

I would feel balanced and responsible. It is a form wellness.

I would be less likely to rely on my phone to be a cure - all for my boredom/sadness/depression/anger. I've noticed I go on it more when I need an escape from any negative emotions.

I wish I had your book six months ago... would have saved me five months of my life.

Be more at peace, feel more motivated to connect w/ hobbies, tangible arts.

Cellular

I'd feel connected to + a technical mastery of an amazing tool

NICE

Balance

I would feel more productive and healthy!

Good in many ways

Workbook

redesign your smartphone and reclaim your time

Good!!

amazing 📱!

Light is everywhere

Good, but I feel like I'd be bored, too

Powerful + omniscient

I cannot have one without the other

I would feel relieved ☺

That would create more piece of mind

PRODUCTIVE

I think I would feel totally free. Our phones are these incredible pieces of technology that help us with SO MUCH. Navigation, connection, photography, etc. If I could release the negative - I could just enjoy the device for what it is ☺

GREAT!!!

created by rachel herring



also more productive

but that shadow has been serving you!
what hurts you, blesses you.
darkness is your candle.
your boundaries are your quest.
you must have shadow and light source both.
listen, and lay your head under the tree of awe.

...rumi

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Everything about the smartphone is deliberate.

It is by design that the iPhone fits comfortably in hand and pocket. It is by design that the average cost of an iPhone 14 is \$749 and the average lifespan is two and a half years (Komando). It is by design that notifications are red and “silent” notifications vibrate. It is by design that the smartphone must be touched by your bare fingers to function properly. It connects users to more people, news, information, and entertainment than one could ever experience outside the cellphone, making instant gratification at our fingertips 24/7.

It is by design that you possibly have a love/hate relationship with the apps you spend the most time on and probably have a love/hate relationship with your phone too. Your smartphone is designed to be more saturated, more exciting, and more entertaining than the world outside it.

If you have ever struggled to create balance with your smartphone, know that it is not a simple willpower issue. It is a design issue.

.....

The Cellular Balance Workbook is a four-week, interactive guide to help you redesign your smartphone and reclaim your time.

You do not need to be a professional designer to redesign your smartphone. This workbook is for anyone who uses their smartphone instinctively, but would like to use it intentionally. Instinctive usage is reaching for the phone impulsively or unconsciously and intentional usage is consciously utilizing the phone as a tool.

I define creating balance with the smartphone as integrating the helpful and releasing the unhelpful aspects of it. We do this by creating boundaries with the smartphone through changes to the

design. What is helpful or unhelpful is specific to each individual, so the design changes should be customized by you.

No additional apps, software, or subscriptions need to be downloaded or purchased to redesign your phone. Each week you will make a series of changes to your smartphone and the way you use it (outlined on page 6).

Without the phone's pull on your attention, you can reclaim your time in a meaningful way.

Reclaiming your time is simply acting in alignment with your values. This could mean a myriad of things to different people, and I encourage you to ponder what it means to you. What would you like to have more of in your life? Is it something traditionally seen as productive such as reading or exercising? Or are you more interested in slowing down and resting? For me, it was a combination. I found that I couldn't put my phone down without having something to be enamored by, and I couldn't be enamored by something without putting my phone down—but more on this later.

This book was originally inspired by my personal struggle to create balance with my smartphone. The design changes I suggest are all changes I made to my phone as well.

That said, I still utilized participatory research methods to ensure that the book you're reading is useful and enjoyable for readers.

The content and design of this workbook were informed by insights gained through collaborative workshops. I conducted a five-day workshop with 20 participants and a 28-day workshop with seven participants to test the design changes and workbook. Before I could justify publishing this book, I had to know it would work for more people than just me. Countless ideas and stories were folded into the

content and design of this book. The *Cellular Balance Workbook* was made for and by people who have struggled to create balance with their phones. None of us work at Apple or consider ourselves “experts,” but all of us have direct, lived experiences that made this book what it is.

Since this book critiques the smartphone’s design, it is important to also discuss the design of the workbook. Let’s start with the most obvious design choice: it is a book. I chose this format because by setting your phone down and spending time in a book, you are already getting in the habit of spending less time on your phone. A book is also a one-time fee opposed to apps which utilize predatory subscriptions with monthly fees. And let’s be honest, you may forget about the subscription and end up paying much more than you would have for a book. The cover of the book is matte, in contrast to the sleek, glossy smartphone. The colors in the workbook clearly separate the weeks and are muted colors unlike our ultra-saturated phones. I also utilized a highly legible font, Capitulum 2, to ensure the book is easier to read for a variety of people. Since some neurodivergent people have larger handwriting, you’ll notice there is just white space for writing—no “college ruled” lines.

I encourage you to “interact” with the workbook instead of your phone as much as possible.

I hope you mark this book up. Break the spine. Take it with you and spill coffee on it. Its un-preciousness makes it precious. You writing in it, making it your own, and using it as a source of self-reflection is the true intention of this format. All white space in the book can be written in. Any of the poetry can be a writing prompt. Feel free to use the workbook and break it. I made it for me and the workshop participants—now you make it what you need.

Contemplation while reading the workbook is very important. The participants who reached their goals were very self-aware. They thought deeply about what their goals with their cellphones were and how they could customize the design changes to help them reach those goals.

I cannot overstate the importance of introspection during this process.

Accountability was also very helpful for the participants. It is recommended—not required—to find a friend or two to do the workbook with and make an accountability group. Then, check in with them throughout the month to keep each other accountable. When you finish the workbook, you can meet with your accountability group to discuss and celebrate.

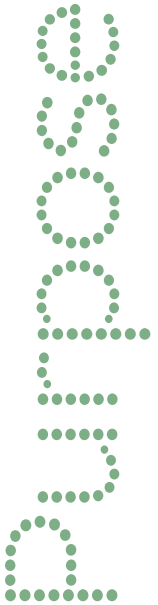
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Here is how it works: on Sundays, read the chapter and complete the Sunday check in. Monday through Saturday check ins should be completed at the end of that day or at the beginning of the following day. The check ins are designed to serve as a record of your experience and progress. They were not created to feel like a chore. That said, use them in a way that feels intuitive for you. If you miss a day here and there—it's no biggie. Keep your focus on progress, not perfection. All the questions can serve as prompts and inspiration. Take as much creative freedom as needed to enjoy this process.

Each week's challenge redesigns your phone to work for you—not against you. The challenges build on the week prior to it. For instance:

- **Week one:** Set up Downtime—an existing iPhone setting that can be turned on so chosen apps work during selected times of day. Set up Do Not Disturb—an existing iPhone setting to silence notifications during chosen times of day
- **Week two:** Keep week one settings in place, delete an app(s), move time-wasting apps, and customize notification settings
- **Week three:** Keep week one and two settings in place, then change your screen to black and white—an existing iPhone accessibility setting
- **Week four:** Reflect on the previous three weeks, then try your own ideas for redesigning your smartphone

*Let's redesign the most designed object
in the world.*



what do you find helpful about your phone?



what do you find unhelpful about your phone?

how would you feel if you could
integrate the helpful and release the
unhelpful aspects of your phone?

how would you reclaim 53 days
a year?

“Dog ear” this page by folding down the corner, so you can reference
it each week.

Cellular Balance Workbook

redesign your smartphone and reclaim
your time

created by rachel herring



Cellular Balance Workbook: Redesign Your Smartphone and Reclaim Your Time
Written and designed by Rachel Herring

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The Cellular Balance Workbook would not exist without the accountability and inspiration from my friend, Julia VanderVeen, and the workshop participants:

Sam, Damini, Alfred, Wendy, Corina, Addison, Neal, Julia, Karen, Melisa, Ross, Zamira, Timothy, Rebekah, Samantha, Kerry, Huiyi, Sarah, Angela, Julia, Taylor, Catherine, Danielle, John Todd, Robyn, Sara, and Haley (last names removed for privacy).

A workbook for us and by us.

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page 19 week one: downtime + do not disturb

page 55 week two: algorithms + apps

page 81 week three: black + white screen

page 105 week four: take stock

page 133 beyond the workbook

page 169 acknowledgments

page 170 bibliography

page 173 colophon

do you use your phone

instinctively or intentionally?

Week One ... Downtime + Do Not Disturb

This book is about you, but it started with me.

In 2020, my cellphone was my proverbial lifeline. It connected me to friends across town, family across the country, and news across the planet. It gave me much needed distractions and helped me apply for jobs.

I needed my phone to make it through one of the toughest periods of our lifetime. But constantly being connected started to wear me down.

The weekly Zoom happy hour invites became annoying, and reading the news turned into doom-scrolling. The distractions started affecting my attention span. And the never-ending list of job opportunities—that I wasn't hearing back from—depressed me.

At what point do we stop benefiting from all the positives our phones provide us and start needing to evaluate our relationship to them?

At different times over 2020 and 2021, I tried—without much success—to decrease my screen time. I would set my phone out of reach while working or try to watch a movie without my phone in hand, but

"there is a charm about the forbidden that makes it unspeakably desirable."

—mark twain

quickly my willpower would wear off and I'd be back where I started. Sometimes, my screen time would even increase on the weeks I was trying to decrease it. Making the phone "forbidden" made me think about it more, which was the opposite of my intention. Eventually my willpower would weaken and I would binge on screen time. I never wanted to get rid of my phone altogether either; I wanted to find the right balance for me.

Many books, like *Irresistible: the Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* by Adam Alter, suggest simply leaving smartphones out of the bedroom while sleeping. When people had landline telephones and alarm clocks, this may have been a reasonable suggestion—I have neither.

Additionally, I enjoy using the Sleep and Alarm settings on my smartphone to remember to go to bed and wake up on time. I want to be available to my family if they really need to call me in the middle of the night. Putting my phone out of my bedroom just gave me more anxiety. It was subtle but very real. I realized that these "all or nothing" techniques treat the symptom, not the problem.

My goal was to use my phone when I needed it then be able to put it down and not think about it.

In the spring of 2022, I was reminded of a book I read years before, *Boundaries* by Dr. John Townsend and Dr. Henry Cloud. I began wondering if boundaries would help me be more intentional with my cellphone screen time. Since I am a graphic designer, I was curious about the design of the cellphone. What makes it so alluring? Why is it so hard to put down?

My friend, Julia, and I tried the following boundaries to see if making design changes to the cellphone would help:

- Set up Downtime—an existing iPhone setting that can be turned on—so only texting, talking, and navigation worked from 8 PM to 9 AM

- Set up Do Not Disturb, another existing setting, that silenced my notifications from 9 AM to 5 PM
- Deleted my most used app, Instagram
- Moved other time-wasting apps, like shopping and gaming, around on my home screen
- Edited my notification settings for specific apps
- Changed the screen to black and white

Julia and I also checked in with each other for accountability throughout the process. Having a friend with similar goals that we could share our successes with helped keep us motivated. On the flip side, when we had days that we over-indulged we had someone to remind us of the benefits of being more intentional.

Before I started making these changes, my cellphone Screen Time was five to seven hours a day (outside of my full-time job). After having these changes in place for a few weeks, my Screen Time was two to three hours a day.

I save an average of three and a half hours a day, which adds up to over 53 days a year.

I can now reclaim that time in a way that is meaningful to me. I rest more, create more, read more, and spend more time with loved ones. I am more intentional with my phone, and it improves my productivity and attention span. I enjoy the world outside my phone more than the world inside it.

By changing the design, I am able to integrate the helpful and release the unhelpful aspects of my smartphone.

Determining what is helpful or unhelpful will be different for everyone. For instance, Julia doesn't work from home on a computer all day like I do, so her cellphone screen time

started around six hours a day and decreased to about four. This is a good balance for her because she uses her phone for content creation for her business, entertainment on her commute, and directions throughout her workday.

It is important to consider your specific lifestyle throughout the process.

Don't get discouraged if your progress looks different from someone else's. After making the changes we discussed, Julia felt more intentional with her cellphone and that was her ultimate goal.

Many people I spoke to about this experience expressed interest in decreasing their screen time and improving their intentionality with their cellphone too. They just didn't know where to start. So I reached out to some friends and family and held a workshop to see if these design changes would help others as well:

- I began by asking participants to fill out a survey about their current relationship with cellphone screen time
- I asked them to make the same design changes I did (listed on page 20 and 21)
- While the changes were in place, they filled out daily surveys about their relationship with their phones
- After the workshop was over, they filled out a final survey about their results and how they would change the workbook for the next iteration
- I then held interviews with the participants to generate more ideas for the evolution of the workbook

From 2022–2023, I created a second and third version of the workbook until I was satisfied with the content and design. Then I gathered a group to test the third version in 2024.

I took the learnings from the workshops and developed the workbook you are reading now.

"design justice requires full inclusion in the design process of people with direct lived experience of the conditions the design team wants to change ... those most affected by the outcomes should lead design processes."

—design justice

The *Cellular Balance Workbook* could not exist in this form without the feedback from the participants in the workshop. So many stories and new ideas have been folded into this book because of the generous contributions of these individuals.

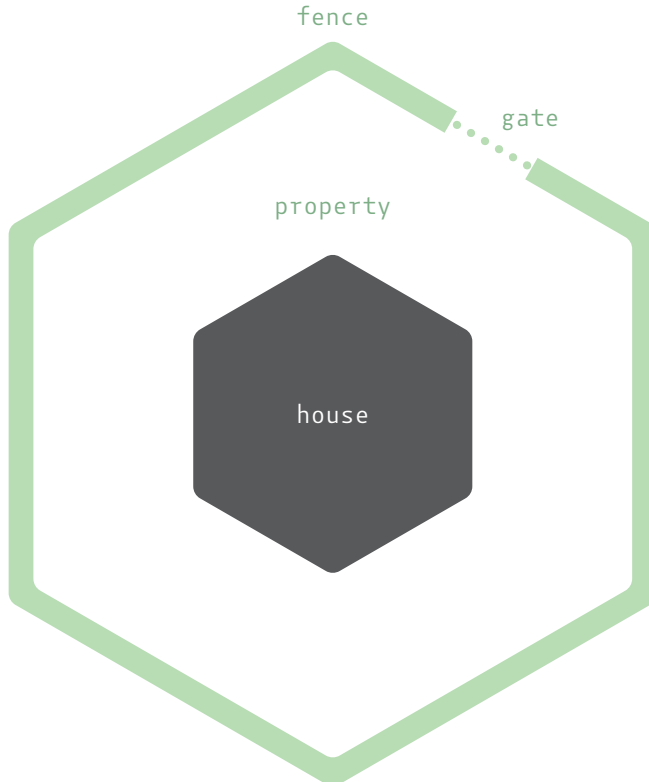
Boundaries

In the *New York Times* Best Seller, *Boundaries*, Dr. Townsend and Dr. Cloud use a metaphor to describe healthy boundaries. Imagine that there is a house, around that house is land, and beyond that land is a fence. You are the house, the people and things you let into your life are the land, and your boundaries are the fence.

Our fences need gates in them, to let the helpful in and keep the unhelpful out.

"boundaries are anything that helps to differentiate you from someone [or something] else, or shows where you begin and end."

—boundaries



"We need to keep things that will nurture us inside our fences and keep things that will harm us outside. In short, boundaries help us keep the good in and the bad out."

—boundaries

Notice the dotted line that represents the gate in the graphic on the previous page. Whenever you see dotted lines for the font or graphics throughout the workbook, use them as a reminder to let the helpful aspects of your phone onto your property and keep the unhelpful aspects off.

For instance, I love using Marco Polo (a video sharing app) to catch up with friends throughout the week. It lets us give lengthier updates without having to schedule a FaceTime call or spend a ton of time texting. When I see that my screen time was high because I spent a lot of time on Marco Polo, I don't think twice about it. That was time well spent. On the other hand, when I notice my mind racing and see that I spent two hours on Instagram that day, I know it is time to delete the app again or move it to a place that it is harder to find.

Our cellphones are available 24/7, so impulse control can be very challenging.

The phone is always there to distract us when we experience tough emotions, are bored, or can't sleep. This manifests itself in over-scrolling, over-shopping, and over-swiping. Identifying and utilizing the right design changes can help interrupt these impulses.

One of the participants, Melisa, said that she does a lot of shopping on the apps Depop and Mercari, but she never shops those websites on her computer. The convenience and design of the apps makes it much easier to quickly click on them and spend money without thinking about it. The changes suggested in the workbook, can help interrupt the impulse to click and shop.

For many of us, healthy boundaries were not exemplified at home or in school. Often, overly rigid boundaries or lack of boundaries are the norm. The proverbial pendulum would swing from one extreme to the other depending on personal preferences, triggers, and projections. There is little intention behind these boundaries and ultimately unhelpful things get let onto our property.

This workbook is an opportunity to try some boundaries that I suggest, then set your own, and see if they provide more success than willpower alone.

According to Dr. Townsend and Dr. Cloud, there are two different kinds of boundaries:

- Boundaries with others
- Boundaries with ourselves



This workbook primarily focuses on the latter, but setting expectations with loved ones may help you stay on track as you develop new habits with your cellphone.

A few boundaries that I set with others is asking to have more serious conversations on the phone or in person—not over text. I am also an early riser, so I ask people to have serious conversations before 9 PM. These aren't hard-and-fast rules, but they help prevent me from staying up an hour late texting about something that could be resolved in a ten minute conversation.

I also make room for other people to have boundaries with me. One summer I made a new friend. We hit it off really well and quickly found ourselves texting a lot because we were both going through a slow period with work. She then went on a work trip and was less available. She was in meetings and training new employees during the day and going out in San Francisco at night. Two days in a row she apologized for a delayed response. I told her I hope she spends time away from her phone while on a trip, and that she doesn't need to qualify her time for me. She was shocked to hear this and told me about getting fussed at by family members in the past because she wasn't responsive enough.

There is a constant expectation to always be connected and available.

I would like for you to consider challenging this idea and communicating openly with those close to you.

