires emotional check-ins or shared goal-setting. Expect that not everyone will want to participate, and that's fine. If someone declines, thank them and move on. The rule still works even if you are the only one following it in a shared space. The environment - like a screen-free living room - can support your habit even if others do not join in. Do not turn to large online groups for this kind of support. A big audience shifts your focus to reporting and explaining, rather than following your rule. Local, physical support is more effective: people who see your device in real time can act immediately, without extra effort. The second kind of support is a parallel-rule partner: someone who is also experimenting with a device boundary, even if their rule is different. This person is for quick, scheduled check-ins - no more than five minutes, twice in two weeks. The conversation is about the experiment, not about your history or feelings. Find a parallel-rule partner by stating your current rule. This will attract people who have tried similar experiments, not just those who want to talk about digital wellness in general. You want someone who has acted, not just someone who is interested in the topic. The third support is someone who benefits from your rule - such as a partner who gets more of your attention when your device is out of sight. You do not need to ask them for help. Their enjoyment of the side effect will naturally reinforce your habit. If anyone asks for your reasons, keep your answer short: "I am trying this for two weeks." Avoid explaining your triggers or past attempts. Long explanations make the rule seem fragile and invite debate. Limit your network to three people at most: one who moves the

device, one parallel-rule partner, and one who benefits. If you have fewer, that is fine. If you have none, the written rule still works - you enforce it yourself. The goal is to make support easy to give and easy to receive.

What this module changes

You have identified and connected with at least two individuals who support your screen time rule: one who can help with a specific action, and one who is running a parallel experiment. You have set up brief, scheduled check-ins, and you have a clear written rule visible in your shared space. You understand how to use these supports without turning them into debates or emotional burdens.

Worked example

Mara lives with her partner and her teenage son. She decides to run this rule: "Laptop stays in the hall closet from 7 PM to 9 PM." She writes it on an index card and tapes it to the fridge. She asks her partner: "I am keeping my laptop in the hall closet from seven to nine for two weeks. If you see it in the living room during that time, say nothing - just put it back in the closet." Her partner says, "Sure, I can do that." Mara thanks her and stops talking. She does not explain why she chose those hours or what she plans to do instead. Her son asks, "Why are you doing this?" Mara says, "I am trying this for two weeks," and changes the subject. He does not ask again. Mara texts her friend Joel, who mentioned last month that he was trying to stop checking email after dinner. She writes: "I am keeping my laptop in the closet from seven to nine for two weeks. Are you trying anything similar right now?" Joel replies: "Yeah, I am leaving my phone in the car when I get home. Let's check in." They schedule two five-minute calls: one on day four, one on day eleven. On day four, Mara calls Joel. She asks: "Still running it?" He says, "Yes, but I brought the phone inside twice when I was expecting a call." She asks, "Any adjustments?" He says, "I am going to tell people to call the landline if it is urgent." She asks, "Anything surprising?" He says, "I read a book." The call lasts four minutes. On day six, Mara leaves her laptop on the couch at 7:15 PM. Her partner sees it, picks it up, and puts it in the closet without saying anything. Mara notices it is gone at 7:30 PM and remembers the rule. She does not retrieve it. On day eleven, Mara calls Joel again. He has stopped leaving his phone in the car because his wife objected, but he is now putting it in a drawer in the bedroom. Mara does not quit her rule. She thanks him for the check-in and continues her experiment. Mara's partner benefits from the rule without enforcing it. Between seven and nine, Mara is more present during dinner and the evening routine. Her partner does not mention this, but on day ten she suggests they watch a show together at 7:30 PM, which is a time Mara used to spend on her laptop. Mara agrees. The rule has created a side effect that her partner is now protecting. At the end of two weeks, Mara thanks her partner: "Thanks for moving the laptop when you saw it. That helped." Her

partner says, "No problem." Mara does not ask her to do it again unless her next rule involves the same device and the same location.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Write your two-week screen time rule in one clear sentence on an index card (e.g., "Phone stays on kitchen counter from 8 PM to 7 AM"). Place the card in a visible shared location, such as the fridge or an entryway table.
- Identify one person who shares your living or working space and is likely to notice your device in the wrong place. This should be someone physically present where the rule applies, not someone you need to text or call.
- Approach this person and use the exact script: "I am [rule] for two weeks. If you see [device] in [wrong place], say nothing - just put it back in [right place]." Avoid adding explanations or asking for their opinion.
- Wait for their response. If they agree, thank them and end the conversation. If they decline or hesitate, say "No problem" and move on. Do not try to persuade or explain further.
- If the first person declines, identify another candidate in your immediate environment and repeat the process. Continue until you have at least one person willing to help, or until you have asked all reasonable candidates.
- Identify a second person who may be running a similar experiment or has expressed interest in changing their device habits. This could be a friend, coworker, or family member who has mentioned a boundary or challenge with screen time.
- Contact this person with the message: "I am running [your specific rule] for two weeks. Are you trying anything similar right now?" If they are, suggest two five-minute check-ins: one on day four and one on day eleven.
- Schedule the check-ins in your calendar, setting reminders. Prepare to ask only three questions during each check-in: "Still running it?" "Any adjustments?" "Anything surprising?" Keep the check-in brief and focused.
- Identify someone who benefits from your rule without enforcing it - such as a partner, roommate, or child who enjoys more of your attention or presence. Note how they benefit, even if you do not formally involve them.
- If anyone asks for your reasons or challenges your rule, respond only with "I am trying this for two weeks." Avoid discussing your motivations, triggers, or previous attempts.
- On day four and day eleven, complete your check-ins with your parallel-rule partner. If they have stopped their experiment, continue yours without comment or judgment.

- At the end of two weeks, thank the person who moved your device (if applicable), and acknowledge any positive changes noticed by those who benefited. Decide if you want to continue, adjust, or change your rule for the next round.

Common mistakes at this step

- Requesting accountability or advice instead of a specific physical action; fix: use the provided script and only ask for the device to be moved.
- Explaining your motivations or history when making the ask; fix: state the rule and stop talking after the script.
- Turning to large online groups for support or updates; fix: keep your network small and local for practical, automatic help.
- Asking the same person to help with every rule or experiment; fix: rotate support people or run some rules solo.

Before you move on

✓ Did you write your rule in one sentence and place it in a visible shared location?

✓ Did you approach at least one person in your immediate environment and use the provided script, without adding explanations?

✓ If your first choice declined, did you move on without negotiation or defensiveness?

✓ Have you found a parallel-rule partner who is also running a device experiment, and scheduled two specific check-ins?

✓ Are your check-ins scheduled for day four and day eleven, with reminders set?

✓ Have you identified someone who benefits from your rule, even if they are not enforcing it?

✓ Did you avoid joining or relying on large online groups or forums for this experiment?

✓ Have you kept your support network to three people or fewer, avoiding group management?

✓ When asked for your reasons, did you stick to "I am trying this for two weeks"?

✓ If your parallel-rule partner quit, did you continue your rule as planned?

Module 8. Overcoming Screen Time Cravings

Screen time cravings appear as powerful, nearly reflexive urges: you might find yourself unlocking your phone while waiting in a doctor's office, opening a social media app while lying in bed, or checking notifications the moment you finish a task at work. These cravings often occur in specific venues - your couch after dinner, your bed before sleep, or even in public spaces like a bus stop or supermarket line. The urge can feel so automatic that you may not realize you've picked up your device until you're already scrolling. Cravings are shaped by your brain's reward system. When you feel discomfort - boredom, stress, loneliness, or restlessness - your brain remembers that screens have provided quick relief in the past. This forms a habit loop: a cue (the feeling or situation), a routine (using your device), and a reward (temporary comfort or distraction). The craving is not a sign of weakness or lack of willpower; it is a learned response to emotional or situational cues. Recognizing this loop allows you to approach cravings with curiosity rather than shame. Cravings are transient. Research shows that most urges peak for about 10-15 minutes and then fade, regardless of whether you give in. Imagine them as waves: they rise, crest, and fall. Your task is to notice the wave, name it, and ride it out without acting automatically. This practice, called urge surfing, helps you separate the feeling from the action. You do not need to eliminate cravings - your goal is to experience them without letting them dictate your behavior. To do this, you must insert a pause between the cue and your usual routine. When you notice a craving, mentally label it ("This is a craving") and identify the emotion beneath it. Are you bored, stressed, lonely, or just seeking a break? Naming the emotion reduces its grip and gives you the space to choose a more helpful response. For example, if you're lonely, texting a friend to make plans or stepping outside for a walk may address your real need better than scrolling through photos. Different types of cravings benefit from different strategies. If boredom is your main trigger, hands-on or creative alternatives - like doodling, organizing a drawer, or working on a puzzle - can help. If you're stressed, calming techniques such as deep breathing, stretching, or splashing cold water on your face can reduce the urge. If you're feeling lonely, seek real connection: call someone or make plans to meet. Habit cravings, such as checking your phone at stoplights or during commercials, often require changing your environment or creating new routines that make the old behavior less convenient. (For more on identifying triggers, see module 2.) It's crucial to distinguish cravings from genuine needs. Cravings feel vague, urgent, and emotionally charged ("I just need to check something"), while real needs are specific and purposeful ("I need to email my boss the report by 3pm"). Practice pausing to ask yourself what you're hoping to get from your device. If you can't answer in one sentence, it's probably a craving. This self-check helps you redirect your actions more effectively. Physical factors can intensify cravings. Being tired, hungry, or dehydrated makes your brain more likely to seek easy comfort. Before reaching for your device, check if you need water, a snack, or a short rest. Addressing these basic needs first can significantly reduce the intensity and frequency of cravings. Social factors play a role, too. You might reach for your phone when you

feel left out, awkward, or when others are using theirs. Anticipate these situations and plan alternative responses. For example, if you're at a gathering and feel uncomfortable, step outside for fresh air instead of turning to your phone. If you're waiting for an appointment, bring a book or simply observe your surroundings. Changing your default response can disrupt the habit loop and build new, healthier patterns. Transitions - such as waking up, finishing work, or getting into bed - are common times for cravings to spike. These are moments when your brain seeks direction, and screens have become the default. You can interrupt this pattern by establishing new transition rituals: stretch for two minutes after waking, take three deep breaths when closing your laptop, or write down three things you're grateful for before bed. These rituals provide structure and reduce the pull of cravings. Progress is not linear. Overcoming cravings is about building awareness, practicing self-compassion, and making small, consistent changes. Some days will be easier than others, and setbacks are normal. Each time you pause and choose a different response, you strengthen new neural pathways. Over time, cravings become less frequent and less intense. Remember, the goal is progress, not perfection. Tracking your cravings is essential. Keep a simple log of when and where cravings hit, the emotion you noticed, and how you responded. This record will help you spot patterns and refine your strategies. For example, you might notice that cravings spike at 3pm when your energy dips, or that Sunday evenings are particularly challenging. Once you recognize these patterns, you can plan ahead and prepare alternative responses for high-risk situations. By completing this module, you'll be able to recognize cravings as normal emotional responses, distinguish them from real needs, and use practical tools to ride them out. You'll analyze your own patterns and prepare for situations where cravings are strongest, giving yourself the best chance to choose healthier alternatives.

What this module changes

you have a better understanding of how your emotional attachment to screens is driving your screen time cravings, and have begun to develop strategies for managing them.

