

Application for the 2025–2026 Psy-Connection Award

ALTERED, From Homeostasis to Eudaimonia

Wong Man Sum

MA in Psychology, CUHK, Department of Psychology

Application for the 2025–2026 Psy-Connection Award

16 March, 2026

Application for the 2025–2026 Psy-Connection Award

ALTERED, From Homeostasis to Eudaimonia

1. Introduction and Community Need

High-achieving young adults—university students, postgraduate trainees, and early-career professionals—represent one of the least-served groups in mental health intervention design. They are rarely flagged as 'at-risk' because they continue to function at high levels, yet many are caught in a destructive cycle: perfectionist standards generate performance anxiety; anxiety triggers dissociative escape into social-media scrolling; scrolling restores momentary calm but erodes sleep, concentration, and motivation; and the cycle repeats. Their phone is not merely a toy but serves as a refuge, as the observed pattern of behavior is linked to underlying processes such as self-compassion, negative attention bias, and self-regulatory fatigue rather than being simply a result of poor self-control (Jing et al., 2025).

Neurobiologically, the brain under chronic stress enters a mode of maladaptive homeostasis: it prioritises short-term stability over long-term flourishing (Ren et al., 2025). Chronic stress induces maladaptive neuroplastic changes in the prefrontal cortex, a region essential for executive function and emotional regulation. Simultaneously, allostatic load accumulates—chronic cortisol elevation, immune dysregulation, and sleep disruption (McEwen, 2007)—while the deeper opioid and oxytocin systems that support meaning, connection, and cardiovascular stability remain under-recruited.

Philosophically, these individuals are stuck at survival rather than eudaimonia. Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia—flourishing through virtue, meaning, and the realisation of potential—now has an empirical basis: people with high eudaimonic well-being show lower basal cortisol, healthier CTRA gene expression profiles, and better immune function than hedonic peers (Ryff,

2013)(Fredrickson et al., 2013) Altered addresses this gap by offering a structured 30-day programme that frames phone addiction as a disruption of homeostasis, which is defined as the maintenance of the internal physiological environment within tolerable limits, and supports participants in moving toward sustainable psychological flourishing.

2. Target Group

The programme targets high-achieving young adults (aged 18–35) who display the following profile:

- Set extremely high academic or professional standards for themselves
- Experience performance anxiety that regularly overwhelms the prefrontal cortex
- Respond by dissociating into social-media scrolling as a primary coping strategy
- Wake with guilt and shame, reinforcing the next cycle

This group is accessible through CUHK student networks, postgraduate associations, and working-adult communities on social media. The Zoom-based support group format makes the programme viable for participants with demanding schedules.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Homeostasis, Allostasis, and Maladaptive Escape

This perspective aligns with the established concept of homeostasis and the emerging concept of allostasis, which involves viability through physiological change (Schulkin, 2004). Under acute stress, hedonic homeostasis recruits midbrain dopamine to restore balance quickly—scrolling works because it reliably removes discomfort. Under chronic high-demand conditions, the predictive allostatic system anticipates threat and pre-emptively triggers escape, accumulating allostatic load over time (McEwen, 2007). Altered reframes this not as weakness but as biology in survival mode.

3.2 Dopamine Reset and the Eudaimonic Reward System

Repeated high-frequency dopamine stimulation down-regulates D2 receptors and raises the pain baseline (Lembke, 2021). A staged intervention designed to reduce digital stimulation over a 30-day period is proposed, with the goal of restoring sensitivity to natural rewards by addressing the mechanisms of positive and negative emotional reinforcement underlying social media addiction (Wang & Wang, 2025). Concurrently, activities introduced by Altered are designed to engage neurochemical systems that recruit endogenous opioids (deep satisfaction from completion) and oxytocin (connection, safety)—the neurochemical substrates of eudaimonic experience.

3.3 Applied Behaviour Analysis

Altered operationalises three ABA strategies: (1) Antecedent manipulation—environmental redesign before the urge arises (greyscale screen, increased response effort, phone displacement); (2) Differential Reinforcement of Alternative behaviour (DRA)—replacing scrolling with brief, manageable tasks that release mild dopamine and opioids without feeding the addiction cycle; (3) Shaping—tasks increase in depth and meaning across 30 days, building behavioural complexity gradually (Theopilus et al., 2025).

3.4 Motivational and Cognitive Frameworks

Implementation intentions (Gollwitzer, 1999) operationalise If–Then plans to interrupt habitual reach-for-phone sequences. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) ensures tasks satisfy autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Mild cognitive dissonance is engineered through values-alignment prompts on lock screens. Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) is activated as participants observe their own behaviour logs and internalise an eudaimonic identity. Delay-discounting training (Bickel et al., 2011) helps participants mentally 'pull forward' the

rewards of long-term goals.

4. Programme Design

Altered is delivered as a physical A5 spiral-bound workbook (40 pages) supplemented by a dedicated landing page providing downloadable PDFs, weekly Zoom group session links, and a mascot-guided digital tracker. No app development is required; the workbook is the primary intervention tool.