As you work on your relationship with cellphone screen time, your cellphone availability might change so that you can be more present in the physical world. Hopefully, your friends and family will love to hear this news and encourage you while you work on new habits. We know that won't always happen, but setting expectations on the front end may help.

Boundaries with ourselves are similar. A few years back, as a graphic designer at L'Oreal, I thought that if I didn't respond instantly to messages or within an hour to emails, it would negatively affect my career. But I started creating boundaries anyway. I began by actually taking a lunch break and not scarfing my food down while responding to emails with my phone in hand. Then I set up Downtime so I wasn't receiving notifications from work during chosen times.

No one on the team ever noticed or said anything about the change—although it dramatically improved my relationship with my phone and work. When I was “on,” I was totally “on” and at work. When I was “off,” I was actually “off” and present in my life. I never had to communicate the boundary or make any giant declaration—I simply changed my behavior.

who should
you loop in
about the
habits you
are changing?

Ownership

The most successful participants in the workshop were very self-aware and considered what changes would be the most helpful personally.

Timothy had great results in the workshop. He said that the program drastically improved his attention span and he decreased his daily cellphone screen time by roughly two hours a day. He set Downtime for the hours he was at work so he could stay better focused.

Other participants, like Angela, set Downtime for the hours she is typically sleeping. This may sound like a great idea if you tend to stay up late scrolling on your phone, but Angela doesn't struggle with that. Ultimately, it didn't help her reach her specific goals because the timing of Downtime needed to be customized for her.

Corina said that the Do Not Disturb function is her favorite out of all the changes. She liked not hearing her phone constantly buzz while she was trying to do other things during the school day but still wanted to be available to family if they called. She put family members on a Favorites list so she could still be reached.

what times
would be best
for you to
use downtime
and do not
disturb?

The Feelings Wheel on the right, developed by Dr. Gloria Willcox in 1982, helps individuals identify their emotions accurately and specifically. Research displayed in Positive Psychology Practitioner's Toolkit shows that people “high in emotional differentiation” are less likely to indulge in addictive behaviors when stressed.

To use the wheel, consider how you feel on the surface—based on the inner circle. Then get more specific with the emotions on the outer circle. It is important to note that you can experience positive and negative emotions simultaneously.

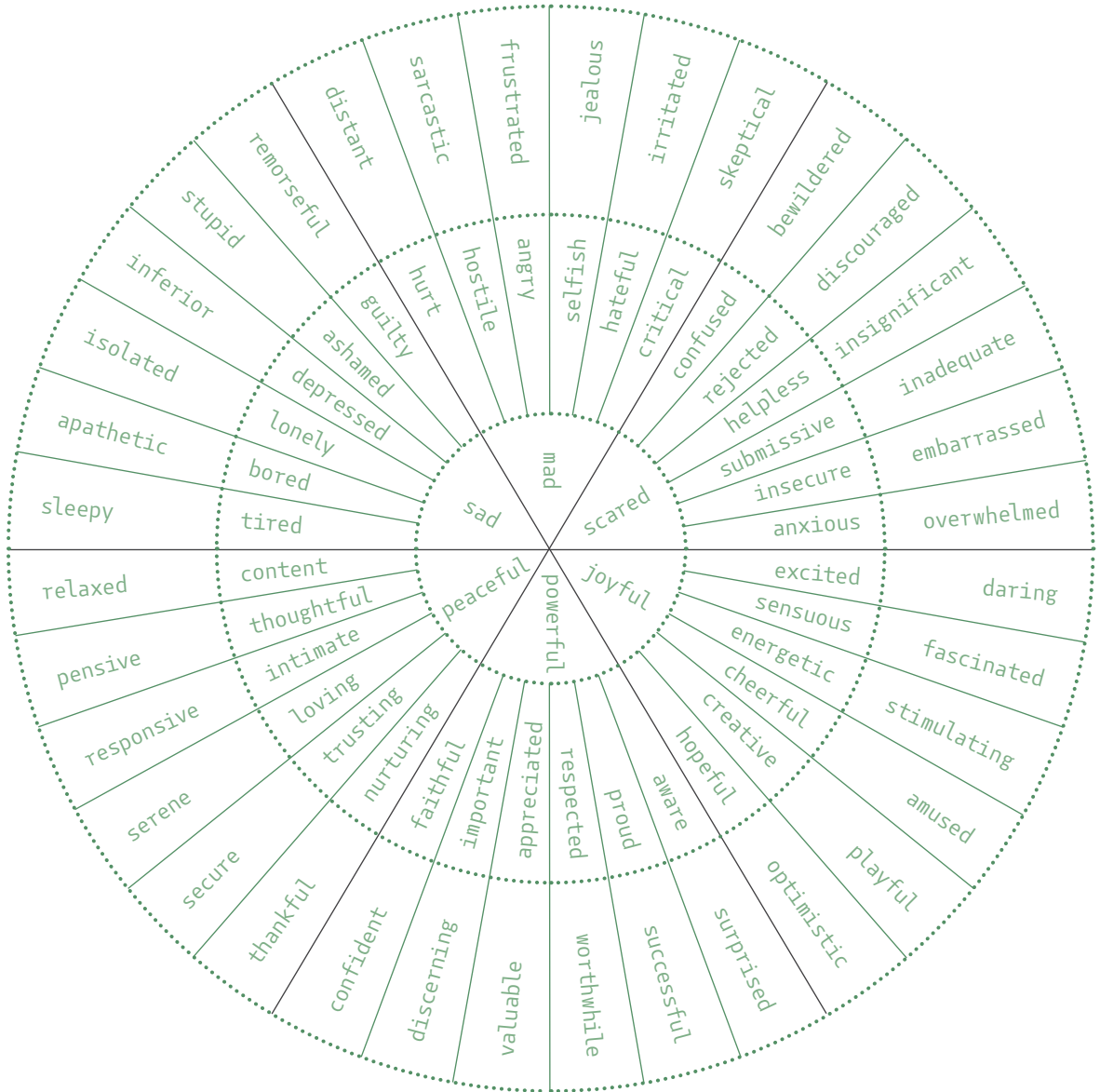
You will use the wheel during the daily check ins to keep track of your emotions. I suggest marking this page for easy reference; you can fold over the corner of the page or mark it with a sticky note. The check ins can be referenced to see if there is a correlation between your emotions and cellphone habits.

When I read the workbook for the 2024 workshop, I noticed that my screen time was almost double on stressful days. Week one of the workbook, I had a disagreement with a friend. We weren't able to resolve things in the moment and it really bothered me. Afterwards, I just could not put my phone down. Through tracking this over the course of the four weeks, I was able to see that the phone was a major source of disassociation for me.

Spending a lot of time on the phone wasn't helpful for decreasing my stress either—if anything it made it worse. Noticing this pattern helped me know I need to go on a walk, talk to a friend, or find a more productive way to tolerate my stress.

This wheel serves as a starting point for emotional self-reflection and does not encompass all emotions you can experience. There are many different versions of the feelings wheel. Feel free to look into them and see if a particular version is more beneficial for you.

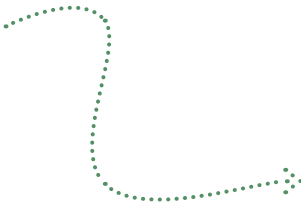
As always, take the helpful and adjust for your specific needs.



James Clear, the author of *Atomic Habits*, wrote an article entitled “How to Build New Habits by Taking Advantage of Old Ones.” In the article he suggests “stacking” new habits with old habits. This method helps us remember the habit we are trying to build. His formula for creating habits is: After/Before [CURRENT HABIT], I will [NEW HABIT]. You can take advantage of this to remember the daily check ins for the workbook.

For example, I have existing morning and evening routines. In the morning, I wake up and meditate for 20 minutes in bed. Each evening I feed my cat, set up the coffee pot for the morning, and clean out the litter box. When I read the workbook for the 2024 workshop, I typically did my daily check in after meditating. If I didn't have time in the morning, I would add it to my evening routine. I also kept the book out to act as a visible reminder.

Free writing is also an important element of the workbook. You will be prompted to free write in the check ins. The general idea is to write without judgment—anything that comes to mind. The goal is just to get your thoughts and feelings on paper. You may be amazed by what comes out when you get into your flow.



Periodically, you can look back to see if you notice any patterns. If you're regularly free writing about comparing yourself to people you follow on social media, maybe a change needs to be made. If you notice yourself venting about feeling distracted by texts and emails, consider setting some boundaries to prevent this.

As you work on your relationship with the cellphone, you may start to notice that you have more time. Successful participants were intentional with how they reclaimed this time so they didn't have to rely on willpower as much. Instead, they could focus on something they were excited to do, but never seemed to find the time for.

I define reclaiming time as acting in alignment with one's values.

Think about what this means to you. What would you like to have more of in your life? Reclaiming time could be taking yourself to lunch, walking in a park, reading, laying in grass, or even simply looking at the world more closely.

A workshop participant named Catherine homeschools her children and wanted to do more hands-on activities with them. When she was using her cellphone about eight hours a day, she never seemed to find the time. Once the workshop started, she did three new activities in five days. She reclaimed her time with something joyful and exciting instead of just sitting with the boredom of having less entertainment from her phone.

how can you
reclaim your
time? how
does this
align with
your values?

Week one, you are asked to set one goal for the week and one goal for the four-week program. Weeks two through four, you are asked to set a new goal each week and check in on your goal for the program. It's important to be aware of your specific struggles with cellphone screen time and consider how that week's challenge may help you with your goals for the workbook.

I encourage you to consider setting qualitative and quantitative goals throughout the program.

For instance, my quantitative goal, when I started setting boundaries with my device, was to get my daily screen time

down to two hours a day, but my qualitative goal was to be more intentional with my cellphone screen time.

Think about what you find helpful and unhelpful about your cellphone and make goals that will support integrating the helpful and releasing the unhelpful.

what are your
qualitative/
quantitative
goals?

Accountability

It is recommended, not required, to find an accountability group to do the workbook with.

It can be a couple friends, family members, or colleagues. Just make sure you have a couple people who you can be honest with that will encourage you while you do the workbook together.

When the participants of the workshop were asked what helped keep them on track, an overwhelming number said, “accountability.” Knowing that I was checking in made them feel like they were a part of something bigger than themselves and encouraged them to stay the course.

A fringe benefit of accountability is that it fosters relationships outside of apps like Instagram, which many of us would like to spend less time on. Once you find your group, check in every few days. You will be prompted to do this in the check ins, but setting a few reminders on your calendar may also be helpful.

Downtime + Do Not Disturb

Downtime and Do Not Disturb are existing settings on your phone.

Downtime makes specific apps unavailable during chosen times of day, while Do Not Disturb silences notifications during chosen times of day.

Each step of this process, take ownership of the experience and think about what would benefit you most. For instance, if you spend a lot of time on social media, it may be a good idea to have your most-used social apps set to Downtime during specific hours. If you struggle with staying up late watching YouTube or Netflix, consider including those apps in Downtime.

For me, I started by setting all apps (excluding Messages) to Downtime. After a couple days, I realized it would be nice to easily access my calendar, navigation apps, and a few others, so I changed the settings to work for me.

I use Do Not Disturb during working hours and Downtime during home and sleeping hours. For instance, Do Not Disturb was set from 9 AM–5 PM and Downtime was set from 7 PM–10 AM. The reason this worked for me is because during working hours, I don't like for my phone to constantly be vibrating from text message or email notifications. It is very distracting for me. But in the evenings, I like to get these notifications so I can connect with loved ones. Downtime is set for hours I spend at home so I am not distracted by apps like Gmail and TikTok when I would like to be spending time with friends and family.

As mentioned before, some workshop participants only used Downtime during hours they would already be asleep, so they didn't reach the goals they were hoping for.



Dr. Cloud and Dr. Townsend generally encourage starting with stricter boundaries and loosening up as you go.

If you need to access an app that is set to Downtime, just click into the app, and choose if you would like to ignore Downtime for a minute, 15 minutes, or all day. If you would like to turn off Do Not Disturb, you can do so from the Control Center (step 1 and 2 on page 140). Before ignoring these settings, consider if ignoring or sticking with the changes is the habit you want to practice.

Follow the steps on pages 138–141 to set up Downtime and Do Not Disturb for week one.



integrate
the helpful...

•••release
the unhelpful



while writing today, reference the workbook purpose at the front of the book and consider your overall struggles and successes with your smartphone. make a personal plan for week one and think about how you can tailor this workbook for your specific struggles and goals.



Outside of work, what do you think is a healthy amount of cellphone screen time per day?



Please find “Screen Time” in the settings on your phone (step one on page 138). Select “see all activity” and write down your daily screen time average, most used apps, number of “pick ups,” and notifications for last week. (You can also take screenshots of this to reference over the four weeks.)



During week one, how do you want to reclaim the time you would usually spend on your phone? Is there a list of things you seem to never get to? Is there a book that you have been wanting to read or a friend you would like to catch up with? Write this on a piece of paper and put it somewhere you will see it. Consider asking the other people in your accountability group how they are reclaiming their time.



Have you tried to decrease your cellphone screen time in the past and been unsuccessful? If so, why do you think that was and how can you incorporate these learnings into week one?



What is your goal for this week *and* the four-week workbook? Are you interested in improving your relationship with your cellphone overall, decreasing Screen Time on specific apps, disassociating on your phone less, or something else? Write this on a piece of paper and put it somewhere you will see it. Share both goals with your accountability group.



monday through friday check ins can be filled out at the end of that day or at the beginning of the following day. just be sure to consider your experience on the day noted on the check in.

if you miss a check in for monday through friday, you can fill it out later or skip a day here and there. the goal is not to perfectly fill out the check ins every single day, but to have a record of how your relationship with screen time is improving over the course of the four weeks. as always, integrate the helpful and release the unhelpful—even with this workbook.



Overall, how did you feel on Monday? (Reference the feelings wheel on page 29) Do you think these feelings are affecting your cellphone screen time?



During Downtime on Monday, roughly how many times did you try to access the apps that were unavailable? Were you attempting to access them intentionally or instinctively?

0

1-5

6-10

11-15

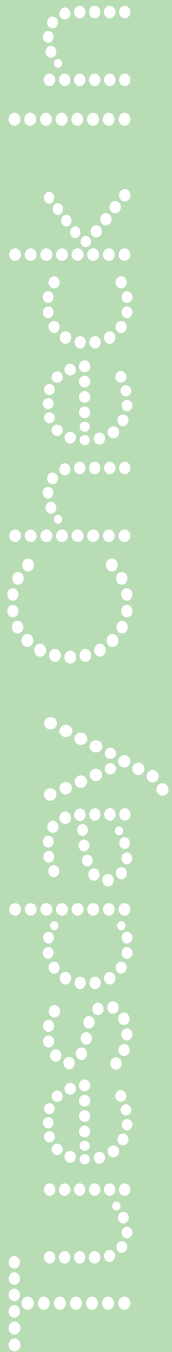
16-20



Free write about your experience Monday. Did you enjoy fewer notifications? Did you miss having more notifications?

"the events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, but in their significance to ourselves, they find their own order ... the continuous thread of revelation."

-eudora welty,
the artist's way



these questions are designed to serve as prompts for self-reflection. feel free to write as much or little as is helpful.



What emotions did you experience on Tuesday? (Reference the feelings wheel on page 29.) Do you think these feelings are affecting your cellphone screen time?



During Downtime on Tuesday, how many times did you try to access the apps that were unavailable? After a few days, have you decided to change what apps are always available? Try checking in with your accountability group on this.



date.....



What did you do today that you are proud of? Could you write or doodle to express how it made you feel?

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it's mid-week, think about what you have learned so far, and how you can adjust to make the most of week one.

1

How did your body feel on Wednesday? Do you think these feelings are affected by your cellphone usage?

2

How is reclaiming your time going? Have you tried anything fun or new this week? Have you rested more?

date.....



Free write about your experience with Downtime on Wednesday. Did you miss something because an app was set to Downtime?

"it always comes
back to the same
necessity: go deep
enough and there is
a bedrock of truth,
however hard."

-*may sarton,*
the artist's way

1

consider what benefits you are starting to notice and look back at the check ins. has anything gotten easier over the course of the week?

2

1

What emotions did you experience on Tuesday? (Reference the feelings wheel on page 29.) Do you think these feelings are affecting your cellphone screen time?

3

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2

During Downtime on Thursday, how many times did you try to access the apps that were unavailable? Were you attempting to access them intentionally or instinctively? Has this changed over the week?

0

1-5

6-10

11-15

16-20



What is something small you can do today or tomorrow to enjoy your day more?



Have you checked in with your accountability group this week? What is your favorite thing about them?

yes

no

remember, it is okay if you miss a check in here and there. the goal is progress, not perfection.



Is your attention span improving? Are there any other benefits of Downtime?



Have you figured out which apps to set to Downtime and the amount of time that works well for you? If not, how could you make adjustments?

date.....



Free write or draw about your experience with Downtime on Friday. Was there a reason you needed to access an app set to Downtime? How did you feel about it?

"perfectionism
is a refusal to
let yourself move
ahead. it is a
loop—an obsessive,
debilitating closed
system that causes
you to get stuck in
the details ... and
to lose sight of
the whole."
—the artist's way

1

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9

review your check ins from week one and consider your overall struggles and successes while writing. after filling out saturday's check in, compare your results to last sunday's.

1

During week one, how did you reclaim the time you would normally spend on your phone?

2

Over the course of the week, did the number of times you tried to access apps during Downtime decrease? Was it more on certain days? Do you notice any patterns?

3

Do you feel like Downtime helped improve your relationship with screen time? Why or why not?



Did you accomplish your goal for week one?
How are you progressing on your goal for the
four-week workbook?



Have you checked in with your accountability group
lately? What do you need accountability with for
week two?

yes

no

why are you so enchanted
by the world,
when a mine of gold
lies within you?

....rumi

Week Two — Algorithms + Apps

This week is all about the apps.