Worked example

Sarah's Story. Sarah is a 30-year-old marketing specialist who finds herself reaching for her phone every hour on the hour. She's always on her phone, even during meals, and often checks work emails on weekends. She's feeling overwhelmed and anxious, and is struggling to disconnect from her screens. Sarah started by tracking her cravings for one week. She discovered that her strongest cravings hit at three specific times: 10am (mid-morning energy dip), 3pm (afternoon slump), and 9pm (winding down for bed). She also noticed that stress and loneliness were her primary emotional triggers. She created a craving response card with three alternatives: a 5-minute walk around her office building for stress cravings, calling her sister to make weekend plans for loneliness cravings, and listening to audiobooks during her commute for boredom cravings. She kept this card as her phone's lock screen so she'd

see it every time she reached for her device. Sarah established clear boundaries: no screens during meals, no work emails after 7pm on weekdays, and no phone in the bedroom. She shared these boundaries with her partner and her boss, saying "I'm working on managing my screen time to reduce stress. I won't be checking emails after 7pm, but if something urgent comes up, please call me." She practiced the 10-minute rule consistently. The first time she tried it, her craving intensity was 8/10 when it hit at 3pm. She set a timer, walked around the block, and rated her craving again: 4/10. She decided she didn't actually need to check her phone. Over three weeks, she discovered that 70% of her cravings passed without action if she waited them out. Sarah also started practicing self-compassion when she reached for her phone out of habit, saying "I'm feeling stressed right now, and that's okay" instead of criticizing herself with thoughts like "I'm so weak" or "I'll never change." This shift in self-talk made a noticeable difference in how quickly she could move past the craving. She scheduled screen-free activities: Saturday morning hikes and Wednesday evening reading time. She put these in her calendar with reminders and treated them as non-negotiable appointments. She placed a book on her nightstand and a puzzle on her coffee table so alternatives were always within reach. After three weeks, Sarah's email checking dropped from approximately 60 times per day to 15-20 times per day. She successfully maintained screen-free evenings four nights per week. Her stress and anxiety levels decreased noticeably, and she reported feeling more focused and productive during work hours. She celebrated these wins by sharing her progress with her sister and marking successful days on her calendar with gold stars.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Notice the craving as it arises. Pause immediately and mentally label the experience: "This is a craving." Avoid judging or suppressing it - your goal is to observe, not react. This moment of awareness interrupts the automatic habit loop.
- Identify and name the emotion present just before the urge. Ask yourself: Am I bored, anxious, stressed, lonely, or uncomfortable? Say the emotion out loud or write it down. Naming the emotion helps you address the real need behind the craving.
- Practice self-compassion in the moment. Remind yourself: "I'm feeling [emotion] right now, and that's normal. This craving will pass. I don't have to act on every urge." Take three slow, deep breaths, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth to ground yourself.
- Create a craving response card. On an index card or digital note, list one physical activity (like stretching, walking, or jumping jacks), one calming technique (like deep breathing or splashing cold water on your face), and one alternative engagement (like calling a friend to make plans or working on a hobby for 15 minutes). Keep this card visible - on your desk, nightstand, or as

your phone's lock screen.

- When a craving hits, use the 10-minute rule: set a timer for 10 minutes before acting on the urge. During this time, do one item from your craving response card. This waiting period allows the craving to peak and subside naturally.
- After 10 minutes, check in with yourself. Rate the craving intensity on a scale of 1-10 before and after the wait. Ask yourself if you still want to use your screen, and make it a conscious, intentional choice rather than an automatic reaction.
- Schedule at least one screen-free routine each day. Block off a 15-20 minute period for a screen-free activity such as reading, walking, meditating, or working on a hobby. Add this to your calendar with a reminder and treat it as a non-negotiable appointment.
- Set clear, specific boundaries for screen use (e.g., no screens after 9pm, no checking emails during meals, no phone in the bedroom). Write these boundaries down and share them with someone you trust for accountability. Communicate your plan clearly, such as: "I'm working on managing my screen time, so I won't be checking my phone after 9pm. If you need to reach me urgently, call twice in a row."
- Prepare alternative activities in advance. Place a book, puzzle, sketchpad, or hobby materials in easy reach - on your nightstand, coffee table, or desk. If your favorite alternative is out of sight or requires setup, you're less likely to use it when cravings hit.
- Track your cravings for one week. Record the date, time, trigger situation, emotion felt, craving intensity (1-10), what you did instead, and the outcome. At the end of the week, review your log to spot patterns and adjust your strategies.
- Take care of your physical needs. Ensure you're getting enough sleep (aim for 7-8 hours), eating regular meals, and staying hydrated (drink water before reaching for your phone). Physical discomfort amplifies cravings, so address these basics first.
- Identify your three highest-risk situations for cravings (such as waiting in line, sitting on the couch, or after work). For each, create a specific alternative plan (e.g., "When I sit on the couch, I'll pick up my sketchpad" or "When I'm waiting in line, I'll practice box breathing"). Write these plans down and review them daily.
- Celebrate every small win. Each time you ride out a craving without automatically reaching for your screen, acknowledge your success. Mark it on a calendar with a gold star, share it with a friend, or add it to a success tally. These celebrations reinforce your new behavior and build momentum.

Common mistakes at this step

- Assuming that setting boundaries around screen time means completely eliminating screens from your life. Boundaries are about intentional use, not total abstinence. You're learning to use screens as tools, not as emotional crutches. The fix: Set specific, realistic boundaries (like "no screens during meals" or "no phone after 9pm") rather than vague goals like "use my phone less."
- Failing to acknowledge and validate your emotions when you reach for screens out of habit or boredom. Judging yourself for having cravings makes them stronger. Self-compassion is a skill that directly reduces craving intensity. The fix: When you notice a craving, say "I'm feeling [emotion] right now, and that's okay" instead of "I shouldn't feel this way" or "I'm so weak."
- Not taking breaks or giving yourself permission to relax and recharge. If you're constantly depleted, your brain will seek the easiest dopamine source available - your screen. Rest is not the same as screen time. The fix: Schedule genuine rest activities like napping, sitting quietly, or taking a walk. Recognize that doing nothing productive is sometimes exactly what you need.
- Trying to resist cravings through willpower alone without addressing the underlying emotional need. Willpower is a limited resource. If you're lonely, no amount of willpower will make that loneliness go away - you need actual connection. The fix: Ask yourself "What do I actually need right now?" and address that need directly. If you're lonely, call someone to make plans. If you're stressed, do a calming technique.

Before you move on

✓ Have I paused and labeled the craving when it arises, rather than automatically reaching for my screen?

✓ Can I name the specific emotion I felt before the urge to use my screen?

✓ Did I create a craving response card and keep it accessible this week?

✓ Have I practiced the 10-minute rule at least three times and recorded the change in craving intensity?

✓ Do I have at least three alternative, screen-free activities prepared and within easy reach?

✓ Have I set and communicated clear boundaries for my screen use with at least one person?

✓ Did I schedule and complete at least one screen-free routine in my calendar this week?

✓ Have I tracked my cravings for at least five days and reviewed the patterns in my log?

✓ Did I celebrate a small win after successfully resisting or riding out a craving?

✓ Can I distinguish between a vague, urgent craving and a specific, purposeful need to use my screen?

- ✓ Have I identified my three highest-risk craving situations and written down specific alternative actions for each?
- ✓ Have I checked my physical needs (sleep, food, hydration) before responding to a craving this week?
- ✓ Did I use a transition ritual (like stretching or deep breathing) during a typical craving time this week?
- ✓ Have I reviewed my craving log to find patterns and made at least one adjustment based on what I learned?

Module 9. Celebrating Small Wins

You close Instagram after five minutes instead of thirty. You finish dinner without checking your phone. These are victories, and most people ignore them completely, then wonder why their screen time efforts collapse within weeks. Celebrating small wins is not optional motivation - it's the mechanism that makes habit change stick. When you only focus on the final goal (cutting screen time by 50%, for example), you ignore the daily victories that actually build the habit. Each small win is a repetition that strengthens the neural pathway you're creating. Each time you acknowledge that win, you're teaching your brain that screen time discipline produces positive feelings, not deprivation. Skip this step and you're fighting your own reward system; use it and you're hijacking the same dopamine mechanism that makes scrolling addictive in the first place. The problem is that small wins feel insignificant in the moment. You might think, "So what if I resisted scrolling for ten minutes? I still wasted an hour later." That thinking sabotages you. Research on habit formation shows that celebrating incremental progress releases dopamine, reinforcing the behavior you want. You're not celebrating because you're done - you're celebrating because you're building. The person who celebrates staying under their social media budget four days out of seven is more likely to succeed long-term than the person who beats themselves up for the three days they missed. Start by defining what counts as a small win in your screen time journey. Vague definitions don't work. A small win must be specific to the budget and rules you set earlier. If your rule is no phone during meals, then one meal without your phone is a win. If your budget allows thirty minutes of social media per day and you stay under that limit, that's a win. If you catch yourself reaching for your phone out of boredom and choose a different activity instead, that's a win. If you check your phone during a screen-free block but put it away after two minutes instead of twenty, that's still a win. Write these definitions down so you're not left wondering whether something counts. You need a clear, written standard. Next, create a system to notice and record these wins as they happen. Most people forget their progress within hours. Memory is unreliable, especially when you're stressed or tired. A simple tally in a notebook, a checkmark on a calendar, or a quick note in your phone works. The act of recording is itself a micro-celebration - it forces you to pause and acknowledge what you did. Over time, this record becomes visible proof that you're changing, which is especially valuable on days when you feel like you're failing. When you can look back at a calendar with fifteen checkmarks representing fifteen small wins, you have evidence that contradicts the story your brain tells you about not making progress. Celebration doesn't mean throwing a party for every small win, but it does mean attaching a positive moment to each one. The celebration should be immediate and proportional. Immediate means within minutes of the win, not hours later. Proportional means the reward matches the size of the win. After a screen-free morning, you might make your favorite coffee or take five minutes to sit outside. After a full week of meeting your screen time budget, you might watch a movie you've been saving or buy a book you want. After a month of consistent progress, you might plan a larger reward like a meal at a favorite

restaurant or a small purchase you've been wanting. The key is that the reward is not more screen time - don't celebrate reducing Instagram by binge-watching Netflix. Choose rewards that align with the life you're building, not the behavior you're changing. Sharing your wins with someone else amplifies the effect. Tell a friend, post in a support group, or text your accountability partner. Saying "I made it through dinner without my phone tonight" out loud makes it real. The other person's acknowledgment - even a simple "Nice work" - adds external validation to your internal sense of accomplishment. If you don't have someone to share with yet, write it in your journal as if you're telling a friend. The act of articulating the win solidifies it. You're not bragging; you're reinforcing the behavior you want to repeat. Beware of the trap of only celebrating perfect days. If you slip and check your phone during a screen-free block but then put it away after two minutes instead of twenty, that's still a win. If you exceed your social media budget by five minutes but it's half of what you used to spend, that's a win. Progress is not linear, and celebrating imperfect wins keeps you moving forward instead of spiraling into shame. The person who can find a partial win on a bad day is the person who will still be working on their screen time six months from now. The person who only celebrates perfection quits after the first setback. Use positive self-talk immediately after each small win. Don't just think "good job" - be specific. Say out loud or in your head: "I chose to close Instagram after five minutes. I'm building the habit I want." Or: "I kept my phone out of my bedroom last night. That's exactly the person I'm becoming." This specificity connects the action to your identity, not just your behavior. You're not just someone who occasionally resists scrolling; you're someone who is changing. The timing of celebration matters more than most people realize. If you wait until bedtime to acknowledge your morning win, the connection between action and reward weakens. Your brain needs to link the behavior with the positive feeling while the memory is fresh. This is why immediate celebration - even something as simple as saying "Yes, I did that" out loud - works better than delayed rewards. The neural pathway you're building requires tight temporal coupling between the action and the acknowledgment. When you celebrate immediately, you're literally rewiring your brain's response to screen time discipline. Consider the cumulative effect of small wins over time. One screen-free meal doesn't transform your life. But thirty screen-free meals over a month create a pattern. Sixty screen-free meals over two months become a habit. When you celebrate each one, you're not just marking individual events - you're building a chain of evidence that proves you're capable of change. This chain becomes self-reinforcing. After ten wins, the eleventh feels more achievable. After fifty wins, you start to see yourself differently. You're no longer someone who struggles with screen time; you're someone who has proven, repeatedly, that you can control it. Finally, use your small wins as fuel for the next step. After you celebrate, ask yourself: "What made this win possible?" Maybe you succeeded because you left your phone in another room, or because you had a specific plan for what to do instead of scrolling. Identify the conditions that led to the win, then recreate those conditions tomorrow. Small wins aren't just feel-good moments - they're data points that show you what works. By celebrating them, you're not just patting yourself on the back; you're building a personalized playbook for reducing screen time that actually fits

your life. Each win teaches you something about which strategies work for you, which environments support you, and which times of day are easiest or hardest. That information is more valuable than any generic advice because it's based on your actual behavior, not someone else's theory.

What this module changes

You will be able to identify and acknowledge your small wins related to screen time reduction, create a system to track and celebrate them, and use those wins to build momentum toward your larger goals.

Worked example

Marcus set a screen time budget of 90 minutes per day for social media and entertainment apps, down from his baseline of 4 hours per day. After two weeks, he was frustrated because he'd only met his budget on 4 out of 14 days and felt like he was failing. Marcus started tracking small wins instead of only counting perfect days. He identified that on 9 out of 14 days, he had closed Instagram within 10 minutes of opening it at least once, compared to never doing that before. He also noticed that on 6 days, he had kept his phone out of his bedroom at night, and on those nights his morning screen time was 30 minutes lower. He celebrated these wins by giving himself a checkmark on a calendar for each one and treating himself to his favorite coffee on days when he hit two or more small wins. After one more week of celebrating small wins, his average daily screen time dropped to 2 hours 10 minutes, and he met his 90-minute budget on 3 out of 7 days. More importantly, he felt motivated instead of defeated because he could see 15+ small wins on his calendar, proving he was changing even on imperfect days.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Define what counts as a small win for your screen time goals by writing down 5-8 specific behaviors that align with the budget and rules you set in earlier modules (e.g., "one meal without my phone," "stayed under 30 minutes on social media today," "resisted checking email before 9 AM").
- Choose a tracking method you'll actually use - a physical notebook, a calendar with checkmarks, a note in your phone, or a simple tally sheet - and keep it where you'll see it daily.
- At the end of each day, review your screen time data (from your phone's settings or tracking app) and identify at least one small win, even if the day wasn't perfect overall, then record it in your tracking system.