Apps help us navigate, stay in touch, book doctors' appointments, play games, share photos, edit photos, send emails, and literally millions of other useful tasks. But where does it end?

When does an app become harmful instead of helpful?

Before the workshop, almost all participants said they instinctively, rather than intentionally, click on apps. By editing notifications and deleting or moving apps you can increase intentionality with your smartphone. To tailor week two to your specific needs and goals consider the following question:

which apps
do you use
most or
click on
without
thinking?

Have you ever noticed when an app updates the location of a button, but your thumb still clicks where the old location was? Or do you catch yourself instinctively clicking on an app because your hand just seems to know where the app is on your Home Screen? This is due to “muscle memory.” In the article, “Illuminating muscle memory’s sinister side: a social media case study” the writers explain “when a task is repeated, it becomes part of procedural memory. This type of memory dedicated to movement is called ‘muscle memory,’ which allows one to perform actions unconsciously. Within the context of social media, muscle memory builds up if one uses [social media] applications frequently” (Kontogeorgou, Nimwegen, and Salah).



This “muscle memory” can be great for forming and maintaining healthy habits, but it can also work against us when we form habits unintentionally. Deleting and moving apps helps disrupt this muscle memory. If there is an app you don’t want to use, try deleting it. If there is an app you want to use less often, try making it harder to find. This will encourage intentional rather than instinctive usage.

App notifications, on the Home Screen or Lock Screen, can also pull us into apps without it being an intentional choice. If you’re constantly distracted by notifications on your lock screen or the “red dot” in the corner of apps keeps enticing you to tap on them, try turning off or batching the notifications.

For me, Townsend and Cloud’s gate metaphor (illustrated on page 23) was helpful for deciding what to do with the apps on my phone. I considered what I wanted to let onto my property and what I wanted to keep off. Navigation, organization, and connection were things I was happy to let onto my property—so I kept Google Maps, Calendar, Notes, Daily Reminders, texting, and calling on my phone in the same place, with the same notification settings.

FOMO, doom scrolling, wasteful shopping, compulsively checking notifications, and constant gaming on the other hand, I wanted to keep off my property. I deleted Instagram then moved Amazon, Candy Crush, and other time-wasting apps around on my home screen making them harder to find

without really thinking about it. I also dramatically reduced the number of apps that could send me notifications.

After the workshops, over half of the participants said they would not redownload the apps they deleted. These were likely apps they were using multiple times a day before.

what app
do you let
onto your
property
daily that
is unhelpful
for you?

Algorithms

Some of us may be familiar with one aspect of apps—the creators of apps employ algorithms that condition us to use the apps more.

According to *The Social Dilemma*, a documentary about social media, algorithms learn about us through our emails, location, age, race, gender and politics to feed us content we want to see so we spend more time on the apps. If our biases are confirmed by the apps we use we are more likely to spend time on them. But algorithms are doing more than just that.

"netflix is no longer constructing a model of abstract relationships between movies based on ratings, but a model of live user behavior in their various apps."

—what algorithms want

The article “Dopamine, Smartphones & You: A battle for your time” published by Harvard, explains that dopamine—commonly referred to as the “feel-good” hormone—is a chemical our brains produce that motivates behavior. “It gets released when we take a bite of delicious food, when we have sex, after we exercise, and, importantly, when we have successful social interactions. In an evolutionary context, it rewards us for beneficial behaviors and motivates us to repeat them.” Smartphones have essentially provided us with an unlimited supply of social interactions that have the potential to increase our dopamine production.

The article continues, “Similar to slot machines, many apps implement a reward pattern optimized to keep you engaged as much as possible. Variable reward schedules were introduced by psychologist B.F. Skinner in the 1930’s. In his experiments, he found that mice respond most frequently to reward-associated stimuli when the reward was administered after a varying number of responses, precluding the animal’s ability to predict when they would be rewarded. Humans are no different; if we perceive a reward to be delivered at random, and if checking for the reward comes at little cost, we end up checking habitually (e.g. gambling addiction). If you pay attention, you might find yourself checking your phone at the slightest feeling of boredom, purely out of habit. Programmers work very hard behind the screens to keep you doing exactly that.”

The more people we follow, the more people who follow us. The more others interact with our content and we do with theirs, the more we can expect a reward whenever we open these apps. But even worse than that, Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly known as Twitter) use a variable-ratio reward schedule, described above, for delivering notifications.

Their algorithms will withhold notifications to deliver them in larger bursts—sounds like hitting the proverbial jackpot to me.

A user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) designer, Huiyi Chen, who participated in the workshop told me that the most popular apps in the world use algorithms to make them even more addictive. Just one example she gave is that TikTok developed an algorithm for infinite scrolling so users don't even have to touch the screen—it is always feeding them the next thing they “should” be watching. Other apps like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have copied TikTok's algorithm to make their apps more addictive too.

She also explained that these apps are running off an advertising model. Programmers are not asked to make apps people enjoy using. They are asked to make apps that are hard for users to put down, so people will see more ads and buy more stuff. It is about making money off users, not helping users live better.

To paraphrase Richard Serra, if something is free, you're not the consumer, you're the commodity. Consider this quote in relation to free apps like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and X. Your time and attention are worth so much more than a dollar a month subscription.

So if you've ever felt like you just can't put your phone down, it's not your fault! This isn't a simple will-power issue—it's addictive by design.

But how do we interrupt these algorithms? How do we take what we know and make different choices? We set boundaries by disrupting the design.

Apps

This week, delete apps that leave you feeling worse after using them. Move time-wasting apps around on your home screen. Modify your notification settings. Keep the Downtime settings in place.

"comparison is the
thief of joy"

—theodore roosevelt

If there is an app you are constantly scrolling on, but you know it gives you FOMO, encourages you to spend money you don't need to, or makes you compare yourself to others—delete it.

Prior to the workshop, Huiyi was spending a lot of time unintentionally on Instagram, so she decided to delete it for the workshop. After the workshop, she said she was happy with her life without Instagram and actually wasn't missing out on anything. The people she wanted to connect with, she did so in other ways. When she wanted to get on Instagram, she did so on a device that isn't always in her pocket.

Samantha also chose to delete Instagram for the workshop. She said deleting social media definitely helped her use her phone in a healthier way and break the habit of always scrolling on social media while also watching TV or movies. The information overload from having multiple devices going at once can be overwhelming without us even realizing.

If there are other apps that you need on your phone but instinctively click on, try moving those apps to another area of your home screen, tucking them in a folder, or putting them on a new page. If you start instinctively clicking on the new location—try moving them again.

Catherine, another participant, said that she would sit down and instinctively pick up her phone to start playing on it. But since the apps she would normally go to were moved, it helped slow her down so she could consider if she actually wanted to be on her phone at that moment or if she was just trying to pass time.

Rest is also an important way to reclaim time. My creative practice requires intentional time to do "nothing." I need time where I don't have anything scheduled, so I can lean into my intuition and see where it takes me. Sometimes I end up journaling, reading, driving, walking, or even just lying on the sofa. This is also a way to reclaim time. It might not look like much to others, but it is during this time that I am able to recharge myself, generate ideas, and plan projects.

If notifications are what pull you out of the present moment and into your phone, edit your notification settings until you find the right balance for yourself.

Like many people, I often use my phone to check the time. If the notifications are visible on the Lock Screen, I seem to always get sucked into something else instead of quickly checking the time and putting my phone back away.

I also dislike having the little red dots in the corner of apps that signify unchecked notifications (these are called Badges). By simply editing my apps to not have “Badges,” I can spend time on apps when I want to, not when the red dot tells me I need to.

Some people also enjoy batching notifications for apps. This setting allows you to choose what times of day you receive notifications for specific apps. This could be particularly helpful for apps with frequent and important notifications like email.

We may not be able to re-write Instagram’s algorithm, but we can re-design our phones to work for us, not against us. We can take breaks from apps we click on instinctively and make sure we are intentional about what apps we actually want to use.

See pages 146–153 for instructions to delete apps, move apps, and edit notifications.

what apps and notifications do you find to be unhelpful?

what you seek ☺ ☺ ☺

👉👉👉 is seeking you.

...rumi



while writing today, reference the workbook purpose at the front of the book and consider your overall struggles and successes with your smartphone. make a personal plan for week two and think about how you can tailor this workbook for your specific struggles and goals.



Please find “Screen Time” in the settings on your phone (step one on page 138). Select “see all activity” and write down your daily screen time average, most used apps, number of “pick ups,” and notifications for last week. (You can also take screenshots of this to reference over the four weeks.) Compare your results to question two on last Sunday’s check in.



How do you want to tailor week two for your specific struggles and goals with screen time? Are there multiple apps you would like to delete? Do you want to increase the duration of Downtime this week?



How do you want to reclaim the time you would usually spend on your phone during week two? Write this on a piece of paper and put it somewhere you will see it. Is there anything you would like to do differently from week one?



What is your goal for week two? Write this on a piece of paper and put it somewhere you will see it. Share this goal with your accountability group.



Look back at question five of Sunday of week one and write out the goal you set for the four-week workbook. Does this goal still seem reasonable/relevant? Make adjustments as needed.



monday through friday check ins can be filled out at the end of that day or at the beginning of the following day. just be sure to consider your experience on the day noted on the check in.

if you miss a check in for monday through friday, you can fill it out later or skip a day here and there. the goal is not to perfectly fill out the check ins every single day, but to have a record of how your relationship with screen time is improving over the course of the four weeks. as always, integrate the helpful and release the unhelpful—even with this workbook.



Overall, how did you feel on Monday? (Reference the feelings wheel on page 29.) Do you think these feelings are affecting your cellphone screen time?



On Monday, roughly how many times did you try to access the apps that were moved or deleted? Were you attempting to access them intentionally or instinctively?

0

1-5

6-10

11-15

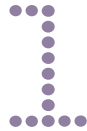
16-20



Free write about your experience Monday. Did you enjoy fewer notifications or distractions? Did you miss having more notifications or distractions?



these questions are designed to serve as prompts for self-reflection. feel free to write as much or little as is helpful.



What was a moment of joy, delight, or contentment on Tuesday?



After a few days, have you needed to redownload an app? Afterwards, did you delete it again or not? Try checking in with your accountability group on this.

date.....



Free write about your experience with apps on Tuesday.
Could you use different colored pens or markers to
express yourself more fully?



it's mid-week, think about what you have learned so far, and how you can adjust to make the most of week two.



How was your mental state Wednesday? (Reference the feelings wheel on page 29.) Do you think these feelings are affecting your cellphone screen time?



On Wednesday, how many times did you try to access the apps that were moved or deleted? After a few days, have you decided to move your time-wasting apps again?



date.....



Free write about your experience with apps on Wednesday. What did you do today that made you feel proud of yourself?

"we are always
doing something,
talking, reading,
listening to the
radio, planning
what's next. the
mind is kept
naggingly busy
on some easy,
unimportant
external task."

*-brenda ueland,
the artist's way*

C

consider what benefits you are starting to notice and look back at the check ins. has anything gotten easier over the course of the week?

U

1

Is your FOMO improving? Are you spending money less impulsively? Are there any other benefits of deleting and moving apps?

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2

How is reclaiming your time going? Have you tried anything fun or new this week? How did it make you feel to act in alignment with your values?



Free write about your experience with apps on Thursday. Were there struggles or successes? How can you make tomorrow even better?

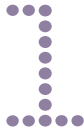


Have you checked in with your accountability group this week? How is it going with them?

yes

no

remember, it is okay if you miss a check in here and there. the goal is progress, not perfection.



Are you more intentional with your cellphone screen time? Are there any other benefits of deleting and moving apps?



On Friday, how many times did you try to access the apps that were moved or deleted? Have you figured out which apps to move around and which apps you would rather not have on your phone?



date.....



What could you do today or tomorrow to spark creativity, delight, or contentment? How might you feel once it is accomplished?

"look and you will
find it—what is
unsought will go
undetected."

—sophocles
the artist's way

A large, dotted number 1 on a purple background.A large, dotted number 2 on a purple background.A large, dotted number 3 on a purple background.A large, dotted number 4 on a purple background.A large, dotted number 5 on a purple background.A large, dotted number 6 on a purple background.A large, dotted number 7 on a purple background.A large, dotted number 8 on a purple background.A large, dotted number 9 on a purple background.A large, dotted number 0 on a purple background.A large, dotted number 1 on a purple background.A large, dotted number 2 on a purple background.

review your check ins from week two and consider your overall struggles and successes while writing. after filling out saturday's check in, compare your results to last sunday's.

A large, dotted number 1.

During week two, how did you fill the time you would normally spend on your phone? Did you do anything you are excited about or proud of? Share this with your accountability group.

A large, dotted number 2.

Over the course of the week, did the number of times you tried to access the moved or deleted apps decrease? Was it more on certain days? Do you notice any patterns?

A large, dotted number 3.

Do you feel like deleting and moving apps helped improve your relationship with screen time? Why or why not?



Did you accomplish your goal for week two?
How are you progressing on your goal for the
four-week workbook?



Have you checked in with your accountability group
lately? What do you need accountability with for
week three?

yes

no

we carry inside us
the wonders we seek
outside us.

•••rumi

Week Three — Black + White Screen

Congrats, you're halfway through the workbook!

You may be wondering why you would change your screen to black and white. This challenge is difficult, but it is very powerful for reframing how and why we use our phones.

Summer of 2022, I listened to a podcast by The Happiness Lab entitled “Social Media and Our Brains with CNN’s Chasing Life.” It discusses changing your phone to black and white for a few reasons. First, endless scrolling isn’t so fun in black and white. The saturated colors on social media don’t allure us in the same ways. Second, a lot of cellphone games, which are a big time-waster, do not function well in black and white. Lastly, advertisements in black and white are not nearly as exciting and shopping is almost impossible. The black and white screen redesigns the visual aspect of our phones in a major way.

Robyn, a participant from the workshop, said that changing the screen to black and white really helped change her perspective on her phone and see it as a tool, rather than a distraction or source of entertainment.

Each week, I encourage you to think about the new challenge in the context of the gate metaphor (illustrated on page 23)—keeping the helpful elements of smartphones inside the gate and the unhelpful elements outside the gate.

For another participant from the workshop, Timothy, it was the news. Being well informed is important, but constantly doom scrolling was affecting his mental health. When he started therapy, one of the first things his therapist suggested was that he cut his news consumption in half. Changing the screen to black and white helped him remember not to scroll for too long.

This is a week to think about the visual element of your phone and how that affects its allure.

Timothy also noted that simply having the visual cue of the black and white screen kept him from picking his phone up when he didn't actually desire to spend time on it. He would either pick his phone up, get the task done he needed to and set it back down, or pick it up, see the screen in black and white and choose to put it back down because of the visual reminder. If the black and white screen starts to frustrate you, try to remember the habits you're breaking and building throughout this process.

Changing the screen to black and white might be the toughest change I am challenging you to make, but it had the biggest impact on me and many of the participants in the workshop.

what are the
biggest time
and money
wasters on
your phone?

what do
you miss
and what
do you
not miss
when you
spend less
time on
your phone?

how can
the black
and white
screen
disrupt the
unhelpful
aspects of
your phone?

Kerry is a mom with young children, so a lot of her time is spent entertaining them with things that aren't as interesting to her—cartoons for example. Before the workshop, she was scrolling on her phone while her kids were preoccupied, but during the workshop, she said that changing the phone to black and white made it so much easier to put down and helped her be more present with her family.

Another participant, Melisa acknowledged the annoyance of the black and white screen but got used to it after a few days. She noted that spending less time on her phone gave her extra time at the end of her day and a clearer head space.



After a couple days of having the black and white screen, I got used to the change and started noticing benefits too. I wasn't shopping; notifications went from a distracting red to just another shade of gray; scrolling on social media had lost a lot of its appeal; I wasn't staying up late watching Amazon Prime in bed; and the world outside my phone was brighter and more colorful than the world designed inside it.

This design change might take some getting used to, but if you focus on the world outside your phone, I believe you will reach the goals you are hoping for.

Black + White Screen

Changing the screen to black and white is likely to disorient you, but it will help reframe how you view your phone and the world outside it. I believe the power of this design change is illustrated by the fact that this setting is hidden so deeply within your phone.

This change is not easy to find or recommended while setting up your phone—which is by design.

The highly saturated colors on our phones allure us, keep us scrolling, and even affect our decision making. An article by *The New York Times* entitled “Is the Answer to Phone Addiction a Worse Phone?” explains, “Companies use colors to encourage subconscious decisions ... So that, for example, I may want to open email, but I’ll end up on Instagram, having seen its colorful button. Making the phone gray eliminates that manipulation ... it reintroduces ‘controlled attention.’”

Week three is an opportunity to do things on your phone that do not require color, like listening to music and podcasts or using more text-based tools like banking and messaging apps. Even if it is still on a screen, long-form content like podcasts are better for your attention span.

As I do every week, I encourage you to use the time you normally spend on your phone by doing something that aligns with your values. Is there a book you have been wanting to read? A magazine you never have the time to get to? A game your kids have been wanting to play? An easy errand you have been putting off? Try one or all of these things! Participants with the most success reclaimed the time they used to spend on their phones with new activities. This also prevents old habits from returning.

This week, change your screen to black and white (instructions are on pages 154–155) and keep the changes from week one and two in place.

what habit
do you want
to build
this week?
who might
want to
join you?

when will you begin that long journey into yourself?

...rumi



while writing today, reference the workbook purpose at the front of the book and consider your overall struggles and successes with your smartphone. make a personal plan for week three and think about how you can tailor this workbook for your specific struggles and goals.



Please find “Screen Time” in the settings on your phone (step one on page 138). Select “see all activity” and write down your daily screen time average, most used apps, number of “pick ups,” and notifications for last week. (You can also take screenshots of this to reference over the four weeks.) Compare your results to question one on last Sunday’s check in.



During week three, how do you want to reclaim the time you would typically spend on your phone? What is something you enjoy but you have a hard time prioritizing? Maybe it’s going on a ten-minute walk or stretching for a few minutes. Maybe it’s reading poetry before bed instead of scrolling on Pinterest. Is there something you could do with your accountability group? Write this on a piece of paper and put it somewhere you will see it.



Based on the examples given this week, what do you think changing the screen to black and white will help you with the most and why?



What is your goal for this week? Write this on a piece of paper and put it somewhere you will see it. Share this goal with your accountability group.



Look back at question five of Sunday of week one and write out the goal you set for the four-week workbook. Does this goal still seem reasonable/relevant? Make adjustments as needed.

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monday through friday check ins can be filled out at the end of that day or at the beginning of the following day. just be sure to consider your experience on the day noted on the check in.

if you miss a check in for monday through friday, you can fill it out later or skip a day here and there. the goal is not to perfectly fill out the check ins every single day, but to have a record of how your relationship with screen time is improving over the course of the four weeks. as always, integrate the helpful and release the unhelpful—even with this workbook.

1

Overall, how did you feel on Monday? (Reference the feelings wheel on page 29.) Do you think these feelings are affecting your cellphone screen time?



On Monday, roughly how many times did you pick up your phone then put it back down because the screen was black and white?



Free write about your experience Monday. Did you enjoy the black and white screen? Did the black and white screen frustrate you? What can you glean from this?

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these questions are designed to serve as prompts for self-reflection. feel free to write as much or little as is helpful.

1

How did your body feel on Tuesday? Do you notice any differences in your vision?

2

What is your favorite thing about the black and white screen? Consider asking your accountability group this question as well.



Free write about your experience with the black and white screen on Tuesday. If writing full sentences feels overwhelming, list adjective or make a mind map instead.

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it's mid-week, think about what you have learned so far, and how you can adjust to make the most of week three.

1

How was your mental state Wednesday? (Reference the feelings wheel on page 29.) Do you think these feelings are affecting your cellphone screen time?

2

Have you left your phone on black and white? Did you decide to turn it off? If so, why and did you remember to turn it back on?

date.....



Free write about your experience with the black and white screen on Wednesday. Do you notice any changes to the way you experience the world outside your phone?

"we can quiet our
inside so we can
perceive more on the
outside, or quiet
the outside so we can
notice more of what's
happening inside."

—*the creative act*

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13

consider what benefits you are starting to notice and look back at the check ins. has anything gotten easier over the course of the week?

1

Are you spending money less compulsively, doom scrolling less, or experiencing less eye-strain? Are there any other benefits of the black and white screen?

2

On Thursday, roughly how many times did you pick up your phone then put it back down because the screen was black and white?

0

1-5

6-10

11-15

16-20



What did you do today that you are proud of?



Have you checked in with your accountability group this week? What are a few benefits of having an accountability group?

yes

no

remember, it is okay if you miss a check in here and there. the goal is progress, not perfection.



How was your day Friday? (Reference the feelings wheel on page 29.) Do you think these feelings are affecting your cellphone screen time?



What are you thankful for today? How can you incorporate that into tomorrow?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

review your check ins from week three and consider your overall struggles and successes while writing. after filling out saturday's check in, compare your results to last sunday's.

1

During week three, how did you reclaim the time you would normally spend on your phone?

2

Over the course of the week, did you notice any changes in your mental state or the way you utilize your phone? Do you notice any patterns or correlations between your mood and phone usage?

3

Do you feel like the black and white screen helped improve your relationship with screen time? Why or why not?



Did you accomplish your goal for week three?
How are you progressing on your goal for the four-week
workbook? Update your accountability group on
your progress.

"under certain
circumstances
failing, losing,
forgetting, unmaking,
undoing, unbecoming,
not knowing may
in fact offer more
creative, more
cooperative, more
surprising ways of
being in the world."

*—the queer art
of failure*



Have you checked in with your accountability group
lately? What do you need accountability with for
week four?

yes

no

·practice·makes·perfect·

progress ∴ perfection

Week Four - Take Stock

You've made it to the final week, a reflection period.

This week is designed for you to take full ownership of the process. Take stock of what changes over the past three weeks have worked for you and what didn't work for you.

which design
changes were
helpful and
which were
unhelpful?

did the
changes you
disliked or
liked help
you get
closer to
your goals?

These are all questions only you can answer for yourself. This week is about choosing what changes would benefit you most for your life and goals, instead of me prompting the changes.

Consider what other changes you can make to improve your relationship with your phone and reach the goal you set at the beginning of week one.

*Taylor, one of the workshop participants, suggested buying a “**phone home**,” a ceramic cover for your phone when you are home. She feels like her phone having a specific place adds to the intentionality of it and prevents her from instinctively grabbing it. Taylor also loves having a place for everything, so the “phone home” helps her feel like her phone is in a safe place and will not get lost or forgotten. This is similar to leaving your keys in a bowl by the door, so you always know where they are.*

*Another participant, Angela, said that she wanted to set up **App Limits** on her phone (tutorial on pages 156–157), so that once she hit a certain amount of time on an app, her phone would notify her, turn the app gray, and if she tried to access it again it would ask her to enter a password.*

For some people (myself included) App Limits don't always work well because we ignore the notifications much like we do when smart watches tell us to stand up while we are working under a deadline.

App limits do not help me with apps that have a narrative or end goal. For instance, if App Limits interrupt me while watching Netflix or playing Candy Crush (a gaming app), I will ignore the notification because I want to finish what I am doing. By the time I finish, I forget that the App Limit notified me, and I'll keep using the app indefinitely. App Limits do work for me on apps like Photos where I am just perusing the photos I took that week.

Above all, think about what works for you and your life.

*A participant named Kerry wanted to try **a week with all apps deleted on her phone** so she could only text, talk, and photograph on it. This may feel extreme—it definitely would for me; I've got to have my Google Maps. But it's only a week! You can also delete all apps, then start fresh and download apps as you need them.*

*A participant named Julia said that the first week of the **black and white screen** was very difficult. She compared her experience to going through withdrawals, but by the second week, she got used to the change and even enjoyed it. Consider keeping whatever changes were the most difficult for you and see if they become easier moving forward.*

*When I really need to focus, I set a timer on my phone for 50 minutes while I work and **put my phone out of reach and sight**. When the timer goes off, I can check my phone, stand up and stretch for ten minutes or so; then I repeat this process. It helps me stay focused on the task at hand without being distracted by my phone. On the flip side, when I set the time for longer than 50 minutes, I start to get concerned I am missing something and that leads to distraction as well. 50 minutes is a happy medium for me, but maybe 15 or 25 minutes could be right for you.*

This idea was inspired by the Pomodoro Technique, which suggests you use a 25 minute timer, focus on one task, then take a break for five minutes. You do this for two to three hours then take a longer break and/or switch to a different kind of task.

Privacy and Content Restrictions are also available on the iPhone (tutorial on pages 164–167). If there are specific apps and/or websites you would like to restrict your access to, you can do so. We did not try this in the workshops, but I think it could be extremely helpful for some readers.



I frequently use my phone for navigation, so being able to turn the black and white screen setting on and off easily is important for me. On pages 162–163, there is a tutorial to turn the black and white screen on and off from the Control Center.

This may be a good week to go into individual apps such as Instagram and Facebook and disable like counts. This will make the number of likes on your posts and/or other’s posts not appear. These apps update quite often, so I am unable to provide tutorials, but all you need to do is Google, “disable like count [insert name of the app]” and instructions should be provided.

are there
any design
changes or
boundaries
you want
to try?

For me, the system that works best is a combination of the above suggestions and challenges from week one to three. Keep in mind, I have slowly increased the duration of Down Time and Do Not Disturb over the past two years:

- Instagram stays deleted; I only visit it on my iPad or laptop
- No shopping apps
- Set my phone away from myself for 50 minutes at a time while working (as needed)
- Time wasting apps are moved periodically
- Instagram like counts are disabled for other people’s posts and my posts
- I set my phone to black and white as needed

- Downtime is now set from 1 PM–11 AM (tutorial on pages 138–139)
- A 15-minute App Limit of the Photos app (tutorial on pages 156–157)
- Do Not Disturb is now set from 7 AM–6 PM (tutorial on pages 140–145)
- Wind Down is set for 30 minutes prior to Bedtime (tutorial on page 158–161)

This may seem overwhelming, but I made these changes over the course of two years—so give yourself time. Now, I don't even notice it anymore. I also adjust these settings as needed and try to stay in conversation with myself about my cellphone usage. These habits were built slowly with quite a bit of trial and error. There were many missteps and “binges,” but I kept my focus on progress, not perfection. Building habits takes time and intention.

The design of my phone is totally different from anyone I know, and it works for my life and goals. There is no way this exact set-up would work well for someone else, because it is that customized. All this said, don't get discouraged if the changes you tried week one through three weren't right for you. Consider how you can customize the design of your phone this specifically for yourself.

There is a way for you to create the relationship you want with your phone without completely throwing it out.

There are so many benefits to having a smartphone and it is a great privilege to enjoy them. This process isn't about being perfect or beating yourself up—it's about building awareness, creating boundaries where needed, and practicing intentional habits.

What do you want to let inside the gate and onto your property and what do you want to keep off?

"while some of us who have escaped our cages may start looking for ways back into the zoo, others may try to rebuild a sanctuary in the wild, and a few fugitive types will actually insist on staying lost."

—*the queer art of failure*

The previous pages give ideas for different changes to make, but you don't have to follow any of them. You can decide what you would like to do based on the new information you have. I encourage you to do some Googling and see what has helped other people decrease their screen time. Anything is fair game this week.

Try something out of the ordinary or a few small things. I think you will be amazed at the difference something small can make when you commit to it. Set some reasonable boundaries for yourself, and be gentle if you slip up.

No misstep is final.

If you have had enough of this challenge by week four and you would like to end the "Take Stock" challenge now—that's also your call! I just ask that you take note of your Screen Time after this week and see if ending the challenge helped you reach your goals.

An important part of this challenge is community and accountability. Remember to check in with your accountability group. See how your friends are doing, brainstorm ideas for new changes to make, encourage each other, and gently hold each other accountable.

let yourself be silently drawn
by the strange pull
of what you really love.
it will not lead you astray.

...rumi



while writing today, reference the workbook purpose at the front of the book and consider your overall struggles and successes with your smartphone. make a personal plan for week four and think about how you can tailor this workbook for your specific struggles and goals.



Please find “Screen Time” in the settings on your phone (step one on page 138). Select “see all activity” and write down your daily screen time average, most used apps, number of “pick ups,” and notifications for last week. (You can also take screenshots of this to reference over the four weeks.) Compare your results to question one on last Sunday’s check in.



How do you want to reclaim the time you would usually spend on your phone during week four? Is there a recipe you have been wanting to try? A puzzle or game you never seem to find the time for? What is something fun that you can integrate into your week? Write this on a piece of paper and put it somewhere you will see it.



Based off the ideas given this week or ideas you have thought of yourself, what changes would you like to make to your phone or how you use your phone this week?



What is your goal for this week? Write this on a piece of paper and put it somewhere you will see it. Share this goal with your accountability group.



Look back at question five of Sunday of week one and write out the goal you set for the four-week workbook. Does this goal still seem reasonable/relevant? Make adjustments as needed.



monday through friday check ins can be filled out at the end of that day or at the beginning of the following day. just be sure to consider your experience on the day noted on the check in.

if you miss a check in for monday through friday, you can fill it out later or skip a day here and there. the goal is not to perfectly fill out the check ins every single day, but to have a record of how your relationship with screen time is improving over the course of the four weeks. as always, integrate the helpful and release the unhelpful—even with this workbook.



Overall, how did you feel on Monday? (Reference the feelings wheel on page 29.) Do you think these feelings are affecting your cellphone screen time?



Do you feel yourself reaching for your phone more or less intentionally? Why or why not? How can this information benefit you this week?



Free write about your experience Monday. How were the first couple of days with the customized changes you made to your phone?



these questions are designed to serve as prompts for self-reflection. feel free to write as much or little as is helpful.



How did your body feel on Tuesday? How can you improve these feelings?



What benefits are you experiencing from the customized changes to your phone? Consider asking your accountability group this question as well.

date.....



Free write about your experience with the changes you made to your phone on Tuesday. What is an intuitive way for you to get your thoughts on the page? Do you like lists, mind maps, or some other format? Try experimenting this week.



it's mid-week, think about what you have learned so far, and how you can adjust to make the most of week four.



How was your mental state Wednesday? (Reference the feelings wheel on page 29.) Do you think these feelings are affecting your cellphone screen time?

date.....



How have you reclaimed your time this week? How did you feel while doing it? What is something small you can do today or tomorrow to reclaim your time?

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F

consider what benefits you are starting to notice and look back at the check ins. has anything gotten easier over the course of the week?

1

How did your body feel on Tuesday? Do you notice any changes when you use your phone more or less?

2

Is your attention span improving? Does your head space feel clearer? Are there any other benefits of the boundaries you are trying this week?



Free write or doodle about your experience with the customized changes on Thursday. What did you do that you are proud of? Try checking in with your accountability group on this.



Have you checked in with your accountability group this week? How could you check in with your accountability group after the workbook is complete?

yes

no

remember, it is okay if you miss a check in here and there. the goal is progress, not perfection.



How was your day Friday? (Reference the feelings wheel on page 29.) Do you think these feelings are affecting your cellphone screen time?



Have you started to notice any changes to how you are using your phone overall?



What do you find helpful about your phone? How can you integrate the helpful aspects of your phone today or tomorrow?



you made it. this is your last check in!

this check in is a little longer than usual, so feel free to complete the sections on another day or take a little time to reflect before filling it out—especially the second part. if quantifiable goals were not reached, and you solely focused on building awareness—that is a huge step in the right direction. whatever progress you made, soak it in, affirm yourself, celebrate with your accountability group.

there are two sections for today, one to look back on the past week and one to reflect on the program as a whole. first, consider your overall struggles and successes with screen time over week four. after filling out this section, compare your results to last sunday's check in.



During week four, how did you reclaim the time you used to spend on your phone? How did it make you feel?



Over the course of the week, did you notice any changes in your mental state or the way you utilize your phone? Do you notice any patterns?



Did the customized boundaries help improve your relationship with your phone? Why or why not?



Did you accomplish your goal for week four? How do you feel about it?

continued on the following pages.

1

2

3

4

5

in this section, i would like for you to reflect on your relationship with screen time over the four-week program. compare your results to sunday of week one's check in.

5

Please find "Screen Time" in the settings on your phone (step one on page 138). Select "see all activity" and write down your daily screen time average. Compare this number to what you wrote for **question one**, Sunday, week one. Is your current daily Screen Time average any closer to what you think a healthy amount is?

6

While in the "Screen Time" settings, write out your most used apps, pick ups, and notifications for last week (you can also take screenshots of this to reference). How do these numbers compare to **question two**, Sunday, week one?



Over the past month, how have you reclaimed your time? What did the workbook help you accomplish?



Overall, did this program help you change your relationship with your smartphone? How or how not?



How are you progressing on your goal for the four-week program? Did you accomplish it? Take a step in the right direction? Share this with your accountability group and find a way to celebrate together.

the wound is the place the light enters you.

...rumi

Beyond the Workbook

So we started this book with my story, and I'd like to finish it there as well.

When I was a kid, I used to stick my head out the window of my dad's truck with my tongue out like a dog. I would paint with water on cement just to watch it evaporate. I created drawings and gave them away as quickly as they were made. I interviewed adults on complex topics and published poems online. I've spent my adult life trying to get back to that little girl—tangled hair, curious, and free.

So I wrote this book for me. I wrote it to understand why finding balance with my smartphone made me feel so much freer; redesigning the smartphone created the space for me to reclaim my time and act in alignment with my values. I also wrote this book for you.

I hope the workbook helps you think less about your phone and more about your life outside it.

The title *Cellular Balance Workbook* isn't even specific to the smartphone. The title refers to balance of the cells in your body in conjunction with your cellular device. Consider how you can be more present and balanced physically. How you can pay closer attention to your physical sensations and live a more embodied life.

There are many ways to do this, some of which you may have already tried during the workbook. For instance, all the ways you chose to reclaim your time—that's presence. That is being intentional.

Journaling in the check ins is also a way to process your emotions, so you can be more present.

*Another way to practice presence
is to connect with your senses.*

An article published by The University of Rochester Medical Center, explains how to do so in the following exercise. Take a few deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth. Relax your face and shoulders or anywhere else you are holding tensions. Then observe the space you are in.

- What are **five colors** you see?
- What are **four textures** you can touch?
- What are **three sounds** you can hear?
- What are **two scents** you can smell?
- What is **one thing** you can taste?

how do
you feel
after
connecting
with your
senses?

As always, you can adjust this exercise. You do not have to follow this sequence or the number that corresponds to each sense. The goal is to connect with the tangible world in an active way. There are many other exercises like the one listed above, but this is one I have found particularly helpful.

Tutorial index

On pages 138–167, you’ll find an index of tutorials for existing settings that can be activated on the phone. This index is intended to spark curiosity and serve as a jumping off point for customizing the design of your smartphone. Do not feel pressure to try all of these changes at once—or ever. Add to the list or ignore the settings you have no interest in.

This index is not all encompassing. New settings are being developed regularly, and by the time you have this book in your hands, there very well may be more settings that can be customized.

Stay curious and design your smartphone to work for you.

Now that you have completed the workbook, feel free to shoot me an email (rhg55@rutgers.edu) about what worked and didn’t work for you. Tell me what you think about the workbook. Help me improve it, redesign it, and keep this a living document.

Your feedback is invaluable to me.

a thousand half-loves
must be forsaken,
to take
one whole heart home.