- Attach an immediate, proportional reward to each small win - something that takes 30 seconds to 5 minutes and doesn't involve screens (e.g., a favorite snack, five minutes outside, a song you love, stretching).
- Create a list of 8-10 larger rewards for weekly or milestone wins (e.g., a movie, a new book, a meal at a favorite restaurant, a small purchase you've been wanting) and write down the criteria for earning each one.
- Share at least one small win per week with another person - an accountability partner, a friend, a family member, or a support group - either in person, by text, or in a group chat.
- When you have a setback or imperfect day, look for the partial win within it (e.g., "I scrolled for 15 minutes when I meant to stop after 5, but that's still better than the 45 minutes I used to spend") and record that as progress.
- Each Sunday, review your week's small wins and identify which conditions or strategies led to those wins (e.g., "I succeeded on days when I charged my phone outside my bedroom"), then plan to recreate those conditions in the coming week.
- Start a "win journal" where you write 2-3 sentences about one small win each week, describing what you did, how it felt, and what it means for your progress - this creates a narrative of success you can revisit when motivation dips.
- Use positive self-talk immediately after each small win by saying (out loud or in your head) a specific affirmation like "I chose to close Instagram after 5 minutes - I'm building the habit I want" rather than generic praise.
- Set a weekly reminder on your phone or calendar to review your small wins from the past seven days and celebrate the cumulative progress, not just individual moments.
- When you reach a milestone (e.g., one month of meeting your screen time budget, two weeks of screen-free mornings), take 10-15 minutes to reflect on how your life has changed and write down three specific benefits you've noticed.
- Create a visual representation of your wins - a jar where you add a marble for each win, a chart where you add a sticker, or a wall calendar where you use different colors for different types of wins - so you can see your progress accumulate over time.

Common mistakes at this step

- Waiting until you achieve the final goal to celebrate, which means you go weeks or months without positive reinforcement and lose motivation - celebrate every small win as it happens, even if you're not "done" yet.
- Only celebrating perfect days and ignoring progress on imperfect days, which makes you feel like a failure whenever you slip - look for partial wins and improvements even when you don't

meet your ideal standard.

- Choosing screen time as a reward for reducing screen time (e.g., celebrating a screen-free morning by scrolling for an hour), which undermines the habit you're building - pick rewards that align with the life you want, not the behavior you're changing.
- Not tracking your small wins and then forgetting them within a day or two, which makes you feel like you're not making progress even when you are - write down each win as it happens so you have visible proof of change.

Before you move on

✓ You have a written list of 5-8 specific behaviors that count as small wins for your screen time goals.

✓ You have chosen a tracking method and recorded at least one small win in it.

✓ You can name at least one small win you achieved in the past three days and describe what you did.

✓ You have identified at least one immediate reward (non-screen) that you will use to celebrate small wins.

✓ You have a list of larger rewards and the criteria for earning them written down somewhere you can reference.

✓ You have shared at least one small win with another person in the past week.

✓ When you review a day that included a setback, you can identify at least one partial win or improvement within that day.

✓ You have reviewed your small wins from the past week and identified at least one condition or strategy that contributed to your success.

✓ You have written at least one entry in a win journal or similar record describing a small win in detail.

✓ You can recall using positive self-talk after a small win at least once in the past week.

✓ You have a visual representation of your wins (calendar, jar, chart, etc.) that you update regularly and can see at a glance.

Module 10. Addressing Common Obstacles

You encounter an obstacle - you miss your screen time budget three days in a row, or you find yourself scrolling at 11 PM despite your 9 PM cutoff. This moment is not failure; it is data. Your first task is to name the obstacle in concrete terms: "I opened Instagram at 10:45 PM on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday" is useful; "I have no willpower" is not. Once you have named the obstacle, look for the pattern underneath it. Ask yourself: What happened in the hour before I picked up my phone? What need was I trying to meet? Often the surface problem (late-night scrolling) masks a deeper cause (you have no plan for winding down after a stressful day, or your bedroom has no alternative to the phone). Ask "why" at least three times. Why did I scroll? Because I was restless. Why was I restless? Because I had no other way to relax. Why no other way? Because I removed my book from the nightstand and never replaced it. Now you have a root cause you can address. Next, list every way this obstacle interferes with your goals. Be specific: "I lose 90 minutes of sleep," "I wake up groggy and skip my morning walk," "I feel behind all day." This list clarifies what is at stake and helps you weigh solutions. Do not skip emotional impacts - frustration, guilt, or anxiety can reinforce the cycle. Now research. Look at what worked in the past, ask someone who has solved a similar problem, or search for evidence-based strategies. Generate at least two possible solutions. For the late-night scrolling example, you might consider: (1) place your phone in another room at 9 PM and put a paperback on your nightstand, or (2) set a 15-minute timer for a calming activity (stretching, journaling) before bed. Compare the options: Which requires fewer steps? Which fits your current routine? Which have you tried before, and what happened? Consider barriers for each - if you need to buy something, can you do it within two days? Choose one solution and write out the action steps. If you choose option 1, your steps might be: buy a paperback this week, clear a spot on the nightstand, plug your phone charger into the hallway outlet, set a 9 PM alarm labeled "phone to charger." Identify every resource you need - time to buy the book, a charger extension cord, a nightstand lamp - and confirm you have them or can get them within two days. If you need help from someone (e.g., a housemate to remind you), include that in your plan. Set a timeline with checkpoints. For example: "I will follow this plan for seven days, then review my sleep log and screen time data on Sunday evening." During the week, track your actions and results. Use a simple log: date, did I move my phone (yes/no), time I fell asleep, how I felt in the morning. This log is your evidence. Consider using a notebook, a digital spreadsheet, or a habit-tracking app - choose a method you will actually use daily. At your checkpoint, review. Did you follow the plan? What changed? If you succeeded five out of seven nights, that is progress - note what was different on the two nights you slipped. If the plan did not work at all, ask why: Was the book boring? Was the hallway too far? Adjust one variable and try again for another week. If your plan worked only on weekdays, consider what makes weekends different and adapt accordingly. If a new obstacle appears, repeat this process. Do not abandon the entire plan because one piece failed. Treat each obstacle as a separate problem to diagnose and solve. And when you do make progress - even

one night of following your new routine - write it down and acknowledge it. Small wins build the confidence you need to tackle the next obstacle. Over time, you will build a toolkit of solutions that work for you in different situations. If you find yourself repeating the same obstacle after several attempts, consider asking for outside feedback. Sometimes a friend, partner, or coach can spot patterns or suggest options you have missed. Remember, the goal is not perfection but steady improvement and insight. Each obstacle is an opportunity to refine your approach and strengthen your skills.

What this module changes

You have identified the root cause of your screen time obstacle, developed a specific plan to address it, and are actively tracking your progress toward overcoming it.

Worked example

Suppose Jordan wants to stop checking work email after 7 PM but finds herself opening her inbox at 8:30 PM on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. She writes the obstacle: "I opened my work email app at 8:30 PM on three weeknights this week." She reviews her calendar and notes that on all three nights, she was sitting on the couch after dinner with no specific plan. She asks why three times: Why did I check email? Because I was restless. Why was I restless? Because I finished dinner and had no plan for the next hour. Why no plan? Because I used to watch TV during that hour, but I removed TV from my screen time budget and never replaced it with another activity. Root cause: no planned evening activity to replace TV. She lists the impacts: "I lose 45 minutes to email and work thoughts, I feel anxious before bed, I sleep poorly, and I'm tired the next morning." She also notes emotional impacts: "I feel guilty for breaking my rule and frustrated that I can't relax." She researches solutions and identifies three options: (1) go for a 20-minute walk after dinner, (2) read a paperback for 30 minutes, or (3) do a 15-minute stretching routine. She compares them: walking requires good weather, reading requires buying a book, stretching requires no new resources. She chooses stretching. Her action plan: (1) Find a 15-minute stretching video and bookmark it. (2) Set a 7:45 PM alarm labeled "stretching time." (3) Put yoga mat in living room before dinner. (4) After stretching, put phone on charger in kitchen. She lists resources: yoga mat (already owned), phone alarm (set), video (bookmarked). She sets a start date of Monday and a checkpoint of the following Sunday. She tracks daily: Monday (stretched, no email), Tuesday (stretched, no email), Wednesday (skipped stretching, checked email at 8:45 PM), Thursday (stretched, no email), Friday (stretched, no email), Saturday (stretched, no email), Sunday (skipped stretching, checked email at 9 PM). At her checkpoint, she reviews: she succeeded five out of seven days. She notes that both slip-ups occurred when she skipped stretching. She adjusts her plan: move the alarm to 7:30 PM to give herself more buffer time. After another week with the earlier alarm, she succeeds six

out of seven days and her evening email habit is nearly eliminated.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Write a one-sentence description of the obstacle using observable behavior (e.g., "I checked email during dinner four times this week").
- Review your screen time log or calendar for the past week and note every instance when this obstacle appeared - record the day, time, and what you were doing just before.
- Ask "why" three times in writing: Why did this happen? (Answer.) Why did that happen? (Answer.) Why did that happen? (Answer.) Read your final answer - that is likely your root cause.
- List every specific way this obstacle is blocking your screen time goals, including lost time, disrupted activities, and how you feel afterward. Include emotional impacts such as frustration or guilt.
- Research two to four possible solutions by reviewing past successes in your own log, asking someone who has solved a similar problem, or searching for strategies that address your root cause.
- For each solution, write down what new habits or resources it requires, and any barriers (e.g., need to buy something, need help from others).
- Compare your solutions side-by-side: Which requires the fewest new habits? Which can you start within 48 hours? Which has worked for you or others before? Which barriers are easiest to overcome?
- Choose one solution and write a step-by-step action plan with 4-8 concrete steps, each starting with a verb (e.g., "Move phone charger to kitchen counter").
- List every resource you need to execute your plan (specific apps, physical items, time blocks, another person's help) and confirm you have them or can obtain them within two days.
- If your plan involves another person (reminder, accountability), let them know your plan and what you need from them.
- Set a start date, a checkpoint date (typically 7-14 days later), and create a tracking method (a simple table with columns for date, action taken, and result).
- Track your actions and results every day using your chosen method - spend no more than 2 minutes per day on this. Set a daily reminder or alarm to ensure you log consistently.
- At your checkpoint, review your tracking data: count how many days you followed the plan, note any patterns in successes or slip-ups, and write one sentence about what you learned.

- Adjust your plan based on your review: if you succeeded fewer than half the days, change one variable (timing, location, tool) and set a new checkpoint; if you succeeded most days, keep the plan and address any remaining slip-ups. If needed, ask for outside feedback to generate new ideas.

Common mistakes at this step

- Describing the obstacle in vague terms like "I'm addicted to my phone" instead of specific behavior like "I checked Instagram 12 times during work hours on Thursday." Fix: Write what you did, when, and where - use your screen time log or app data to get exact numbers.
- Stopping at the first "why" answer (e.g., "I was bored") without digging deeper to find the root cause (e.g., "I have no plan for the 30 minutes between finishing work and starting dinner"). Fix: Write out all three "why" answers and use the third one to guide your solution.
- Ignoring emotional impacts such as frustration, guilt, or anxiety, which can reinforce the obstacle. Fix: Include how you feel after the behavior in your list of consequences.
- Choosing a solution before comparing at least two options, which often leads to picking the first idea that comes to mind rather than the most practical one. Fix: Write down two to four solutions, then compare them using criteria like ease, cost, and past success before deciding.

Before you move on

✓ Have I described my obstacle using specific, observable behavior rather than vague labels like "lack of discipline"?

✓ Did I review my log or calendar to identify when and where this obstacle appeared?

✓ Have I asked "why" at least three times in writing to find the root cause?

✓ Did I list the specific ways this obstacle interferes with my goals (time lost, activities disrupted, how I feel)?

✓ Did I include emotional impacts (frustration, guilt, anxiety) in my list of consequences?

✓ Have I identified at least two possible solutions before choosing one?

✓ For each solution, did I consider what new habits or resources are required and any barriers to starting?