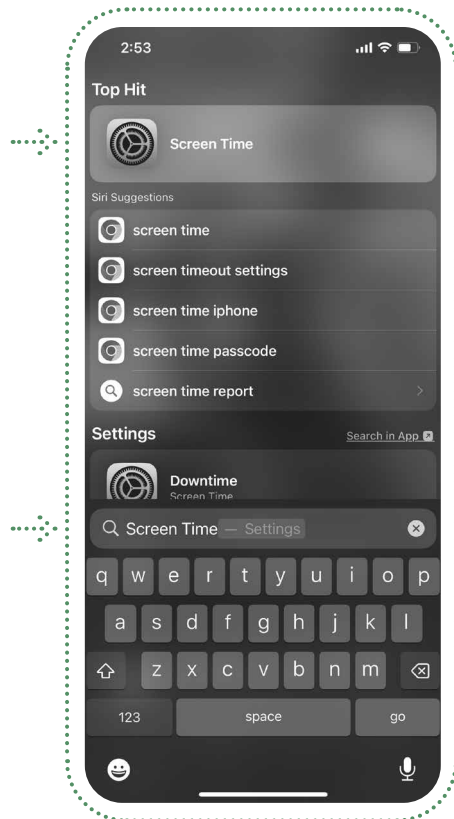
...rumi

Downtime

choose which apps are available and unavailable during certain times of day.

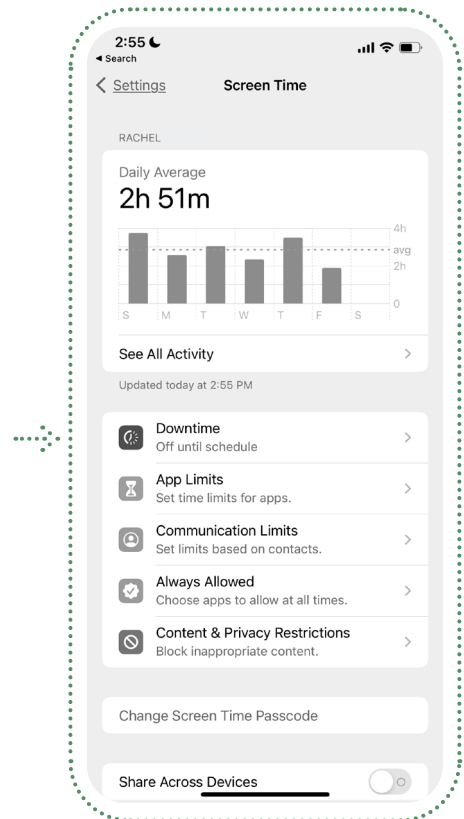
step 1

From the center of your home screen, swipe down, type in “Screen Time,” click the icon “Screen Time.”



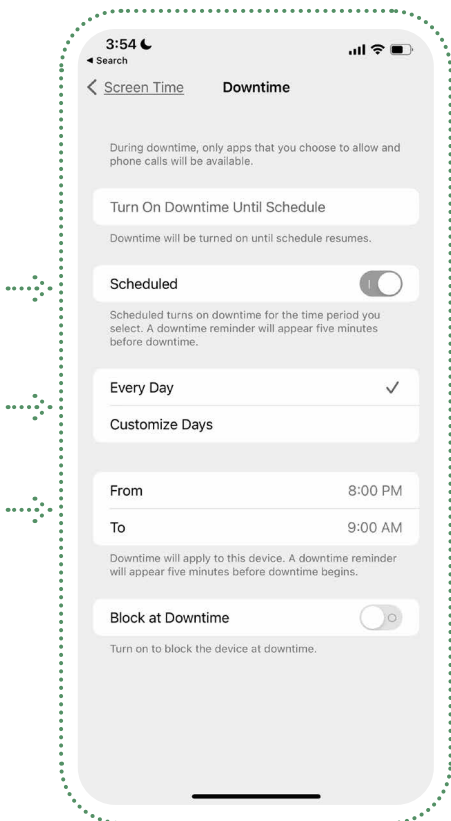
step 2

On the Screen Time page, click “Downtime” to start setting up the process.



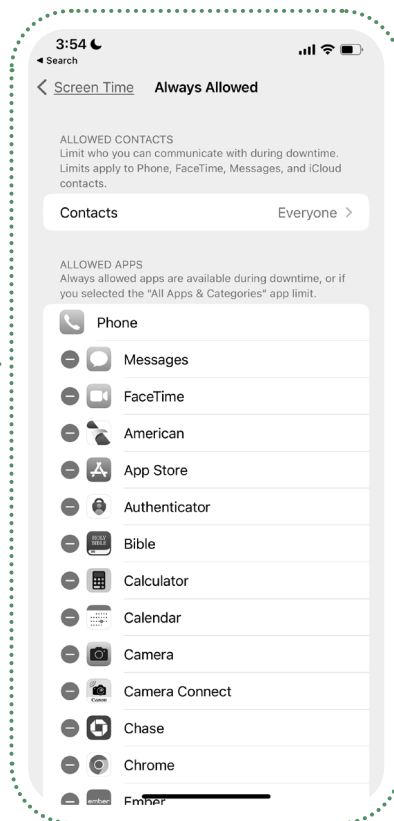
step 3

Toggle “Scheduled” to on.
Check “Every Day” or
“Customize Days.” Choose the
time of day you would like
Downtime to function.



step 4

Go back to the Screen Time page,
click “Always Allowed” and
choose what apps you would
like to always have access to.

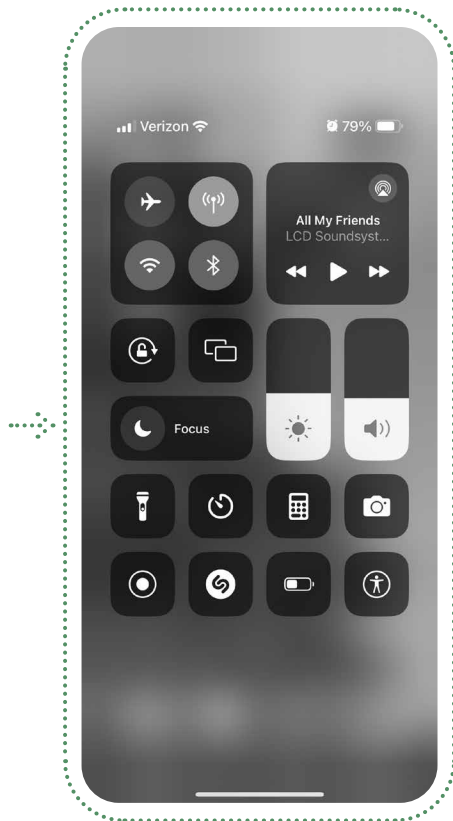


Do Not Disturb

choose times of day you would like to not hear or see notifications until you unlock your phone.

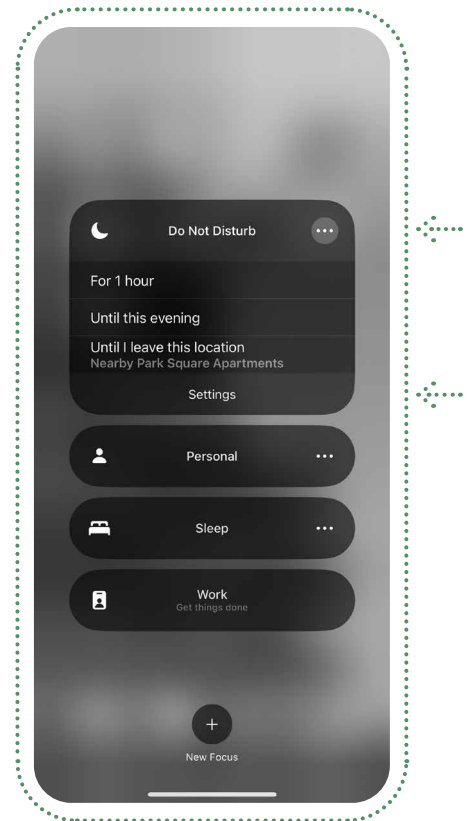
step 1

From the top-right of your home screen, swipe down, and click “Focus.”



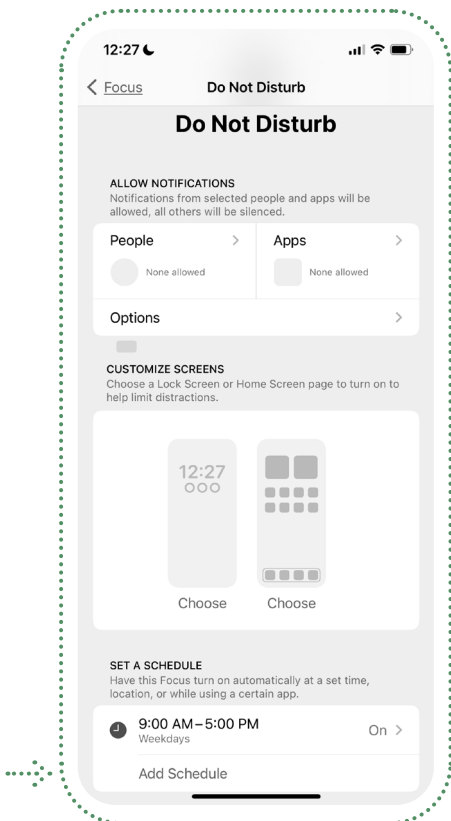
step 2

Click the three dots on “Do Not Disturb” then click “Settings.”



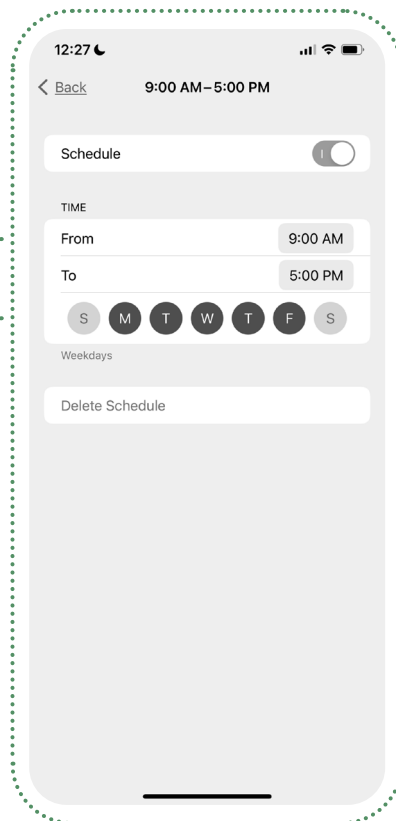
step 3

Click “Add Schedule.”



step 4

Choose the time of day and days of the week you would like Do Not Disturb to function.



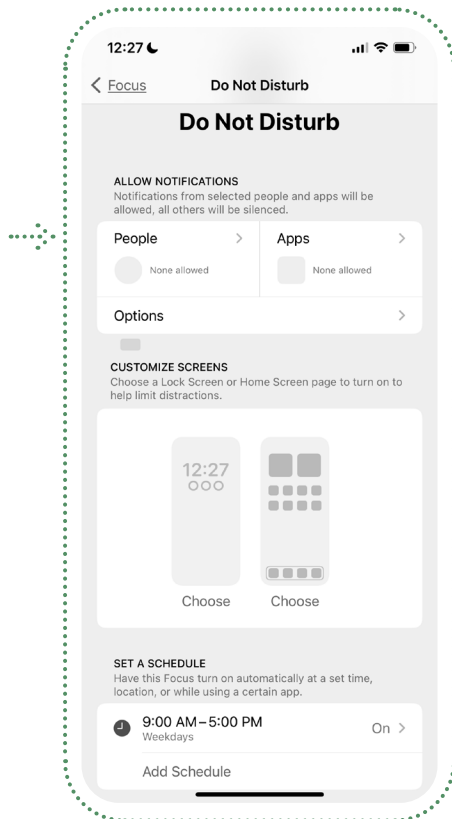
continued on the following pages.

Allow Notifications

choose people whose calls will not be silenced when your phone is set to do not disturb.

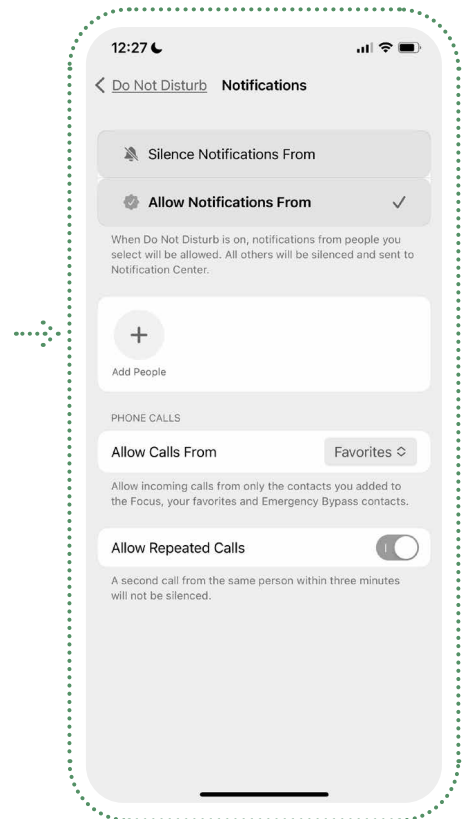
step 5

Go back to the Do Not Disturb main page and click “People.”



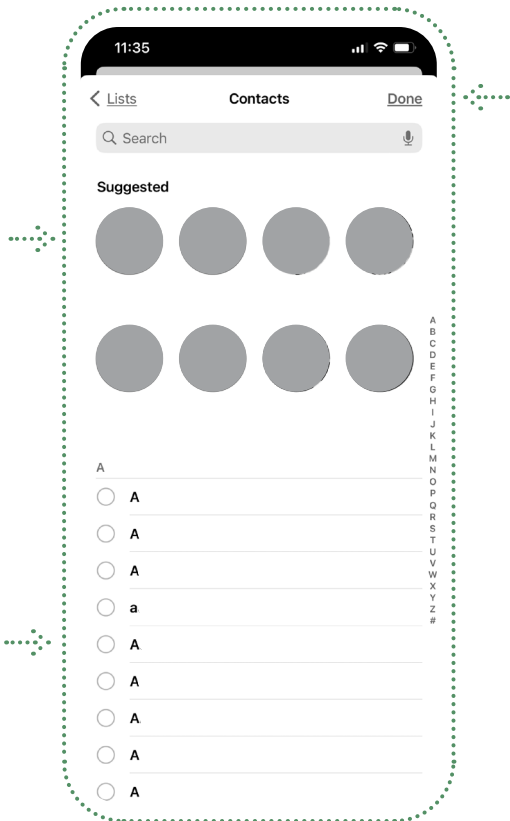
step 6

Click “Add People.”



step 7

Choose who you would like to allow notifications from. Click “Done.”



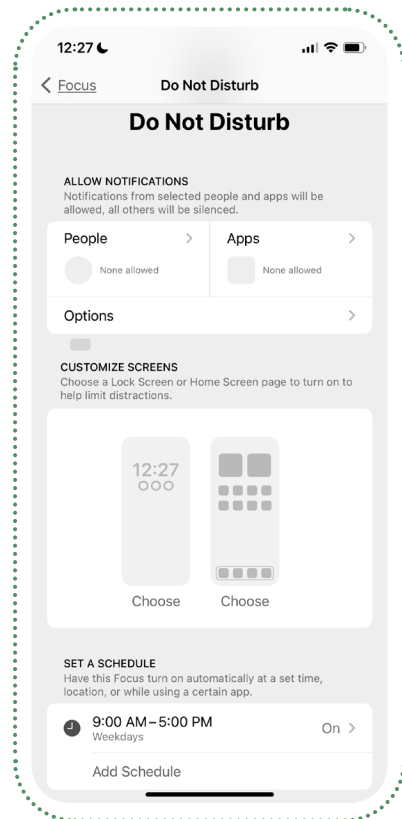
continued on the following pages.

Allow Notifications

choose apps that the notifications will not be silenced when your phone is set to do not disturb.

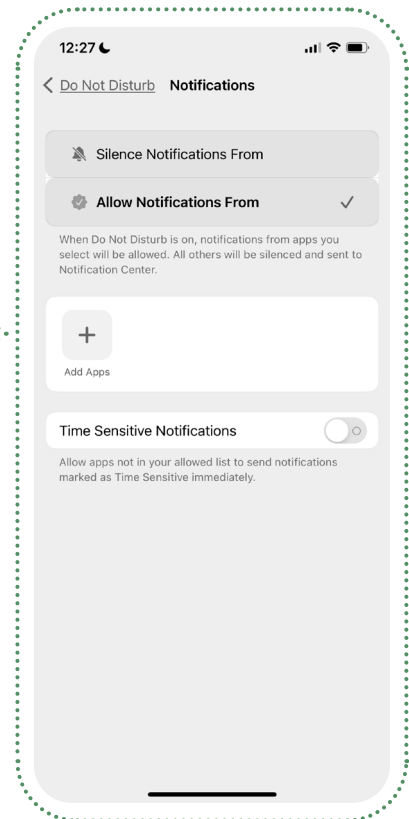
step 8

Go back to the Do Not Disturb main page and click “Apps.”