✓ Is my action plan written as a series of concrete steps, each starting with a verb?

✓ Have I listed all resources I need (tools, time, support) and confirmed I have them or can get them within two days?

✓ If my plan involves another person, have I communicated what I need from them?

✓ Did I set a specific start date and checkpoint date for my plan?

- ✓ Am I tracking my actions and results every day using a simple, consistent method?
- ✓ Have I set a daily reminder to help me track consistently?
- ✓ Have I reviewed my tracking data at my checkpoint and written down what I learned?
- ✓ If I did not make progress, did I adjust only one variable and set a new checkpoint instead of starting over completely?

Module 11. Maintaining Momentum

You've already made meaningful changes to your screen time habits: you've tracked your usage, set boundaries, and started building new routines. Now, the challenge is to keep your progress going even as your initial motivation fades and daily life gets busy or stressful. Momentum is not about pushing yourself relentlessly every day. Instead, it's about creating a rhythm you can keep up for the long haul - weeks, months, and beyond. Expect your energy and motivation to fluctuate. Some days, reducing screen time will feel easy; other days, every ping and notification will tempt you. The key difference between those who maintain their progress and those who slip back is not willpower - it's having a set of practical strategies. Begin by mapping your natural energy and focus patterns. For one week, pause three to four times each day to record your energy level (high, medium, low), your mood (calm, anxious, irritable, content), and your sense of focus. Pay attention to what you were doing before each check-in. Look for trends: Do you get tired after lunch? Are you most alert in the morning? Do certain tasks drain you more than others? Once you spot your patterns, use them to your advantage. Schedule your most demanding, focus-intensive tasks during your peak energy windows. If you're trying to swap evening scrolling for reading but always feel wiped out at 8 PM, move your reading to a time when you have more energy, or choose a lighter activity for the evening slot. Break your larger screen time goals into small, clear actions. Swap vague intentions like "use my phone less" for specifics like "leave my phone in the kitchen from 7-8 PM" or "check social media only at 12 PM and 7 PM." Each concrete action you complete is a win - track and celebrate them to reinforce your progress. Structure your work and focus periods to prevent burnout. Techniques like the Pomodoro Technique (25 minutes of focused work, 5-minute break, repeat four times, then take a longer break) help you maintain energy and avoid the fatigue that leads to mindless scrolling. Try out different work/rest rhythms to see what keeps you fresh. Schedule rest and recovery as deliberately as you schedule work. Rest is essential maintenance, not a luxury. Plan for short walks, stretching, or quiet time - these activities recharge your mind and body, making it easier to maintain your new habits. Set aside a specific weekly review time. Reflect on what went well, where you struggled, and any signs of burnout (like irritability, fatigue, or loss of interest). Use these insights to adjust your schedule, goals, or strategies. Flexibility is crucial for long-term momentum. Celebrate every win, no matter how small. Completing a Pomodoro session without checking your phone or sticking to your screen-free time for a few days are real achievements. Record them, share them with someone, or give yourself a small treat - celebration reinforces the behavior you want to keep. When setbacks happen - and they will - treat them as feedback, not failure. Ask yourself what triggered the slip (fatigue, stress, boredom?), adjust your plan, and move forward. One off day doesn't erase your progress; what matters is how you respond and adapt. Finally, protect your focus by communicating your boundaries to others. Let family, roommates, or colleagues know when you're unavailable and when you'll be back. Turn off non-essential notifications and create physical or digital barriers to interruptions. Your

environment can support or sabotage your momentum - design it with intention. By weaving these practices into your routine, you'll create a sustainable rhythm. You're not relying on sheer willpower; you're using self-awareness, structure, and strategic rest to keep moving forward, even when motivation dips.

What this module changes

you have created a sustainable rhythm of productivity that allows you to make consistent progress on your goals

Worked example

Marcus set a goal to reduce his evening screen time from three hours to one hour, freeing up time to work on a side project. After two weeks of progress, he noticed he was feeling sluggish and unmotivated. He was trying to work on his project from 8-10 PM, but by that time he was exhausted from his day job. Marcus tracked his energy for one week and discovered he was most alert from 6:30-8:00 AM and again from 12:30-2:00 PM. He was consistently drained by 7 PM. He adjusted his schedule: he moved his project work to 6:30-7:30 AM (one hour before work) and used the Pomodoro Technique - 25 minutes of focused work, 5 minutes of stretching or making coffee. After four cycles, he took a 20-minute break to shower and get ready for work. He broke his project into small tasks: "outline chapter 1" (30 minutes), "write 300 words" (25 minutes), "research three sources" (25 minutes). Each completed task went on a checklist he kept on his desk. At 7 PM, instead of trying to work, he allowed himself one hour of screen time for entertainment, guilt-free, because he'd already done his focused work. Marcus set a Sunday evening review: he looked at his checklist, counted his completed tasks (12 in week one, 9 in week two after the adjustment), and noted his energy levels. When he had a low-energy morning and skipped his project work, he didn't beat himself up - he noted he'd stayed up late the night before, adjusted his bedtime, and resumed the next day. After three weeks with this new schedule, Marcus had completed the outline and first draft of two chapters. He celebrated by sharing his progress with a friend and treating himself to a nice breakfast. By working with his energy patterns instead of against them, and by building in rest and celebration, Marcus maintained momentum and made steady progress.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Track your energy, focus, and mood at three to four points each day for one full week, noting what activities or events preceded each state.

- At the end of the week, review your log to identify your 1-3 hour windows of peak productivity and alertness. Highlight these periods on your calendar.
- Break your main screen time goal into 3-5 specific, actionable steps that can each be completed in 15-30 minutes (e.g., 'put phone in another room during dinner' or 'read for 20 minutes before bed').
- Design a daily schedule that places your most challenging or focus-intensive tasks during your identified peak energy periods, and assign easier tasks or breaks to lower-energy times.
- Block out specific times for self-care activities such as a 10-minute walk, stretching, or quiet breathing, and enter these as non-negotiable appointments in your calendar or planner.
- Implement the Pomodoro Technique or another structured work/rest rhythm: set a timer for 25 minutes of focused work, take a 5-minute break, and after four cycles, take a longer 15-30 minute break.
- Set a recurring weekly review appointment (same day and time each week) to reflect on your progress, energy, and mood, then adjust your schedule or goals based on what you observe.
- Create a simple, visible system for celebrating small wins - use a journal, a calendar, or share with an accountability partner - and make sure to use it at least three times per week.
- Monitor for early warning signs of burnout (irritability, trouble focusing, lack of motivation, physical fatigue) and respond immediately by reducing your workload or increasing rest and self-care.
- Experiment with different break activities (walking, stretching, making tea, stepping outside, listening to music) over two weeks to discover which genuinely help you recharge and which are just distractions.
- Communicate your focused work schedule and boundaries to family, roommates, or colleagues, specifying when you're unavailable and when you'll be back, to reduce interruptions.
- When you miss a goal or have an unproductive day, spend 5-10 minutes reflecting on what happened (triggers, circumstances, energy level), adjust your plan, and resume without self-criticism.
- Review your device notification settings weekly, turning off or muting any alerts that aren't time-sensitive, and consider using 'Do Not Disturb' or focus modes during your key work periods.

Common mistakes at this step

- Pushing yourself too hard without rest, trying to maintain peak performance every day. Fix: Schedule regular breaks and intentionally reduce your workload during low-energy periods or

after intense focus sessions.

- Ignoring your body's physical and emotional signals (fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating). Fix: Track your mood and energy daily for at least a week, then adjust your schedule based on the patterns you discover.
- Relying solely on willpower or discipline to maintain progress. Fix: Use structured techniques like Pomodoro, schedule self-care as part of your plan, and design your environment to support your goals rather than fighting against it.
- Failing to break large goals into smaller, manageable steps, which leads to overwhelm and avoidance. Fix: Divide big screen time goals into specific 15-30 minute actions and check them off as you complete them.

Before you move on

✓ Have you tracked your energy and mood for at least one full week to identify your personal productivity peaks?

✓ Does your daily schedule place your most demanding tasks - those requiring focus and willpower - during your highest-energy times?

✓ Are your screen time goals broken down into specific actions that can be completed in 15-30 minute sessions?

✓ Do you have scheduled breaks and self-care activities built into your day, with specific times blocked out?

✓ Are you using a structured technique like Pomodoro to organize your work and rest periods?

✓ Have you set aside a recurring weekly time to review your progress and adjust your approach?

✓ Do you have a working system for celebrating small wins and tracking your accomplishments?

✓ Can you recognize early signs of burnout or fatigue in yourself and do you adjust your workload when you notice them?

✓ Have you communicated your productivity schedule and boundaries to people who might interrupt you during focused time?

✓ When you miss a goal or have an unproductive day, do you reflect on what happened and adjust your plan rather than criticizing yourself or giving up?

✓ Are your notification settings reviewed and updated weekly to reduce unnecessary distractions?

✓ Have you experimented with at least two different break activities to find what helps you recharge most effectively?

Module 12. Reviewing and Refining Progress

A weekly review session transforms your tracking data into a personalized instruction manual for what actually works in your life. You gather your screen time logs, replacement activity totals, and notes about triggers, and then analyze them to uncover patterns that memory alone would never reveal. For example, you might discover that you always spiral on rainy Saturdays, or that morning exercise predicts a low-screen day. This process gives you a clear, evidence-based view of your habits and helps you make smarter adjustments. Reviewing is distinct from tracking. While tracking captures raw data, reviewing interprets that data to extract lessons and guide strategic changes. You look backward across multiple weeks to identify trends ("my average dropped 20 minutes, then plateaued for three weeks"), test hypotheses ("does meal prepping on Sunday actually reduce my weeknight phone use?"), and decide which experiments to run next. This is how you avoid repeating the same mistakes and instead build on your wins. Start each review by calculating weekly averages, not just daily totals. Daily numbers can be misleading due to one-off events - a sick day, a dinner out, or a work crisis. Weekly averages smooth out the noise and reveal the true direction of your progress. Write down this week's average, last week's, and the week before that. Are you trending down (progress), flat (plateau), or up (backslide)? Each trend calls for a different response. If you're trending down, analyze your three lowest screen time days. What did they have in common? Maybe you exercised before work, had evening plans, or left your phone in another room during dinner. These commonalities are your levers - strategies you can use more often. Write them down as tested tactics: "Exercise before 9am consistently predicts a sub-2-hour day." If your trend is flat, you've hit a plateau. Your current strategies got you this far, but now you need to evolve. Look at your three highest screen time days. What triggers are you not addressing? Boredom on weekend afternoons? Anxiety after checking work email? The urge to scroll while waiting? Identify the most frequent trigger and design a specific countermeasure to test this week. If you're trending up, something changed - a new stressor, a disrupted routine, or a replacement activity that lost its appeal. Scan your notes for what's different in the past two weeks compared to before. Did you stop going to the gym? Did a friend move away? Did work get more stressful? Decide whether to address the root cause (find a new workout buddy) or compensate with a new strategy (schedule phone-free time blocks during high-stress periods). Apply the same rigor to your replacement activities. If you freed up 90 minutes of screen time but only logged 40 minutes of replacement activities, where did the other 50 minutes go? If you can't account for it, you likely spent it in low-grade restlessness - staring into space, pacing, feeling vaguely uncomfortable. This is a red flag: empty time is a vacuum that screens will rush back to fill. Test new replacement activities that are genuinely engaging, not just "better than scrolling." Compare your replacement activity totals week over week. If reading time dropped from 45 minutes a day to 15, why? Did the book get boring? Did you lose your reading spot? Did something else crowd it out? Treat your replacement activities as experiments: if one is fading, fix the obstacle or swap in a different activity. You're not committed

to any particular hobby - you're committed to filling your time with things that satisfy you. Look for surprises - data points that contradict your expectations. Maybe weekends are harder than weekdays, or your highest usage is between 2pm and 4pm instead of the evening. These surprises reveal blind spots and point you toward high-leverage interventions you wouldn't have considered. For each surprise, ask: what was I doing (or not doing) during that time? What was I feeling? What need was I trying to meet by reaching for my phone? If your 2-4pm usage is high, maybe that's when your energy crashes and you're using your phone as a stimulant. The fix isn't willpower; it's a 10-minute walk, a cup of tea, or a quick call to a friend - something that actually addresses the underlying need. Once you've identified patterns, trends, and surprises, choose exactly one behavior to adjust this coming week. Not three, not five - one. Make it specific and testable: "I will put my phone in the kitchen drawer from 7pm to 8pm every night" or "I will go for a 15-minute walk every day at 2:30pm before I'm tempted to scroll." Write down what you're testing and why. Next week, review whether it worked. Adjust your targets based on your actual performance, not your aspirations. If you hit your goal five or more days per week for two consecutive weeks, tighten it by 15 minutes - you're ready for the next challenge. If you missed your goal four or more days per week, your target is too ambitious. Pull it back by 15-30 minutes to something you can sustain. There's no shame in adjusting down; the real mistake is setting yourself up for repeated failure and then quitting. Document one win every single week, even if you had a tough week overall. "I didn't check my phone until 8am on Wednesday" or "I read for 30 minutes on Saturday instead of watching YouTube." Wins prove that you're capable of the behavior you're working toward. On hard weeks, reviewing past wins reminds you that you've succeeded before and can do it again. End every review by writing one sentence that captures your key insight. "I need plans for Sunday afternoons or I default to screens." "Stress at work makes me scroll - I need a different release valve." "I do best when I'm with people; I struggle when I'm alone." Over 8-12 weeks, these insights accumulate into a personalized playbook. You'll know your triggers, strengths, weak spots, and exactly which strategies work for your life - not generic advice, but your own proven tactics. Reviewing is not about judging yourself. It's about collecting evidence, spotting patterns, and running experiments. Every week is a data point. Every month is a trend. Every insight is a tool you can use forever. This is how you turn temporary effort into permanent change. To deepen your review, periodically (such as every four weeks) look back at your past review documents as a set. Are there recurring patterns or triggers that you notice across multiple weeks? Are certain replacement activities consistently effective or consistently fading? This meta-review helps you spot long-term trends and refine your strategies on a broader scale. Consider sharing your findings with a trusted friend or accountability partner for outside perspective and extra motivation. Finally, remember that setbacks are data, not failure - use them to adjust your approach, not as a reason to stop.