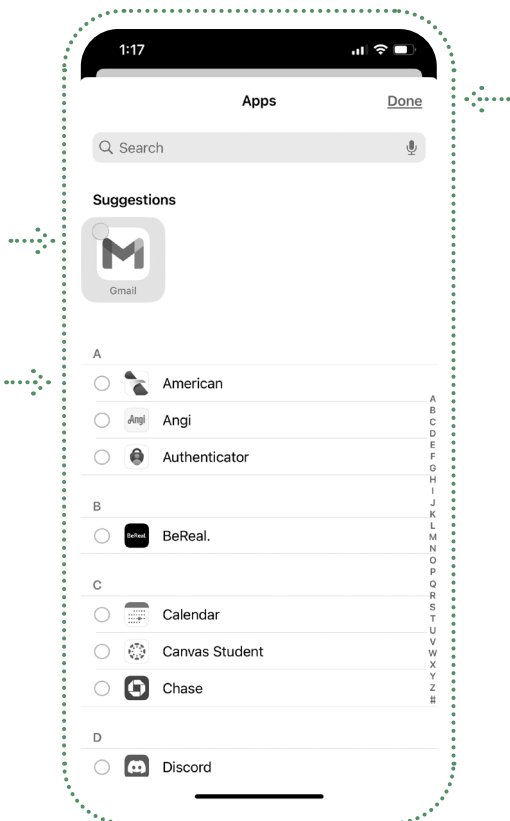
step 9

Click “Add Apps.”



step 10

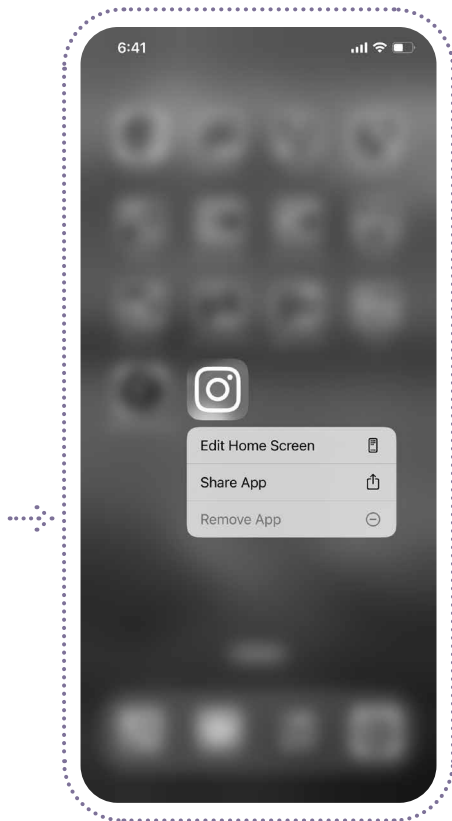
Choose which apps you would like to allow notifications from.
Click “Done.”



Delete + Move Apps

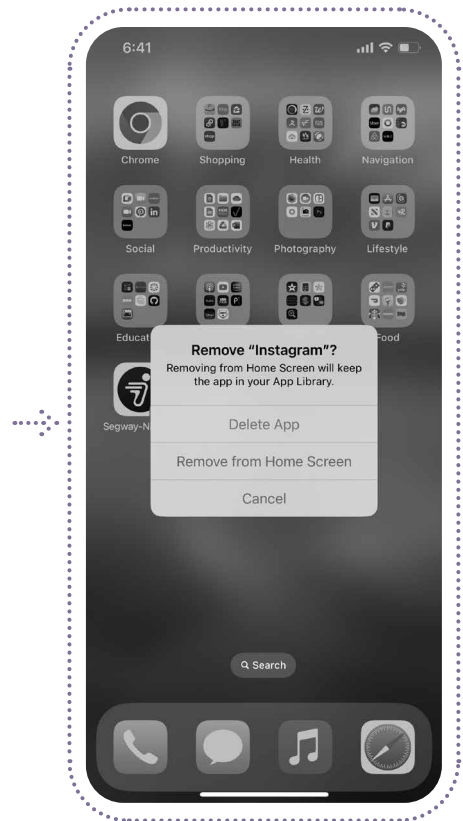
step 1

Hold down your thumb on the app you would like to delete.
Click “Remove App.”



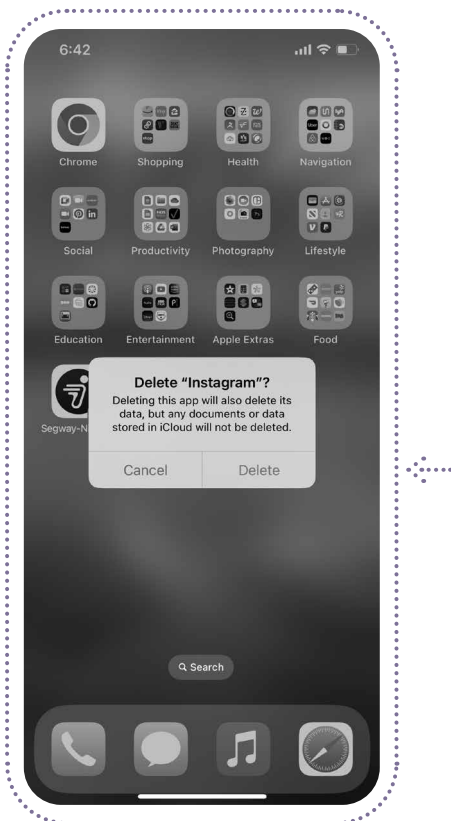
step 2

Click “Delete App” so it is completely removed from your phone.



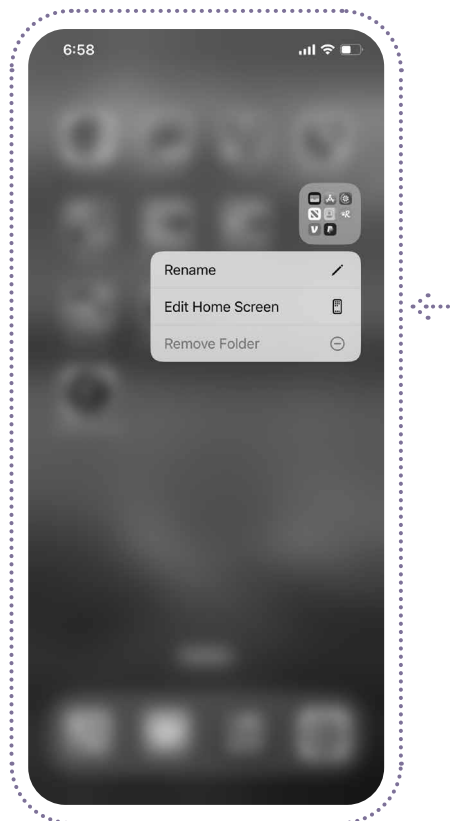
step 3

Confirm that you would like to delete the app.



step 4

Hold down your thumb on an app, click "Edit Home Screen," then move your apps and folders.

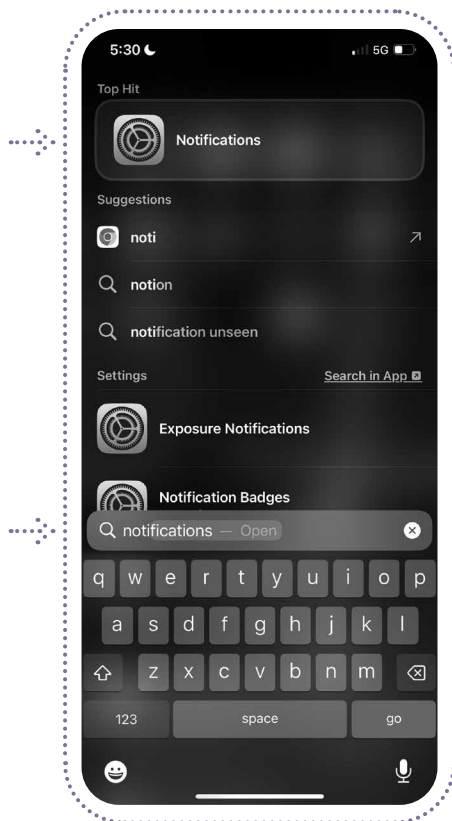


Edit Notifications

choose the kinds of notifications you can receive from specific apps.

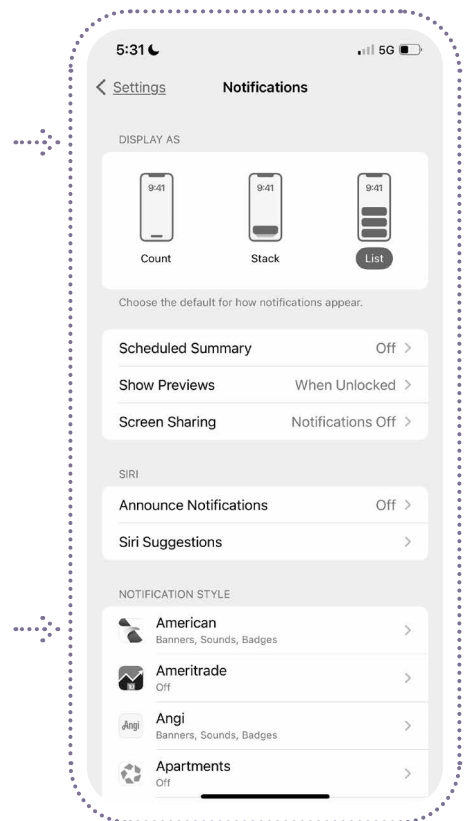
step 1

From the center of your home screen, swipe down, type in “Notifications,” click the icon “Notifications,” click the icon “Notifications.”



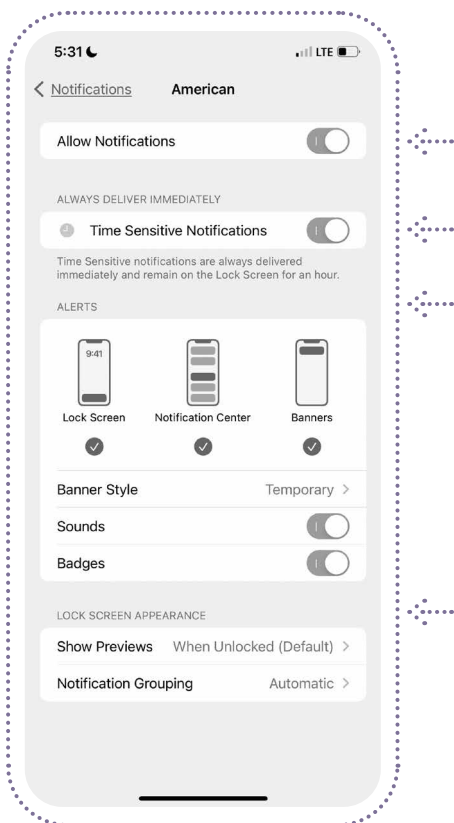
step 2

Chose the default display of your notifications. Click on specific apps to customise each one.



step 3

Customize Allow Notifications, Time Sensitive Notifications, Alerts, and/or Lock Screen Appearance.

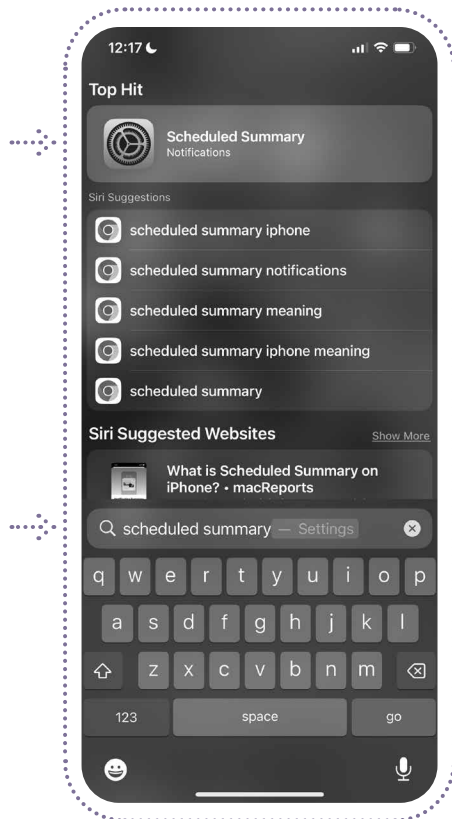


Notification Summary

schedule a notification summary of chosen apps for specific times.

step 1

From the center of your home screen, swipe down, type in “Scheduled Summary,” click the icon “Scheduled Summary.”



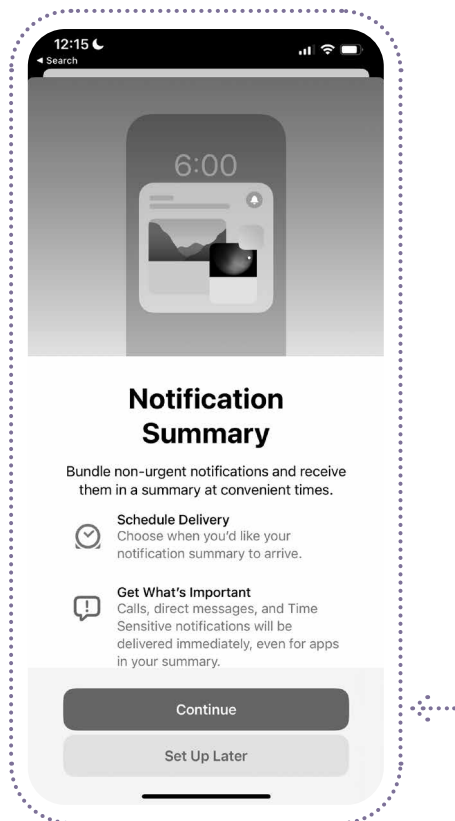
step 2

Toggle on “Scheduled Summary.”



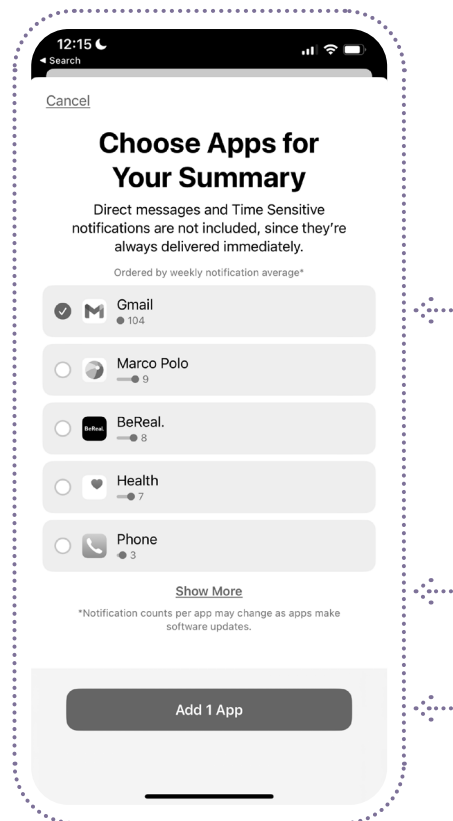
step 3

Click “Continue.”



step 4

Choose the app(s) you would like to add to your summary from the suggestions or by selecting “Show More.” Click “Add App.”



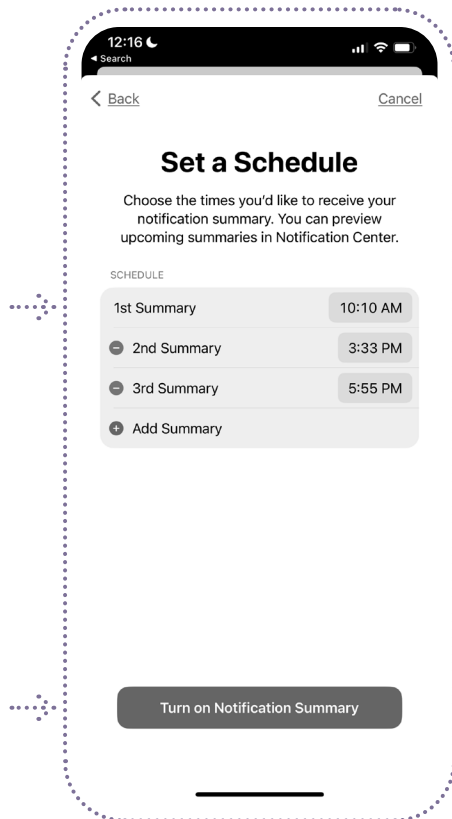
continued on the following pages.

Notification Summary

schedule a notification summary of chosen apps for specific times.

step 5

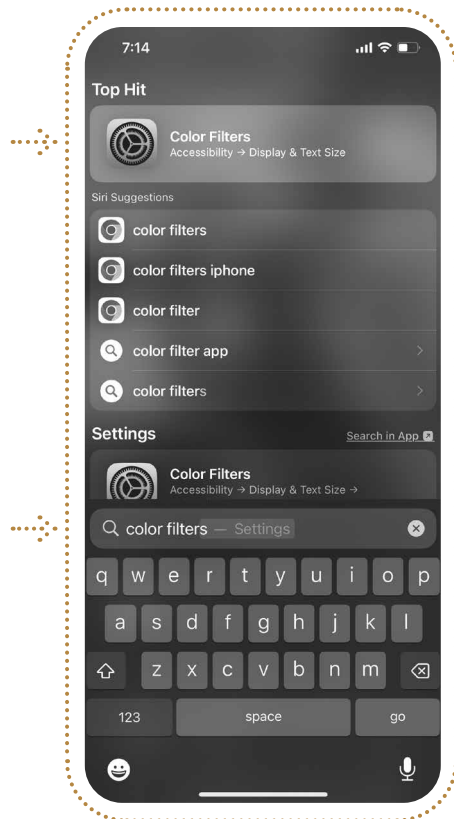
Choose the times of day you would like to receive your notification summary. Click “Turn on Notification Summary.”



Black + White Screen

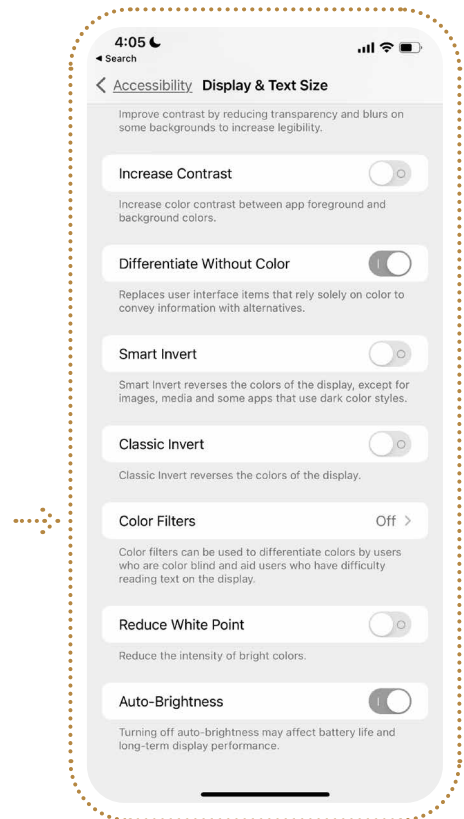
step 1

From the center of your home screen swipe down, type in “Color Filters,” click the icon “Color Filters.”