What this module changes

You have a clear understanding of what's working and what's not in your progress, and you have a plan in place to make adjustments as needed. You also gain a growing record of your own patterns, triggers, and successful strategies, building a personalized playbook for ongoing improvement.

Worked example

Sarah. Sarah has been working to reduce her screen time for five weeks. Her initial baseline was 3.5 hours per day, and she set a goal of 2.5 hours per day. She tracks her screen time using a mobile app that breaks down usage by category, and she also tracks her replacement activities in a simple spreadsheet - minutes spent reading, exercising, and socializing. It's Sunday evening and she's sitting down for her weekly review. She pulls up her data from the past three weeks to look for trends. Sarah's weekly averages: three weeks ago 2.7 hours/day, two weeks ago 2.6 hours/day, last week 2.7 hours/day, this week 2.9 hours/day. She's trending up after a brief dip. Her target is 2.5 hours/day. This week's daily totals: Mon 2.8 hrs, Tue 2.3 hrs, Wed 2.6 hrs, Thu 3.4 hrs, Fri 2.9 hrs, Sat 3.8 hrs, Sun 2.4 hrs. Her replacement activities this week: reading averaged 35 minutes per day (last week 42 min/day), exercise averaged 28 minutes per day (last week 30 min/day), socializing averaged 42 minutes per day (last week 38 min/day). Her three highest screen time days were Saturday (3.8 hrs), Thursday (3.4 hrs), and Friday (2.9 hrs). Her three lowest were Tuesday (2.3 hrs), Sunday (2.4 hrs), and Wednesday (2.6 hrs). Sarah notices that her highest days (Thursday, Friday, Saturday) all followed days when she worked late or skipped her evening walk. She writes this as a pattern: "Skipping my evening walk leads to more screen time the next day." She also sees that her reading time dropped this week, and remembers that she finished her novel last Sunday and hasn't started a new book. She decides to pick a new book tonight. A surprise: Sarah thought weekends would be easier, but Saturday was her highest screen time day. She realizes she felt bored and didn't have plans. She writes: "On weekends without plans, I default to scrolling." Her behavior to test: "Schedule at least one social or outdoor activity for Saturday afternoon." She writes down a win: "Didn't check my phone until after breakfast on Sunday." Her key insight: "Evening walks and planned weekend activities help me keep screen time down." She adjusts her target up to 2.7 hours/day for next week to build momentum, planning to tighten it again after two consistent weeks. At the end of the month, Sarah looks back at her last four weekly reviews. She notices that skipped walks and unplanned weekends come up repeatedly as triggers. She sets a new focus for the next month: "Prioritize evening walks and plan Saturday activities in advance."

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Schedule a recurring 15-minute weekly review session at the same day and time each week - put it in your calendar as a non-negotiable appointment. Treat this review as seriously as any work meeting or commitment.
- Gather your tracking data from the past seven days: daily screen time totals, replacement activity minutes (reading, exercise, socializing, hobbies), and any notes about triggers or unusual events. Use your tracking app, spreadsheet, or paper log - do not rely on memory.
- Calculate your weekly average screen time for this week, last week, and the week before. Write these numbers down in your review document. Note whether your trend is down (progress), flat (plateau), or up (backslide).
- List your three lowest and three highest screen time days from this week. For each, review your notes and context (schedule, mood, location, who you were with, what you did instead) to spot patterns.
- If you're trending down, identify what your lowest days had in common. Write this as a tested strategy you can repeat (e.g., "Exercise before 9am predicts a low-screen day"). Plan to use this strategy more often next week.
- If you're flat or trending up, analyze your three highest screen time days. Identify the most frequent trigger (boredom, stress, waiting, loneliness, etc.) and design one specific countermeasure to test this coming week.
- Review your replacement activity totals and compare them to last week. For any activity that dropped significantly, investigate the reason (boring book, lost your spot, time crowded out) and decide whether to fix the obstacle or try a new activity.
- Look for at least one surprise in your data - something that contradicts your expectations or assumptions. For that surprise, ask what you were doing, feeling, or needing at that time, and brainstorm a new way to meet that need without screens.
- Check for any unaccounted-for time: If you reduced screen time but did not increase replacement activities, note how you spent that time. If you can't recall, consider it a sign to plan more engaging alternatives for next week.
- Choose exactly one concrete, testable behavior to adjust for the coming week, based on your review. Make it specific (e.g., "Put phone in kitchen drawer from 7-8pm" or "Take a 15-minute walk at 2:30pm"). Write down what you will test and why.
- Write down one win from the past week, however small (e.g., "Read for 20 minutes on Tuesday instead of scrolling" or "Didn't check phone until 8am on Saturday"). Add it to your running list of wins for motivation.
- Evaluate your target: if you missed it four or more days this week, adjust your goal down by 15-30 minutes for next week. If you hit it five or more days per week for two weeks in a row,

tighten your goal by 15 minutes. Write your new target in your review document.

- End your review by writing a one-sentence summary of your key insight for the week (e.g., "I need plans for Sunday afternoons or I default to screens"). Add this to your personal playbook so you can review your evolving strategies and self-knowledge each month.
- Every four weeks, review your past monthly insights and look for recurring patterns, persistent triggers, or consistently effective strategies. Use this meta-review to refine your overall approach and set a focus for the next month.

Common mistakes at this step

- Reviewing progress by memory instead of looking at actual tracking data - your memory is unreliable and will either make things seem better or worse than they actually are, preventing you from seeing real patterns. Fix: Open your tracking app or spreadsheet during every review session and write down the actual numbers.
- Focusing only on screen time totals without tracking what you did instead - this makes it impossible to tell whether you're building rewarding new habits or just suffering through empty time, which isn't sustainable. Fix: Track your replacement activities (reading time, exercise minutes, social time) as carefully as your screen time and review those totals every week.
- Looking only at daily totals instead of calculating weekly averages - daily numbers jump around due to one-off events, so you can't tell if you're actually making progress or just having a good day. Fix: Calculate and write down your weekly average every single week, and compare it to the previous two weeks to see your trend.
- Trying to fix everything you notice in one week - this overwhelms you and guarantees you'll change nothing because you're trying to change too much at once. Fix: Choose exactly one behavior to adjust each week; small consistent changes compound over time into major shifts.

Before you move on

✓ Did you complete a review session this week using your actual tracking data (not just your memory)?

✓ Can you name your highest and lowest screen time days from the past week and identify at least one factor that made them different?

✓ Do you know your weekly average screen time for this week, last week, and the week before, and can you state whether you're trending down, flat, or up?

✓ Have you identified at least one specific pattern in your screen time behavior from reviewing this week's data - either what your low days had in common or what trigger shows up on your high days?

- ✓ Did you review your replacement activity totals and check whether any activity dropped significantly compared to last week?
- ✓ Did you identify at least one surprise in your data - something that contradicts what you expected about when or why you use screens?
- ✓ Did you check for unaccounted-for time when screen time dropped but replacement activities did not increase, and plan how to fill that time next week?
- ✓ Did you select one concrete, testable behavior to adjust this coming week based on your review findings?
- ✓ Have you written down at least one win from the past week and added it to your running list?
- ✓ If you consistently missed your target, did you adjust your goal down to something more achievable? If you consistently hit your target, did you tighten your goal to maintain progress?
- ✓ Did you write down your key insight from this week's review in a document where you can review past insights monthly to spot long-term patterns?
- ✓ Did you conduct a monthly meta-review of your insights to spot recurring patterns or triggers and use this to refine your strategies?

Module 13. Embracing a Growth Mindset

Sticky notes on your mirror. A journal page filled with crossed-out attempts. These are signs of someone practicing a growth mindset. In this module, you'll learn how to apply this mindset to your screen time goals - so setbacks become stepping stones, not stop signs. A growth mindset is the belief that your abilities and habits aren't fixed - they can be shaped by practice, feedback, and reflection. In contrast, a fixed mindset assumes your self-control or discipline is set in stone. This difference matters: with a growth mindset, every misstep is a chance to learn, not a verdict on your character. When you catch yourself thinking, "I'll never get better at this," you're hearing your fixed mindset. Instead, a growth mindset voice says, "I'm not there yet, but I can improve with practice." This shift is crucial for screen time control, where progress is rarely linear and setbacks are common. You may feel discouraged after a tough week or believe that slipping up means you're failing. But neuroscience shows that each time you try a new approach - even if it doesn't work at first - you strengthen new neural pathways. The discomfort you feel when resisting the urge to check your phone is your brain rewiring itself. Over time, this discomfort fades as new habits take root. A growth mindset also means separating effort from outcome. If you set a two-hour screen time limit but go over, focus on what you learned: Did a certain time of day trip you up? Was there a trigger you didn't expect? Treat each day as an experiment, not a test. Self-compassion is a powerful tool here. Instead of berating yourself for setbacks, use kind self-talk: "This is tough, but I'm learning what works for me." Research shows that self-compassion leads to better recovery and more consistent progress than self-criticism. Place a reminder somewhere you'll see it often. Expect discomfort. Growth is uncomfortable, especially when you're breaking old habits. When you feel the urge to check your phone, remind yourself: "This is what growth feels like." The urge is not a sign of failure, but a sign of change. Finally, remember that a growth mindset is not about ignoring challenges or pretending change is easy. It's about believing you can learn the skills you need, even if it takes time and repeated effort. Each setback is information, not a final judgment. To deepen your practice, notice the language you use about your progress. Are you describing setbacks as permanent or as part of the learning process? When you journal or reflect, focus on what you did to adapt, not just what went wrong. Over time, these reflections will build evidence that you can improve, even when progress is slow. If you find yourself stuck in a fixed mindset loop, pause and ask, "What would I say to a friend in this situation?" Often, we are kinder and more constructive with others than with ourselves. Borrow that supportive language and apply it to your own journey. This habit can gradually shift your internal dialogue. You can also use visualization: picture yourself succeeding at a screen time goal after several attempts, not on the first try. Imagine what you might learn from each attempt. This mental rehearsal prepares you to handle setbacks with curiosity instead of frustration. When you celebrate effort, make it specific. Instead of just saying "I tried," write down exactly what you did: "I put my phone in another room for 30 minutes," or "I noticed my urge to scroll and paused before acting." These details will help you recognize patterns and

reinforce your growth mindset. As you continue, remember that growth is a process, not a destination. Each day is a new opportunity to practice, learn, and adjust. Over time, your mindset will become more flexible, and your screen time habits will reflect your ongoing commitment to improvement.

What this module changes

You have a clear understanding of the concept of a growth mindset and how it can help you overcome self-doubt and fear of failure around screen time control. You know how to apply specific strategies to reframe setbacks, practice self-compassion, and turn obstacles into learning opportunities. You are able to identify fixed mindset patterns in your self-talk, actively reframe them, and use daily reflections and feedback to reinforce your progress. You can separate effort from outcome, celebrate learning, and approach each screen time challenge as a skill-building opportunity.

Worked example

Let's say Marcus has always struggled with evening phone use. He tells himself, "I'm just not disciplined enough" and "I'm addicted to my phone." These fixed mindset statements make him feel helpless. Marcus decides to develop a growth mindset about his evening screen time. He writes down three things he's afraid of failing at: sticking to his 8 PM phone cutoff, resisting the urge to check work emails before bed, and reading instead of scrolling. He reframes these: "I'm learning what evening routine helps me wind down without my phone," "I'm discovering what triggers my work email checking and how to address those needs differently," and "I'm building a new habit of reading, which takes time to feel natural." He creates a self-compassion phrase: "I'm learning to manage my evenings differently. Each night gives me information about what works." He writes this on a note card and places it on his nightstand. On Monday, Marcus puts his phone in the kitchen at 8 PM. By 8:30 PM, he's retrieved it three times. Instead of thinking, "I failed," he asks, "What did I learn?" He realizes he kept thinking of things he needed to check - a text he wanted to send, a calendar item, tomorrow's weather. On Tuesday, he spends five minutes before 8 PM handling these items, then puts his phone away. He only retrieves it once. On Wednesday, Marcus succeeds in leaving his phone in the kitchen all evening. On Thursday, after a stressful day, he scrolls until 10 PM. His fixed mindset voice says, "See? You can't do this." He catches this thought and uses his self-compassion phrase. He asks, "What triggered this?" He realizes that stress makes him seek distraction. On Friday, he plans a different stress response: a walk after dinner. After one week, Marcus reviews his progress. He didn't hit his 8 PM cutoff every night, but he learned that pre-8 PM preparation helps, stress is a trigger, and having a specific alternative activity (reading a physical book he enjoys) makes a difference. He adjusts his approach: he'll do a five-minute phone wrap-up at 7:55 PM and

keep his book on the couch where he usually scrolls. Marcus celebrates three efforts from the week: putting his phone in the kitchen even when it felt uncomfortable, catching his fixed mindset thought on Thursday and reframing it, and identifying stress as a trigger so he could plan differently. He's learning that managing his evening phone use is a skill he's developing, not a test of his character he's failing. To deepen his growth mindset, Marcus also asks his partner for feedback: "Have you noticed any changes in my evening phone use?" His partner notes that Marcus seems more present at dinner, even on nights he struggles. Marcus uses this feedback to reinforce his progress and set a new experiment for the following week: inviting his partner to join him in a phone-free activity after dinner.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- List three fixed mindset statements you've had about your screen time (e.g., "I always fail at this," "I'm just not disciplined"). Next to each, write a growth mindset alternative (e.g., "I'm learning what works for me").
- Pinpoint one area of your screen time routine where you feel most discouraged or stuck. Write down why this area feels challenging and what you wish you could change.
- Identify three specific fears related to failing at screen time management. For each, write a sentence that reframes the fear as a learning opportunity (e.g., "If I go over my limit, I'll discover what triggers me").
- Craft a self-compassion phrase you'll use when you slip up (e.g., "I'm learning; each setback is data"). Put this phrase on a sticky note somewhere visible (mirror, phone case, computer monitor).
- Take one deliberate risk today that nudges you out of your comfort zone with screen time. Examples: leave your phone in another room during dinner, uninstall an app for 24 hours, or share your goal with a friend.
- At the end of each day this week, jot down one thing you learned about your screen time patterns. Focus on discoveries, not just successes or failures.
- Each week, celebrate three efforts you made to manage your screen time, regardless of the result. Write them down and reflect on what made them possible.
- Ask a trusted friend or family member for honest feedback: "Have you noticed any changes in my screen habits or focus?" Listen without defending yourself, and ask what progress would look like to them.
- Notice when you encounter a fixed mindset trigger (a situation that makes you want to give up). Write down the situation and what you'll say to yourself next time it happens.

- Do a weekly review: What worked? What didn't? What's one small experiment you can try next week based on what you've learned?
- When you face an obstacle (e.g., using your phone as an alarm and getting sucked into social media first thing), ask, "What does this reveal about my habits?" Brainstorm one adjustment to test.
- Recall three skills you once struggled with but now handle well (e.g., driving, cooking, public speaking). Write them down as proof that you can learn new habits, including screen time management.
- Practice visualizing yourself handling a setback with curiosity instead of frustration. Imagine what you might say to yourself, and write down one supportive phrase to use next time.

Common mistakes at this step

- Trying to eliminate all fear or doubt before acting. Fix: Acknowledge your fear, then take a small step anyway.
- Waiting until you feel confident or certain before experimenting with new screen time strategies. Fix: Start with imperfect action and adjust as you learn.
- Responding to setbacks with harsh self-criticism. Fix: Use your self-compassion phrase immediately after a slip to break the shame cycle.
- Measuring your progress only by outcomes (e.g., hours reduced), not by effort or learning. Fix: Track and celebrate effort and insights, not just results.

Before you move on

✓ Have I written down three fixed mindset statements and reframed them with growth mindset alternatives?

✓ Did I identify one area of my screen time routine that feels most challenging and write down why?

✓ Have I listed three fears about screen time failure and reframed each as a learning opportunity?

✓ Is my self-compassion phrase visible somewhere I'll see it when I slip up?

✓ Did I take at least one small risk this week that challenged my comfort zone with screen time?

✓ Have I recorded at least one insight about my screen time patterns each day this week?

✓ Have I celebrated three efforts I made this week, regardless of the outcome?

✓ Did I seek feedback from someone I trust about changes in my screen time or focus?

- ✓ Have I identified a fixed mindset trigger and planned what to say to myself when it appears?
- ✓ Did I complete a weekly review and set a new experiment or adjustment for next week?
- ✓ Have I reflected on a past skill I learned with practice, and used that as motivation for screen time change?
- ✓ Did I use visualization or supportive self-talk when I faced a setback this week?

Module 14. Building Resilience

Screen time setbacks, emotional dips, and motivation slumps are a normal part of changing digital habits. Building resilience means you respond to these challenges with practical recovery steps, not self-blame or avoidance. This module gives you concrete tools to recover quickly from lapses, use setbacks as learning opportunities, and keep making progress toward your goals - even when things feel slow, uneven, or discouraging. Start by reframing setbacks as valuable feedback, not evidence of failure. When you exceed your screen time budget or reinstall an app you meant to avoid, pause and ask, "What was different about today?" Focus on specific, observable factors - such as poor sleep, skipped meals, or unexpected stressors - rather than blaming your character or willpower. Write down the circumstances factually, without judgment. This shift from self-criticism to curiosity is the foundation of resilience and helps you break the cycle of shame and avoidance. Design a bounce-back protocol before you need it. Decide in advance what you'll do the day after a setback: review your journal, identify one trigger, choose one small action (such as a 10-minute walk or a phone-free hour), and remind yourself of a previous win. Write this protocol on a card or digital note and keep it visible. When you're feeling defeated, you won't have the energy to invent a plan - having it ready makes recovery much easier and automatic. Practice emotional agility by naming difficult feelings as they arise. When you feel frustrated, ashamed, or hopeless about your screen habits, say or write, "I'm feeling ____, and that's okay." Remind yourself that feelings pass and do not define your long-term progress. Research shows that labeling emotions reduces their intensity and helps you act thoughtfully instead of reactively. Give yourself permission to feel bad without numbing with screens or abandoning your goals. If you notice yourself spiraling into negative thoughts, pause and repeat your self-compassion script aloud or in writing. Assemble a resilience toolkit - a collection of resources you can use when motivation is low or emotions are high. Include: three people you can contact for encouragement, five non-screen activities that boost your mood (even a little), screenshots or notes of past progress, a playlist that energizes or calms you, and a one-page summary of your reasons for changing your screen habits. Review and update your toolkit monthly to keep it fresh and relevant. Practice accessing your toolkit during calm moments so it's second nature when you need it. Begin a resilience log, separate from your main journal. Each time you recover from a setback, try a new strategy, or persist despite discouragement, record it. Over time, this log becomes concrete evidence of your growing skill at handling difficulty. When you feel stuck, reading your own record of bounce-backs can renew your confidence and motivation. Note not just big recoveries, but also small moments where you chose to get back on track. Schedule regular resilience check-ins, every two weeks, separate from your weekly progress reviews. Ask yourself: How quickly did I recover from my last lapse? What helped me get back on track? What made it harder? Am I treating myself as kindly as I would treat a friend in the same situation? Use your answers to adjust your bounce-back protocol so it reflects what actually works for you. Even if you haven't had a major setback, use the

check-in to notice smaller improvements or new challenges. Make self-compassion a daily practice, not just a reaction to setbacks. Spend two minutes each morning or evening acknowledging something difficult about managing screen time and offering yourself understanding. For example: "Changing habits is hard, and I'm doing my best. It's okay that this takes time." Consistent self-compassion reduces the shame that can trigger avoidance and giving up, and it supports long-term change. Set a daily reminder if needed. Celebrate resilience itself, not just perfect days or big milestones. When you notice you're recovering from setbacks faster, trying new strategies, or feeling less derailed by a bad day, acknowledge this growth explicitly. Write it in your journal, share it with your support network, or simply pause and say, "I'm getting better at bouncing back." This reinforces the skill you're building and makes it more likely you'll keep practicing it. Remember, resilience is measured by your ability to recover, not by the absence of setbacks. Update your resilience toolkit monthly. Remove resources that no longer help and add new ones you've discovered. This keeps your toolkit practical and ensures you always have relevant options when you need support. Ask yourself which tools you actually used and which could be replaced or refreshed. Share examples of resilience with your support network each week. Instead of waiting to share only perfect days, let others know when you recover from a setback or try a new approach. This normalizes ups and downs and strengthens your sense of connection and support. If you feel awkward, use a prepared script or send a short message - consistency matters more than perfection. If you find yourself stuck in self-criticism after a lapse, immediately open your resilience log and read three past examples of recovery. Use your own history as proof that setbacks are temporary and you have the skills to get back on track. This practice interrupts negative spirals and grounds you in evidence-based self-trust. If needed, repeat your self-compassion script or reach out to a support contact. Resilience is not about eliminating setbacks, but about shortening your recovery time and learning from each experience. Over time, you'll notice that lapses become less frequent, less disruptive, and less discouraging. This is the true foundation of sustainable screen time change. Your goal is to build a system that supports you through ups and downs, so you never feel like you have to start over.

What this module changes

The reader has built a concrete, personalized system for recovering quickly from screen time setbacks, reframing failures as learning opportunities, and maintaining steady progress through emotional ups and downs without abandoning their goals.

Worked example

Marcus. Marcus had been following his screen time plan successfully for three weeks when he had a terrible day at work, came home, and spent four hours watching videos and scrolling social media - double his daily budget. He woke up the next morning feeling ashamed and tempted to give up entirely. Instead of giving up, Marcus pulled out his

bounce-back protocol card. He reviewed his journal from the previous day and identified the specific factor: he had skipped lunch due to back-to-back meetings and was exhausted and hungry when he got home. For his small action, he decided to eat a proper dinner and set just one phone-free hour that evening. He reminded himself of his past win: 21 consecutive days of meeting his goals. He texted his accountability partner: 'Had a rough day yesterday, back on track today.' That evening, he spent 2.5 hours on screens - not perfect, but a clear recovery. By the end of the week, he was back to his 2-hour budget. In his resilience log, he wrote: 'Recovered from 4-hour lapse in 2 days by using protocol instead of giving up.' One month later, when he had another difficult day and went to 3 hours of screen time, he recovered in less than 24 hours and noted in his check-in: 'I'm getting faster at bouncing back - this time I didn't even consider quitting.'

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- After your next screen time lapse, write down the circumstances factually - note any specific factors (e.g., poor sleep, skipped meal, unexpected stress) that contributed, and avoid judgmental language.
- Draft a bounce-back protocol on a card or digital note: include reviewing your journal, identifying one trigger, choosing a small recovery action for the next day, and recalling a past win. Place this protocol somewhere visible.
- Practice emotional agility by naming difficult feelings aloud or in writing when they arise (e.g., "I'm feeling frustrated about yesterday's screen time, and that's okay"), and remind yourself the feeling will pass.
- Build a resilience toolkit with five elements: three people to contact for encouragement, five non-screen mood-boosting activities, screenshots or notes of past progress, a motivating or calming playlist, and a written reminder of your reasons for change.
- Start a resilience log where you record each time you recover from a setback, try a new strategy, or persist despite discouragement. Review this log when you need evidence of your progress.
- Schedule a resilience check-in every two weeks. Ask: How quickly did I recover from my last setback? What helped? What made it harder? Am I treating myself as kindly as I would a friend?
- Update your bounce-back protocol after each resilience check-in, adding or removing actions based on what actually helped you recover.
- Practice daily self-compassion for two minutes, even on good days. Acknowledge something difficult about managing screen time and offer yourself understanding.