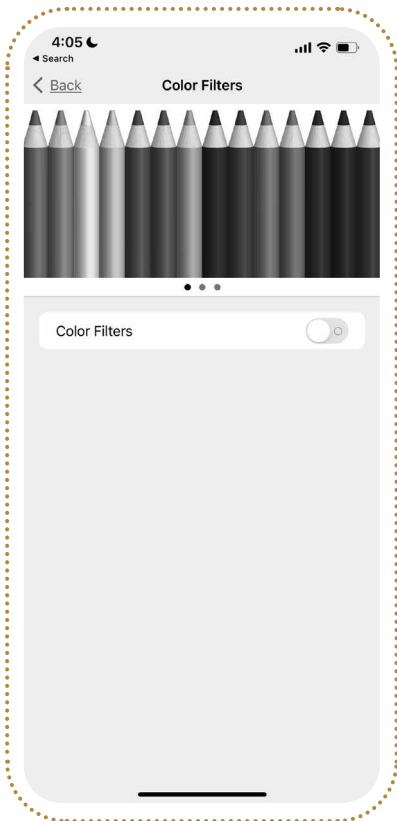
step 2

Click “Color Filters.”



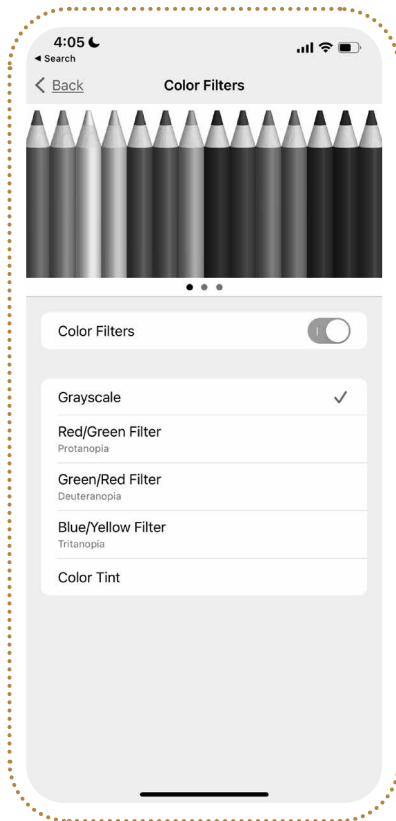
step 3

Toggle “Color Filters” on



step 4

Select “Grayscale.”

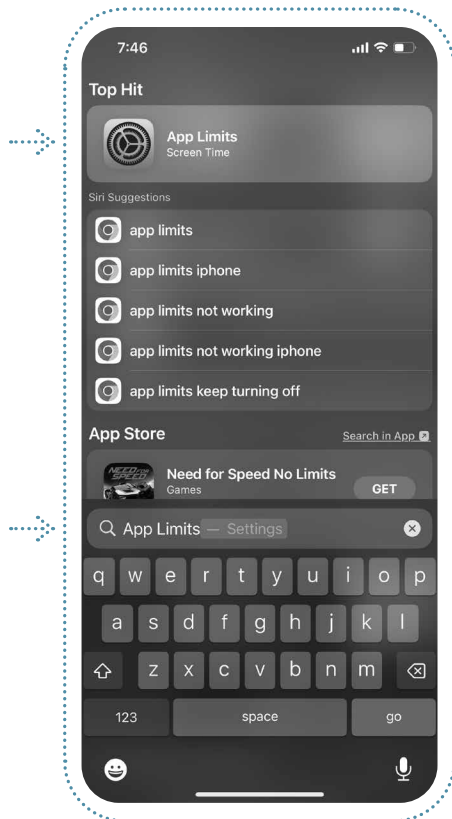


App Limits

choose the amount of time you would like to spend on specific apps each day.

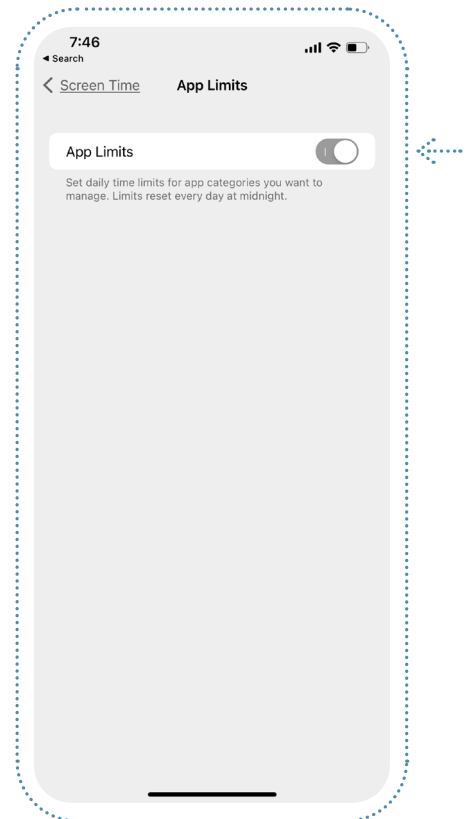
step 1

From the center of your home screen, swipe down, type in “App Limits,” click the icon “App Limits,”



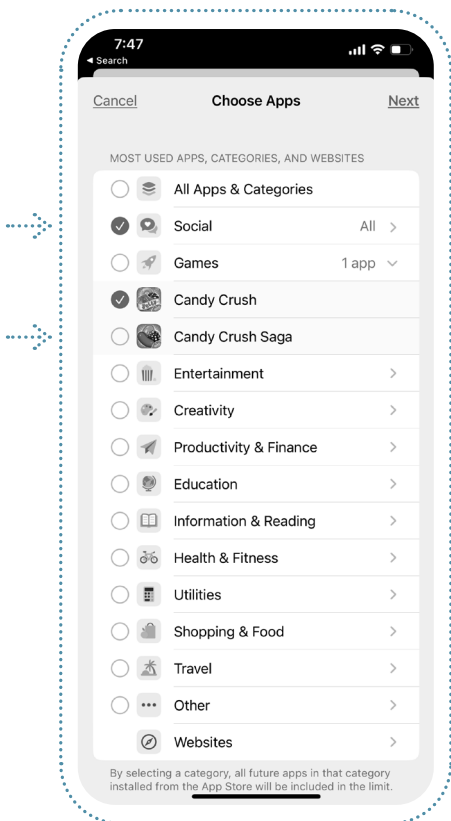
step 2

Toggle on “App Limits” and click “Add Limit.”



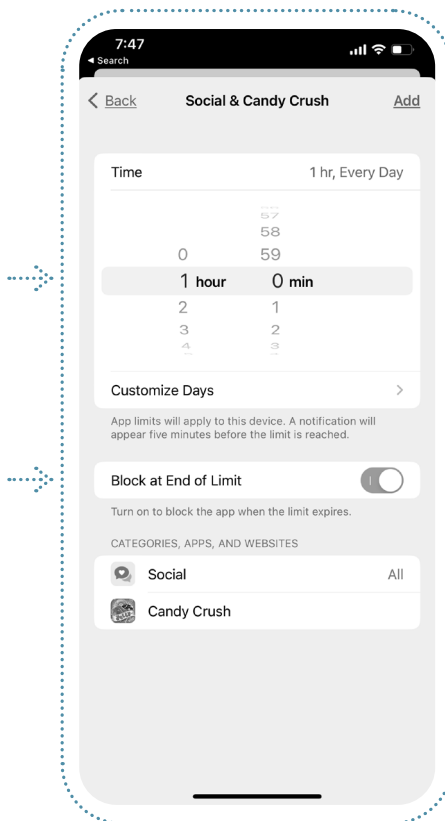
step 3

Choose if you would like to add a limit to a category of apps or a specific app.



step 4

Choose the time limit you would like. You can even customize the days.

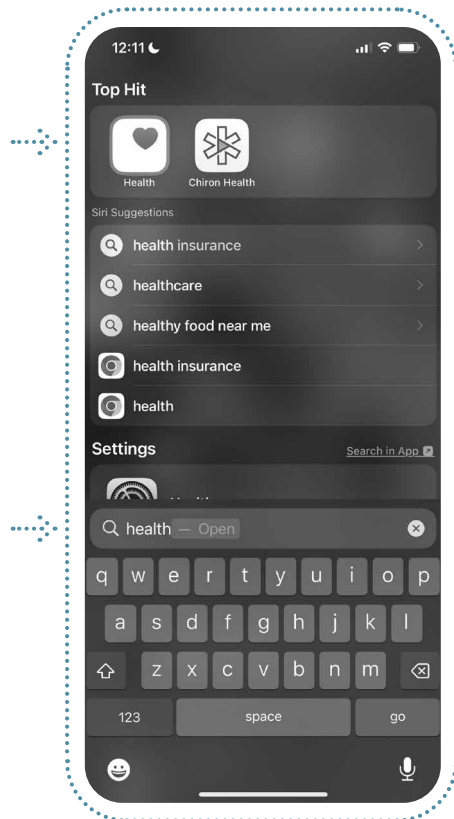


Sleep

choose the hours you would like to sleep and a wind down period. your phone will silence chosen notifications during those hours.

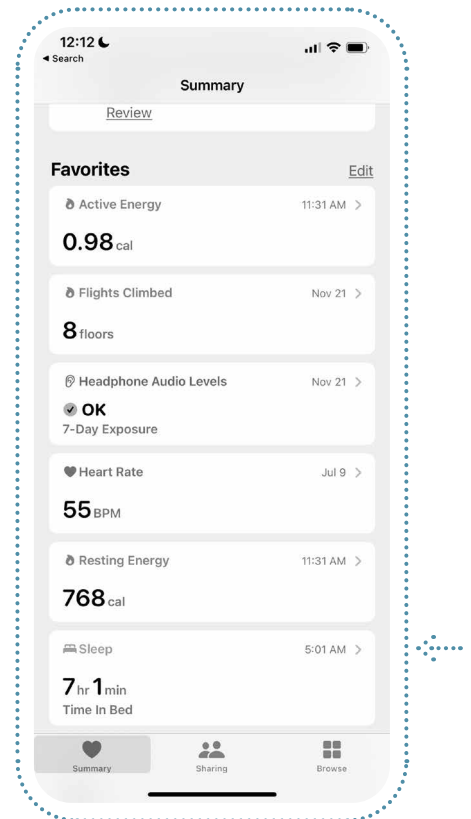
step 1

From the center of your home screen, swipe down, type in “Health,” click the icon “Health.”



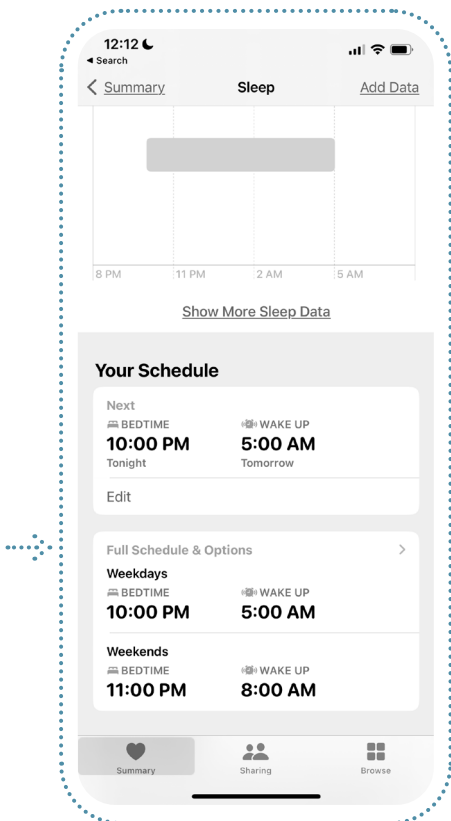
step 2

Scroll down and click on “Sleep.”



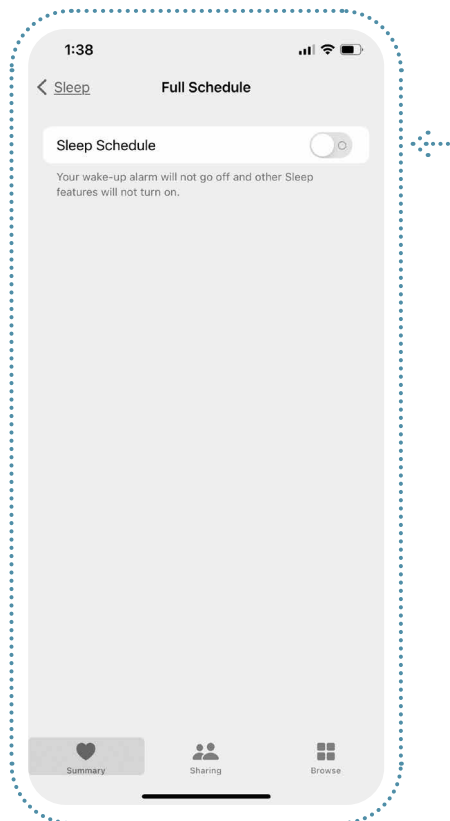
step 3

Click “Full Schedule & Options.”



step 4

Toggle on “Sleep Schedule”



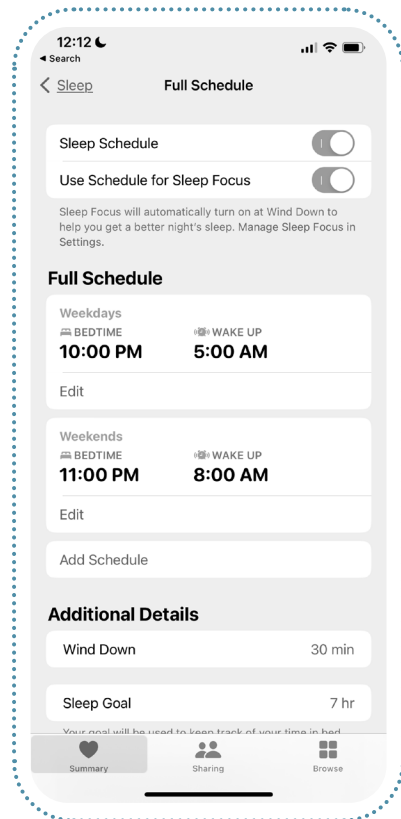
continued on the following pages.

Sleep

choose the hours you would like to sleep and a wind down period. your phone will silence chosen notifications during those hours.

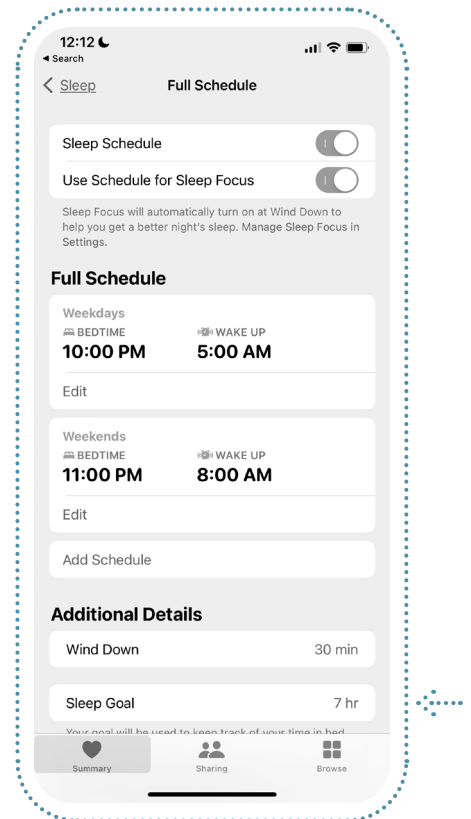
step 5

“Wind Down” is the amount of time prior to “Bed Time” you would like your phone to be silent. Choose the amount of time.



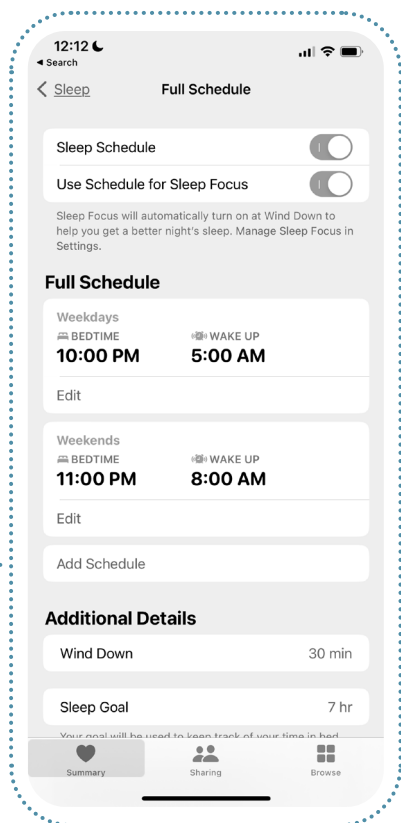
step 6

“Sleep Goal” is the hours of sleep you would like get per night. Choose the amount of time.



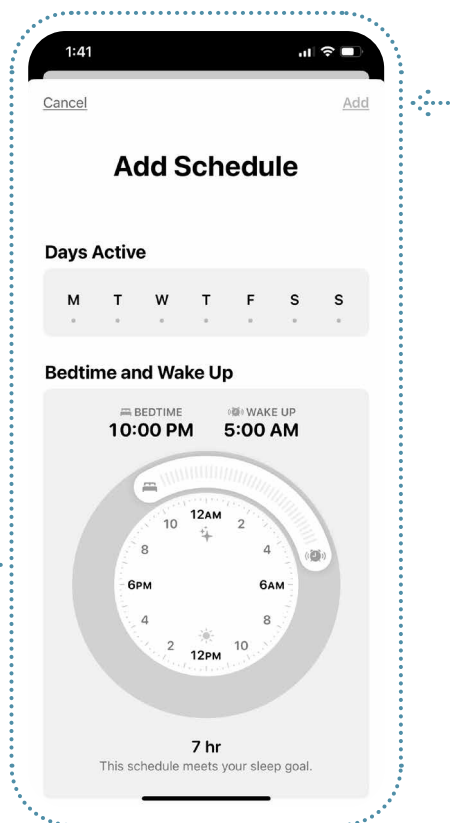
step 7

Click “Add Schedule.”



step 8

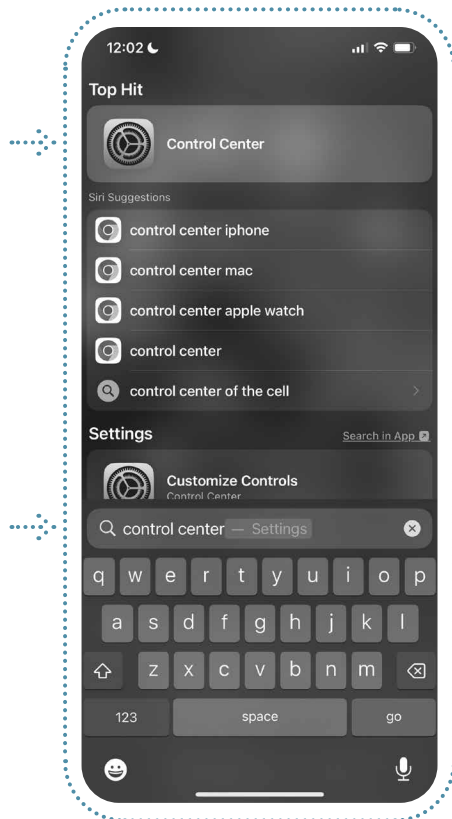
Choose the days of the week you would like this alarm. Choose the time you would like to go to sleep and wake up. Click “Add.”



Turn On/Off the Black + White Screen

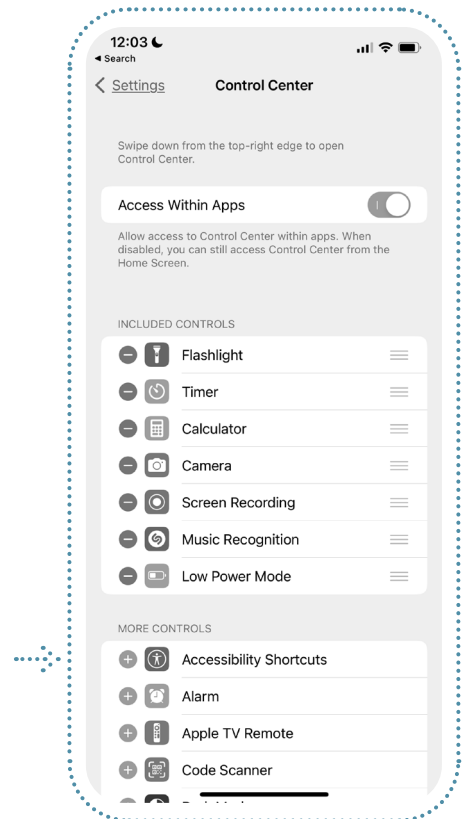
step 1

From the center of your home screen, swipe down, type in “Control Center,” click the icon “Control Center.”



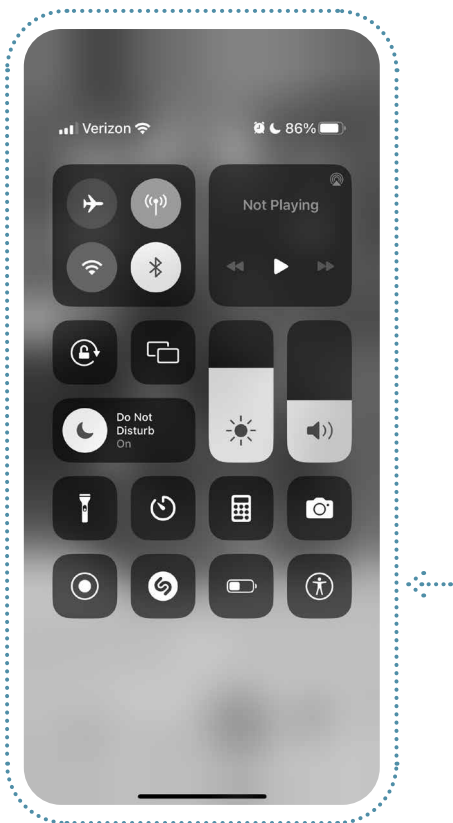
step 2

Click the “+” to the left of “Accessibility Shortcuts.”



step 3

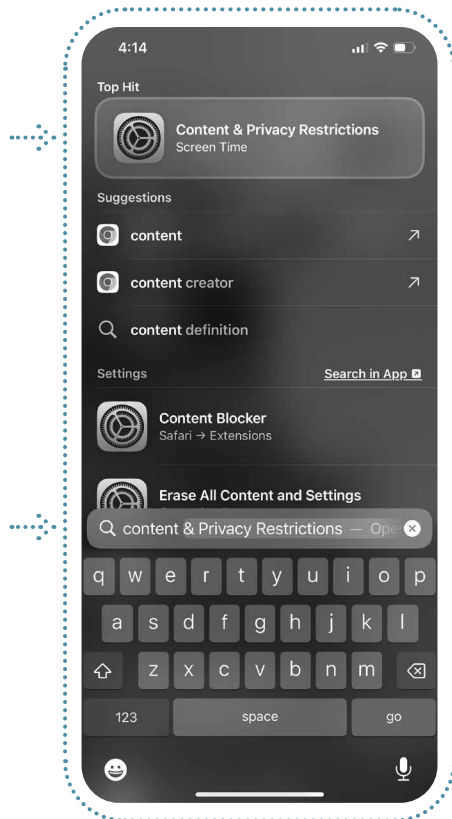
From the top-right of your home screen swipe down. Click Accessibility Shortcut icon to toggle on or off the black and white screen.



Content + Privacy Restrictions

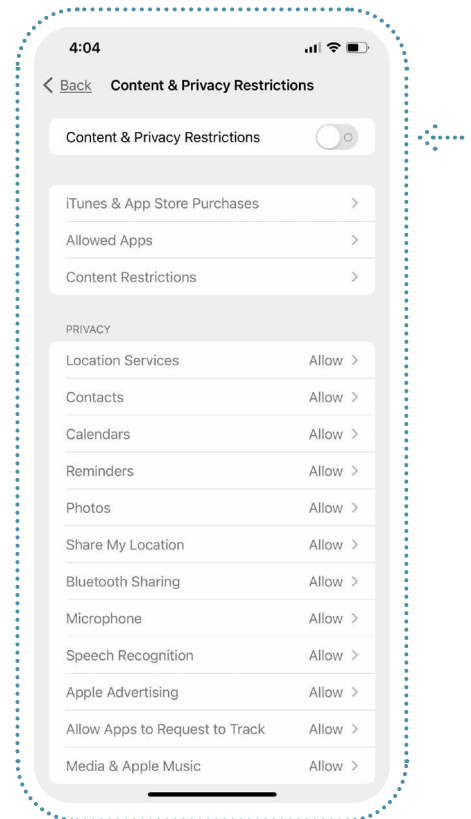
step 1

From the center of your home screen, swipe down, type in “Content & Privacy Restrictions,” click the icon “Content & Privacy Restrictions.”



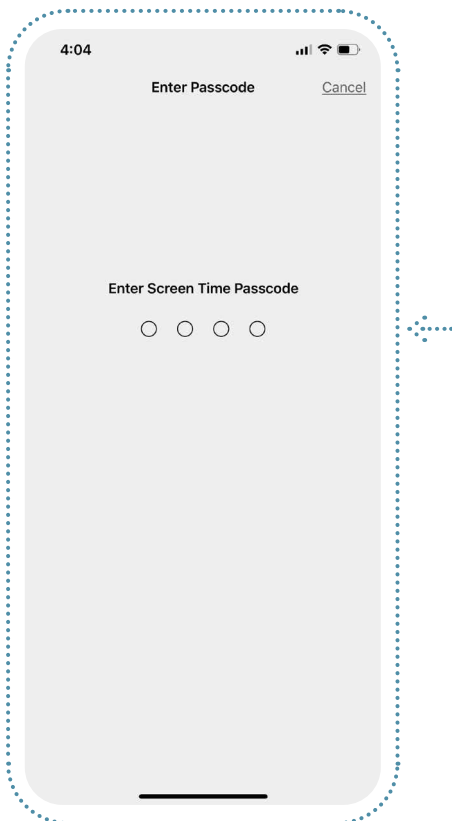
step 2

Toggle on “Content & Privacy Restrictions.”



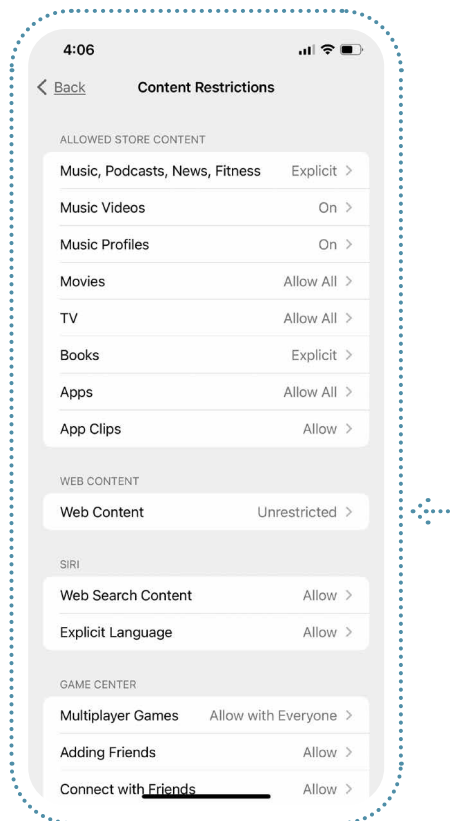
step 3

Enter your Screen Time Passcode.
The keyboard will appear.



step 4

There are innumerable ways to
customize this, but I'll show one.
Click "Unrestricted" to the right
of "Web Content."

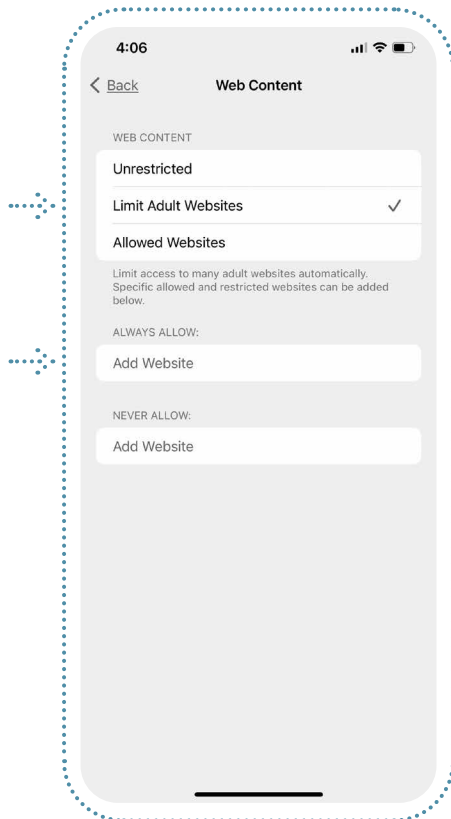


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Content + Privacy Restrictions

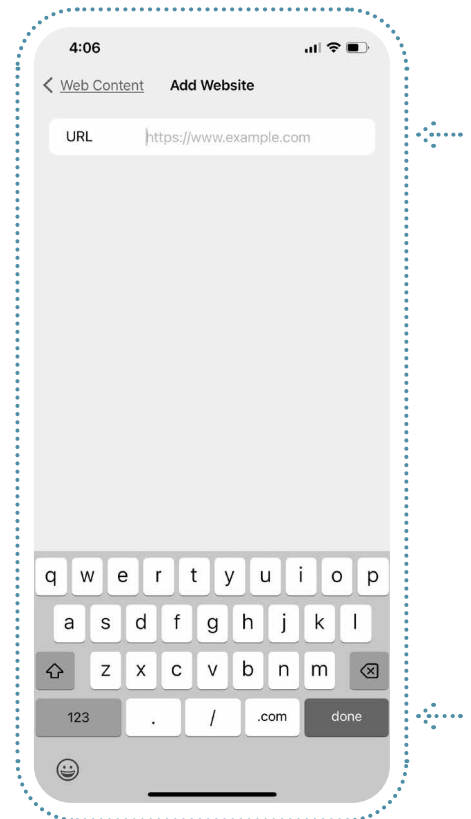
step 5

Click “Limit Adult Websites” then click “Add Website” under “Always Allow” to make specific websites always available.



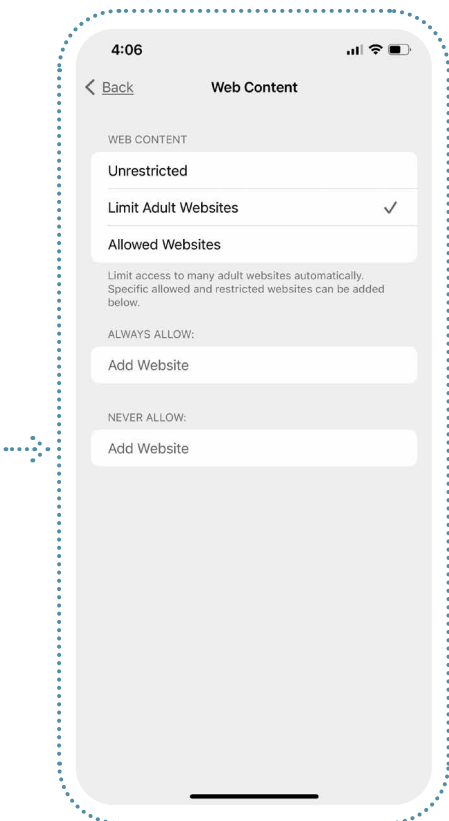
step 6

Type in the exact URL then click “done.”



step 7

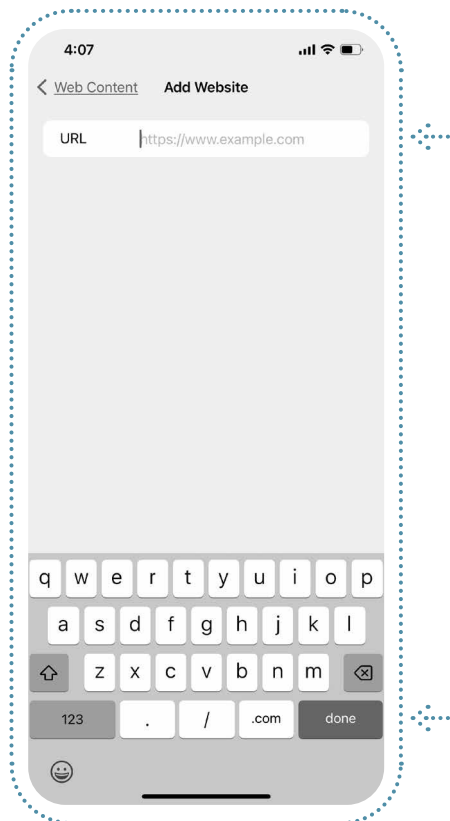
Click “Add Website” under “Never Allow” to make specific websites never available.



step 8

Type in the exact URL then click “done.”

Go back to the main Privacy & Restrictions page and explore the settings.





Thank you to the 2024 and 2025 MFA in Design co-horts and professors at Rutgers University who have guided me on the process of researching, writing, workshopping, and designing the workbook: Saba Maheen, Zamira Tennie, Melisa Tekin, Corina Coughlan, Gerry Beegan, Atif Akin, Huiyi Chen, Jackie Thaw, Chris Rypkema, Natalie Bookchin, and Mindy Seu (listed in no particular order). Your feedback has been invaluable to the development of this workbook and my development as a human.

And to my mom, Karen: thank you for teaching me to read and write long after I was supposed to know how. Thank you for copy editing anything I write before others see it and for reading to me and helping me fall in love with words.

*Thank y'all for your energy, honesty,
generosity, and most of all—time.*

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Rutgers University MFA in Design 2024

yesterday I was clever,
so I wanted to change the world.
today I am wise,
so I am changing myself.

•••rumi

This workbook was created from insights gained through collaborative workshops:

“Basically all the time my phone could have taken, I fully reinvested into myself . . . I focused on having a cleaner, leaner lifestyle in terms of what I consumed overall.” —Alfred, 29

“I homeschool my kids. Once I set my phone down it’s like my brain worked better which made all the things I wanted to do for my kid’s school not really feel so big after all. We did three of my ideas in five days!” —Catherine, 35

“I made strides in understanding and consciousness regarding the habit of looking at my phone . . . My phone is my tool, I am not my phone’s tool. This is how it should be!” —Neal, 34

Creating balance with the smartphone involves integrating the helpful and releasing the unhelpful aspects of it.

What is helpful and unhelpful is unique to everyone, so the design changes will be customized by you. To redesign your phone, no additional apps, software, or subscriptions need to be downloaded or purchased. This workbook is for anyone who would like to use their phone more intentionally. This process starts with the design.

It is recommended, not required, to have a friend or two to do the workbook with for accountability. This makes the process a lot more enjoyable and helps everyone stick with their goals.

By redesigning her smartphone, the author saves an average of 3.5 hours a day which used to be spent on her phone. This adds up to over 53 days in a year. Without the phone’s pull on your attention, you can reclaim your time in an intentional way.

How would you reclaim 53 days a year?