- When you notice growth in resilience - such as faster recovery or willingness to try new strategies - write it down in your journal or resilience log.
- Update your resilience toolkit monthly, removing items that are no longer helpful and adding new resources you've discovered.
- Share one example of resilience (not just success) with your support network each week, such as recovering from a setback or trying a new approach.
- If self-criticism arises after a lapse, immediately read three past examples from your resilience log to remind yourself of your ability to recover.
- Practice accessing your resilience toolkit during calm moments so you are familiar with it before you need it most.
- Set a recurring calendar reminder for your resilience check-in and toolkit update to ensure these steps become habits.

Common mistakes at this step

- Treating every setback as equally catastrophic instead of distinguishing between a single difficult day and a recurring pattern. Fix: Use your bounce-back protocol for isolated lapses and your resilience check-in to spot patterns needing bigger changes.
- Waiting for motivation to recover from a setback instead of following your protocol regardless of how you feel. Fix: Remind yourself the protocol is designed for low-motivation moments - follow it step-by-step even if you feel discouraged.
- Building a resilience toolkit but never practicing using it when emotions run high. Fix: Rehearse accessing your toolkit during calm moments, and ask your support network to prompt you to use it if they notice you're struggling.
- Comparing your resilience or recovery speed to others' instead of tracking your own improvement. Fix: Review your own resilience log and check-ins to measure progress - your journey is unique.

Before you move on

✓ Have I written down the circumstances of my last screen time lapse using only factual, non-judgmental language?

✓ Do I have a bounce-back protocol written down and placed where I can access it easily after a setback?

✓ Have I named a difficult emotion about my screen time at least once this week, without trying to fix or avoid it immediately?

- ✓ Does my resilience toolkit include all five elements (contacts, activities, past progress, playlist, written reminder of my why)?
- ✓ Have I started a resilience log and recorded at least one example of recovery or trying a new strategy?
- ✓ Did I complete a resilience check-in in the last two weeks, reflecting on recovery speed and what helped or hindered me?
- ✓ Have I practiced daily self-compassion at least four times this week, including on days without setbacks?
- ✓ Did I use my bounce-back protocol within 24 hours of my last setback?
- ✓ Have I explicitly celebrated or acknowledged an instance of resilience (not just a perfect day) in the past week?
- ✓ Have I updated my resilience toolkit in the past month to keep it current and practical?
- ✓ Can I identify at least two ways my resilience has improved since starting this process (e.g., faster recovery, less self-criticism, more experimentation)?
- ✓ Have I shared an example of resilience with my support network in the last week?
- ✓ Have I rehearsed using my resilience toolkit during a calm moment so I know how to access it when needed?
- ✓ Did I set a calendar reminder for my next resilience check-in and toolkit update?

Module 15. Creating a Maintenance Plan

A maintenance plan is your written system for protecting screen time habits after the first weeks of change. It names your triggers, assigns specific tasks, and prepares you to recover from slips without losing momentum. Start by writing your screen time goals for the next three to six months. State exactly what you will maintain: 'No screens after 9pm on weeknights,' 'Limit streaming to two episodes per evening,' or 'Keep total phone time under ninety minutes daily.' Precision lets you measure success and catch drift early. Next, list every situation, mood, or environment that has pushed you past your limits before. Include stress at work, social events, travel, boredom, loneliness, fatigue, certain times of day, or specific apps. The more honest this list, the more useful your plan. Write each trigger in a single sentence so you can spot patterns. For each trigger, brainstorm at least two small, concrete actions you can take to prevent or manage it. If boredom leads to scrolling, keep a book or puzzle within arm's reach. If notifications break your focus, schedule Do Not Disturb hours. If evening fatigue weakens your resolve, charge your phone outside your bedroom. Make every action small enough to do on your worst day. Break your maintenance plan into daily and weekly tasks. Daily tasks might include logging your screen time each night, reading for ten minutes before bed, or checking your phone's app timer at dinner. Weekly tasks could be reviewing your screen time stats on Sunday morning, updating your action list, or texting your accountability partner. Assign each task a specific day and time - vague intentions fail. Choose a tracking method you will actually open. Options include a digital calendar, a paper planner, a habit-tracking app, or a simple spreadsheet. Consistency matters more than the tool. Enter your maintenance tasks for the next four weeks with clear times, and set reminders if you need them. Set up a recurring weekly check-in with yourself. Block fifteen to thirty minutes every week to review your progress, note any slips, and adjust your plan. Document what worked and where you struggled in a log or journal. This review catches small problems before they grow and shows you which strategies deliver results. Prepare for setbacks by creating a relapse protocol. Write down three concrete steps you will take if you slip back into old habits. Examples: acknowledge the slip without judgment, review your triggers and adjust your plan, reach out to your accountability partner within twenty-four hours. Having a written protocol makes recovery faster and less emotional. Identify at least one person you trust for accountability. This could be a friend, family member, or colleague who respects your goals. Ask them to check in with you monthly - by text, call, or coffee - and schedule your first update now. Accountability increases your chances of sticking to your plan, especially when motivation dips or life gets chaotic. Create a motivational reminder to keep your goals visible during tough moments. Write a note and stick it on your device, schedule a recurring message to yourself, or use a photo that represents your reason for changing. Place this reminder where you will see it during your most vulnerable times - on your phone case, your bathroom mirror, or your laptop screen. Schedule a monthly review of your maintenance plan. At the end of each month, reflect on what worked, what needs to change, and what new challenges appeared. Update your plan

based on this review. A living plan adapts to your real life and stays relevant as your circumstances and challenges evolve. Document your progress in a consistent format. Each week, write a short summary: total screen time, biggest win, toughest challenge, and one adjustment for next week. Over time, this log reveals patterns you cannot see day-to-day and proves your progress when motivation fades. Test your plan by walking through a typical week in your mind. Imagine a stressful workday, a boring evening, and a social weekend. Does your plan give you clear actions for each scenario? If not, add them now. A good maintenance plan answers the question 'What do I do when...' for every trigger you listed. Finally, prepare for life changes that will test your habits. Travel, job changes, relationship shifts, and seasonal rhythms all affect screen time. When you know a disruption is coming, update your plan two weeks in advance. Add temporary actions, adjust your check-in schedule, and warn your accountability partner. Proactive planning prevents relapse during transitions. By following these steps, you build a maintenance plan that supports your screen time goals, adapts to real-world challenges, and helps you sustain progress long-term. This plan is not a rigid contract - it is a toolkit you refine as you learn what works for you.

What this module changes

By the end of this module you will have completed the matching workbook page and produced something you can actually use.

Worked example

Maria wants to maintain her new screen time habits after reducing her daily phone use. Her specific goal: 'Keep total phone screen time under two hours per day for the next three months.' She identifies three triggers: 1) Checking her phone out of boredom during breaks at work, 2) Using her phone in bed before sleep, 3) Getting distracted by notifications during focused work. For each trigger, Maria lists actions: 1) Keep a book and a crossword puzzle in her desk drawer, and set a ten-minute timer when she feels bored instead of reaching for her phone. 2) Charge her phone in the kitchen starting at 9pm every night and set an alarm on a separate device in her bedroom. 3) Turn off non-essential notifications and set her phone to Do Not Disturb during work hours from 9am to 12pm and 2pm to 5pm. Her daily tasks: Log screen time each night at 9pm using her phone's built-in tracker, and read for ten minutes before bed. Her weekly task: Review her screen time stats every Sunday at 10am and write a short summary of what worked and what did not in her journal. She uses a habit tracking app to monitor her daily and weekly tasks. She schedules her weekly check-in for Sunday evenings at 8pm and sets a recurring reminder. Her relapse protocol: 1) Acknowledge the slip without judgment by writing 'I slipped on [date] and here is what happened,' 2) Review her triggers and adjust her plan by adding a new action or changing the timing of an existing one, 3) Text her accountability partner Jen within twenty-four hours

for support. Maria asks her friend Jen to be her accountability partner and schedules a monthly coffee check-in on the first Saturday of each month. She writes a motivational note - 'Remember why you started: more time for reading and better sleep' - and sticks it on the back of her phone case. She sets her next plan review for one month from today and adds a reminder in her calendar. During her first weekly review, Maria notices her average screen time was two and a half hours per day. She reviews her log and sees she spent extra time on social media during lunch breaks at work. She adjusts her plan: she will leave her phone in her bag during lunch and bring a magazine instead. She texts Jen about the new strategy and asks Jen to check in mid-month to see how it is going. At her monthly review, Maria sees her average screen time dropped to one hour and fifty minutes per day. The lunch break adjustment worked. However, she struggled on Friday nights when she was tired. She adds a new action: on Fridays, she will set a thirty-minute timer for social media after dinner and stop when it rings. She updates her worksheet and shares the change with Jen at their coffee meeting.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Write down your primary screen time goals for the next three to six months. Make each goal specific, measurable, and time-bound so you can track whether you are meeting it.
- Reflect on your past experiences and list at least three situations, triggers, or moods that have caused you to exceed your screen time limits. Be honest and specific.
- For each trigger you listed, brainstorm at least two concrete, small actions you could take to address or avoid it. Write these actions next to each trigger in your plan.
- Break your maintenance plan into daily and weekly tasks. Examples: 'Log screen time every evening at 9pm,' 'Read for ten minutes before bed,' 'Review screen time stats each Sunday at 10am,' or 'Text accountability partner every Friday.'
- Choose a tracking method - digital calendar, paper planner, habit app, or spreadsheet - that you are confident you will use consistently. Test it for one week before committing.
- Enter your daily and weekly maintenance tasks into your chosen tracker or calendar for the next four weeks, assigning specific days and times to each task.
- Set up a recurring weekly check-in with yourself to review your progress, note any slips, and adjust your plan as needed. Block out fifteen to thirty minutes in your calendar for this review.
- Document your weekly progress in a log or journal, noting both successes and areas where you struggled. Use this record to spot patterns and measure improvement over time.

- Create a relapse protocol by writing down three specific steps you will take if you notice yourself slipping back into old habits. Keep this protocol accessible and easy to follow.
- Identify at least one accountability partner and ask them to check in with you monthly. Schedule your first update together and add it to both calendars.
- Prepare a motivational note, image, or reminder and place it somewhere you will see it during moments of temptation - on your phone case, your bathroom mirror, or your laptop.
- Schedule a monthly review of your maintenance plan. At the end of each month, update your plan based on what worked and what did not, and adjust your tasks and strategies accordingly.

Common mistakes at this step

- Mistake: Setting vague goals like 'use my phone less' or 'be better with screens.' Fix: Rewrite your goal to be specific, measurable, and time-bound, such as 'Limit total phone use to two hours per day for the next three months' or 'No screens after 9pm on weeknights.'
- Mistake: Ignoring personal triggers and relying only on generic advice from articles or friends. Fix: List your actual triggers from your daily life - specific apps, times of day, moods, or situations - and tailor your action steps to address them directly.
- Mistake: Adding too many maintenance tasks at once, leading to overwhelm and inconsistency within the first week. Fix: Prioritize one to two key actions per trigger and focus on building consistency for two weeks before adding more tasks.
- Mistake: Forgetting to assign specific days and times for maintenance tasks, so they never happen. Fix: Schedule every task in your calendar or tracker with clear timing, such as 'Sunday 10am: review screen time stats' or 'Every evening at 9pm: log screen time.'

Before you move on

✓ Have you written down at least one specific, measurable, and time-bound screen time goal for the next three to six months?

✓ Can you list at least three personal triggers, situations, or moods that challenge your screen time limits?

✓ Did you brainstorm at least two actionable steps for each trigger you identified?

✓ Are all your maintenance tasks assigned to specific days and times in your tracker or calendar?

✓ Is your chosen tracking method something you will realistically open and use every week?

✓ Have you scheduled a recurring weekly check-in and blocked out time for it in your calendar?

- ✓ Are you documenting your progress and noting both wins and struggles each week in a log or journal?
- ✓ Do you have a clear, written relapse protocol with three steps to follow after a slip?
- ✓ Have you identified an accountability partner and scheduled your first check-in with them?
- ✓ Did you prepare a motivational note or reminder and put it somewhere visible during your most vulnerable times?
- ✓ Is your next monthly maintenance plan review scheduled on your calendar with a reminder set?
- ✓ Does your plan include specific actions for each of your identified triggers, so you know what to do when they arise?

Module 16. Sustaining Progress and Achieving Goals

Day fifteen is where most screen-time attempts quietly end, and not because the rules stopped working. They end because the rules stop being visible: the tracker is full, the fortnight is over, the fridge card has been there long enough to become wallpaper, and nothing is asking the question any more. Maintenance is therefore not willpower and not motivation. It is a re-check on a date you have already written down. Put one in the calendar for fourteen days after you finish the tracker, and give it exactly five minutes: read the "what broke it" column, keep the rules that held without effort, and rebuild the one that broke three times for the same reason. Rebuilding means changing the rule, not trying harder at it - a Friday hard stop of 23:00 that holds beats a 21:45 one you lose every week. Then expect drift, and expect it to arrive attached to an event rather than to a failure of character. A new phone resets your home screen and puts the feeds back on page one. A holiday suspends the hard stop and nobody reinstates it. A new job moves your evening by ninety minutes and the scroll chair becomes the only place you sit. None of those is a relapse; each is a room or a device that changed underneath a rule written for the old one. The fix is the same every time: re-run the two or three rules the event broke, from the quick-start, in the order the quick-start gives them. You are not starting over, because the other five never stopped. That is the whole reason this is seven separate rules and not one programme. Your goals - the ones screen time was blocking - come back into view when the rules hold for thirty consecutive days. Not because thirty is magic, but because thirty days is long enough for you to notice what you did with the time you got back. You wrote four chapters, or you called your sister twice a week, or you slept past 06:00 without an alarm. Those outcomes are not aspirations any more; they are facts you can point to. Sustaining progress means protecting those facts from the next disruption. Write down the three outcomes you got in the first thirty days, and write down which rule made each one possible. When drift happens - and it will - you know exactly which rule to reinstate first, because you know which outcome you are about to lose. The second maintenance check happens sixty days after the first one. Same five minutes, same process: read the tracker, keep what held, rebuild what broke. If the same rule broke both times, that rule is wrong for your life. Replace it with a different boundary that achieves the same screen-time reduction. A "no phone in the bedroom" rule that fails twice becomes "phone charges in the kitchen starting at 22:30" or "phone goes in a timed lockbox at 22:00." The goal is the same; the method is now one you can actually follow. After the sixty-day check, schedule quarterly reviews - one every ninety days. These are ten-minute sessions where you audit all seven rules and check whether your environment has changed in ways that require rule updates. New job, new relationship, new living situation, new phone, new app that everyone at work uses - each of these can silently break a rule that was working. The quarterly review catches the break before it becomes a month-long drift. Your long-term goals - the ones that take six months or a year - stay on track when you tie them directly to the screen time you are protecting. If your goal

is to finish a certification, and you need four hours a week to study, then you need to know which screen-time rule is giving you those four hours. When that rule breaks, your study time disappears, and the certification stalls. The quarterly review is where you check that the rule is still delivering the hours your goal requires. Expect that some rules will become invisible because they worked. A rule you followed for ninety days without breaking it once is now a habit, and habits do not require tracking. When a rule becomes invisible, you can stop checking it at the quarterly review. That frees up attention for the one or two rules that are still hard, or for new rules you need because your goals have grown. The maintenance check is also where you catch rule interference - when two rules that worked separately start conflicting because your life changed. Your "no phone during meals" rule and your "check work email by 18:00" rule both held for weeks, but then your dinner time moved to 17:30 and now you are choosing between the rules every night. The fix is not to break one rule; the fix is to move the email check to 17:00 or the dinner to 18:00. Rule interference is not failure; it is a scheduling problem you solve by adjusting one boundary. You will also notice goal drift - when the outcome you wanted in month one is not the outcome you want in month six. You started tracking screen time to write a book, and now the book is done and you want to learn guitar. The screen-time rules that gave you writing time may not give you practice time, because writing happened at night and practice needs to happen before work. At your quarterly review, you re-map your rules to your new goal: keep the rules that protect morning time, adjust or drop the rules that only protected evening time. Your screen-time reduction stays the same; the hours just move to where your current goal needs them. Finally, maintenance is where you decide whether a goal is still worth the screen time it costs. You protected four hours a week to study for a certification, and six months later you realize you do not want that certification any more. The quarterly review is where you acknowledge that and redirect those four hours to a goal you do want, or let them become free time. Sustaining progress does not mean sustaining every goal forever; it means keeping the screen-time rules that give you the hours to work on the goals that still matter.

What this module changes

The reader has identified common obstacles and developed a plan to overcome them.

Worked example

Marcus had been following his screen-time rules for thirty days and had written three chapters of a book he had been planning for two years. His tracker showed that his "no phone after 21:00" rule had held every night except Fridays, when he broke it six times out of eight. At his fourteen-day maintenance check, Marcus read the "what broke it" column and saw the same reason every Friday: "friends texted about weekend plans and I replied, then opened Instagram." He realized the 21:00 hard stop was wrong for his Friday social life. Instead of trying harder, he changed the rule to "no phone after 22:30 on Fridays, 21:00

all other nights." The new rule held for the next sixty days without a single break. Marcus wrote down his three outcomes from the first thirty days: "wrote three chapters," "read two books," "called mom every Sunday." Next to "wrote three chapters," he wrote "no phone after 21:00 rule." Next to "read two books," he wrote "no phone in bedroom rule." Next to "called mom every Sunday," he wrote "Sunday morning phone-free block rule." When Marcus got a new phone sixty days later, the setup wizard put Instagram and email back on his home screen, and he stopped writing. At his sixty-day maintenance check, he saw that his "wrote three chapters" outcome had disappeared. He looked at which rule made that outcome possible - "no phone after 21:00" - and realized the new phone had broken it by making the apps visible again. He re-ran the home screen rule from the quick-start (move distracting apps to a folder on page three), and his writing time came back the same week. At his ninety-day quarterly review, Marcus checked all seven rules. Six were still holding. The "no social media before 10:00" rule had broken four times in the past month because his new job started at 08:00 instead of 09:00, and he was checking Twitter during his new commute. He changed the rule to "no social media before 11:00" to match his new schedule. He also noticed that his "no phone in bedroom" rule had held for ninety consecutive days without a single break - it was now a habit. He removed it from his quarterly audit list and noted the date it became automatic: March 15. He added a new rule: "no phone during lunch," because his book goal had grown and now required an extra two hours per week. At his 180-day quarterly review, Marcus noticed rule interference: his "no phone during meals" rule and his "check work email by 18:00" rule had both held for months, but his dinner time had moved to 17:30 and now he was choosing between the rules every night. He moved his email check to 17:00 so both rules could hold. He also checked his long-term goals and realized he no longer wanted to finish the certification he had been protecting two hours a week for - he wanted to start a podcast instead. He redirected those two hours to podcast planning and recording. Marcus's book was finished six months later, and five of his original seven rules were still running. The two he had replaced were working better than the originals ever did.

Names and figures in worked examples are illustrative composites, not client records.

Steps

- Schedule your first maintenance check for exactly fourteen days after you finish your current tracker. Put it in your calendar with a five-minute time block and the note "Read what-broke-it column, keep what held, rebuild what broke."
- At the fourteen-day check, read your tracker's "what broke it" column and identify any rule that broke three or more times for the same reason. That rule needs to be changed, not repeated - write down the new version of the rule that will be easier to follow in your actual life.

- Rebuild one broken rule by making it easier to follow, not by trying harder. If a 21:45 hard stop failed every Friday, change it to 23:00. If "no phone in bedroom" failed, change it to "phone charges in kitchen starting at 22:30." Test the new version for the next fourteen days.
- Write down the three concrete outcomes you achieved in your first thirty days (e.g., "wrote four chapters," "called sister twice a week," "slept past 06:00 without alarm"). Next to each outcome, write which screen-time rule made it possible. Keep this list where you will see it at your next maintenance check.
- Schedule your second maintenance check for sixty days after the first one. Use the same five-minute process: read the tracker, keep what held, rebuild what broke. If the same rule broke at both checks, replace it entirely with a different boundary that achieves the same screen-time reduction - do not try the same rule a third time.
- Schedule quarterly reviews (one every ninety days) in your calendar starting after your sixty-day check. These are ten-minute sessions where you audit all seven rules and check whether your environment has changed (new job, new phone, new living situation, new app everyone at work uses). Write down what changed and which rules it affected.
- At each quarterly review, check that your screen-time rules are still delivering the hours your long-term goals require. If your goal needs four hours a week and you are only getting two, identify which rule broke and reinstate it. If your goal changed, re-map your rules to protect the hours your new goal needs.
- When drift happens - new phone resets your home screen, holiday suspends your hard stop, new job moves your evening - re-run the two or three rules the event broke, from the quick-start, in the order the quick-start gives them. Write down the date you restarted each rule so you can track whether it holds for the next thirty days.
- Identify any rule you have followed for ninety consecutive days without breaking it once. That rule is now a habit and no longer needs to be checked at quarterly reviews. Remove it from your audit list and note the date it became automatic - this tells you how long new rules take to stick in your life.
- Tie each long-term goal (certification, fitness milestone, creative project) to the specific screen-time rule that gives you the hours to work on it. Write this connection down in your tracker or on your quarterly review worksheet so you know which rule to prioritize when time gets tight or when you need to choose between two goals.
- Check for rule interference at each maintenance session - when two rules that worked separately start conflicting because your schedule changed. If your "no phone during meals" rule and your "check work email by 18:00" rule both held for weeks but now conflict because dinner moved to 17:30, adjust one boundary (move email check to 17:00 or dinner to 18:00) so both rules can hold.

- When a rule fails twice in a row at maintenance checks, do not try it a third time. Replace it with a different method that achieves the same screen-time boundary but fits your actual schedule and environment. Write down what you are replacing and why, so you can see patterns in what works and what does not work for your life.
- At your quarterly review, decide whether each long-term goal is still worth the screen time it costs. If you protected four hours a week for a certification you no longer want, acknowledge that and redirect those hours to a goal you do want, or let them become free time. Sustaining progress means keeping the rules that serve your current goals, not every goal you ever had.

Common mistakes at this step

- Skipping maintenance checks because "everything is going fine," then discovering three months later that four of your seven rules stopped working weeks ago and you did not notice until the goals stalled. The check is not optional; it is the only way you catch drift before it costs you a month of progress.
- Treating a broken rule as a personal failure instead of as a signal that the rule needs to be changed. If a rule breaks twice for the same reason, the rule is wrong for your life - replace it with a different boundary that achieves the same screen-time reduction but fits your actual schedule and environment.
- Scheduling maintenance checks but not writing down what you will do during them, so the check becomes a vague "look at my progress" session that produces no action. The five-minute or ten-minute time block must include the specific tasks: read tracker, identify broken rules, write new versions, schedule next check.
- Trying to reinstate a rule by "trying harder" instead of by changing your environment. If "no phone in bedroom" failed, the fix is not more willpower; the fix is a charging station in the kitchen or a timed lockbox. If "no social media before 10:00" failed because your commute changed, the fix is moving the boundary to 11:00, not trying to resist during the commute.

Before you move on

✓ I have scheduled my first maintenance check for fourteen days after finishing my tracker, with a five-minute time block and a note about what to do.

✓ I have identified any rule that broke three or more times for the same reason in my tracker, and I have written down the new version of that rule that will be easier to follow.

✓ I have written down the three concrete outcomes I achieved in my first thirty days and identified which screen-time rule made each outcome possible, and I have kept this list where I will see it at my next maintenance check.

- ✓ I have scheduled my second maintenance check for sixty days after the first one, using the same five-minute process.
- ✓ I have scheduled quarterly reviews (one every ninety days) in my calendar, with ten-minute time blocks for auditing all seven rules.
- ✓ I have checked that my screen-time rules are still delivering the hours my long-term goals require, and I have reinstated any rule that broke or re-mapped rules to match a new goal.
- ✓ I have identified any rule I have followed for ninety consecutive days without breaking it once, and I have removed it from my quarterly audit list and noted the date it became automatic.
- ✓ I have tied each long-term goal to the specific screen-time rule that gives me the hours to work on it, and I have written this connection down in my tracker or on my quarterly review worksheet.
- ✓ I have checked for rule interference at my last maintenance session - when two rules that worked separately started conflicting because my schedule changed - and I have adjusted one boundary so both rules can hold.
- ✓ When a rule has failed twice in a row at maintenance checks, I have replaced it with a different method instead of trying it a third time, and I have written down what I replaced and why.
- ✓ I have a plan for re-running broken rules (from the quick-start, in order) when drift happens due to a new phone, holiday, job, or living situation, and I have written down the date I restarted each rule.
- ✓ At my most recent quarterly review, I decided whether each long-term goal is still worth the screen time it costs, and I redirected hours from goals I no longer want to goals I do want or to free time.

Where to go next

Repeat the workbook cycle for each new situation you face. The tracker keeps the work visible.

Product questions go to the seller support address on your receipt. Billing, receipts, and refunds are handled by ClickBank.