Table 1

Programme designs in 3 phrases

Phase	Days	Core Mechanism	Key Activities
1 — Disconnection	1–10	Antecedent manipulation + grounding	Greyscale mode, extra taps before apps, 30-sec cortisol-discharge tasks, affect-labelling diary
2 — Calibration	11–20	DRA + implementation intentions	Personalised micro-tasks (cold water, 2-min body scan, micro-tidy, short walk); If-Then plans; mood emoji tracking
3 — Meaning Rebuild	21–30	Values affirmation + identity shift	Future-self letters, prosocial micro-tasks, eudaimonic reflection prompts; mascot growth arc culminates

4.1 The Workbook

The workbook is structured around the three phases above. Each day contains one printed page: a brief psychoeducation framing (2–3 sentences), a micro-task prompt, a mood-rating scale (1–10), and a reflection box. The language is warm and non-clinical. Biological concepts are explained using accessible analogies (e.g., 'Your nervous system is like a thermostat; scrolling tricks it into thinking the temperature is fine'). Day 30 ends with a Future-Self Letter template.

4.2 Weekly Zoom Support Group

Six weekly 60-minute sessions (one per week across the 30 days, plus a final debrief) are facilitated by the PI. Sessions cover psychoeducation, peer sharing of micro-task experiences, troubleshooting avoidance patterns, and progressive values clarification exercises. The group format also satisfies the relatedness component of SDT and provides oxytocin-mediated

accountability.

4.3 Landing Page

A single-page website provides: programme overview, downloadable PDF version of the workbook for non-print participants, session Zoom links, and a weekly reflection prompt. The landing page also functions as the recruitment and dissemination hub post-programme.

5. Feasibility and Project Timeline

All materials are self-produced by the PIC (workbook design and printing, landing page). Zoom is freely available. Across one year, two cohorts of 10 participants each will be run. Recruiting 10 participants per cohort is realistic through CUHK postgraduate networks, Chambers of Commerce among professionals such as engineers, architects, and entrepreneurs, and social media within two weeks for each cohort. This workbook-based programme is intentionally designed as a pilot; outcome data and user feedback from the two cohorts will directly inform the subsequent development of a high-fidelity app prototype based on the same theoretical and behavioural framework.

Table 2

Project timeline

Month	Milestone
Mar–Apr 2026	Workbook finalisation; landing page design; ethics approval; recruitment (target: 20 participants)
May 2026	Cohort 1 enrolment; baseline assessments (PHQ-9, Bergen SMAS-SF, PSQI); programme launch
May–Jun 2026	30-day programme delivery: weekly Zoom support group (6 sessions); workbook use at home
Jun 2026	Post-programme assessments; qualitative debrief interviews; data analysis
Jul 2026	Report writing; open-source release of workbook PDF; dissemination via CUHK student networks

6. Evaluation Plan

Outcome data will be collected at three time points: baseline (Day 0), post-programme

(Day 30), and follow-up (Week 8). The following validated instruments will be used:

Table 3

Validated instruments for for evaluation

PHQ-9	Patient Health Questionnaire — depression and anxiety severity (Kroenke et al., 2001)
Bergen SMAS-SF	Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale — 6-item validated screen for social-media addiction (Andreassen et al., 2012)
PSQI	Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index — sleep quality and disruption (Buysse et al., 1989)
EWB Scale	Eudaimonic Well-Being subscale from the PERMA Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016)
Qualitative	30-minute semi-structured debrief interview with a subset of participants (n = 6) on experience of programme and perceived change

Note. Primary outcomes: reduction in Bergen SMAS-SF scores and improvement in EWB scores from Day 0 to Day 30. Secondary outcomes: PHQ-9, PSQI improvement. The dataset will also provide preliminary effect-size estimates to support a future formal RCT application.

7. Budget

Table 4

Budget

Item	Details	Estimated Cost (HKD)
Workbook printing	50 copies × spiral-bound A5, 40 pp., full-colour cover	\$2,500
Landing page hosting	Domain + 1-yr hosting (e.g., Carrd Pro)	\$200
Zoom support group	6 weekly sessions × facilitator time + platform	\$0 (PI-facilitated)
Recruitment & publicity	Posters, IG promotion, CUHK campus flyers	\$500
Assessment tools	PHQ-9, Bergen SMAS-SF, PSQI printing & scoring	\$300
Contingency	Reprints, postage, miscellaneous	\$500
Total		\$4,000

Note. If awarded, the amount of HK\$5,000 would cover the full programme cost and enable free workbook distribution to all participants. Any surplus will fund additional copies for open distribution via CUHK counselling services or community mental health platforms.

8. Contribution to Humankind

Phone addiction and performance anxiety are converging crises among educated young adults globally. Existing interventions are either too clinical (requiring therapist referral) or too shallow (simple screen-time apps with no psychological depth). Altered occupies a unique niche: it is theoretically rigorous, practically low-cost, and scalable without professional infrastructure.

The workbook will be released as an open-source PDF after the programme, making it freely accessible to any student or professional worldwide. The Zoom format removes geographical barriers. If initial outcomes are promising, the programme is designed to serve as a feasibility study for a larger-scale RCT, with potential to contribute to both clinical practice guidelines and public health approaches to behavioural addiction.

At a philosophical level, Altered models a shift in how we talk about digital habits: not as moral failure requiring willpower, but as a biological and psychological system under stress that needs redirection, not punishment. This reframe alone—communicated through the psychoeducation layer of the workbook—is a contribution to public understanding of mental health.

References

- Bem, D. J. (1972). Self-Perception Theory. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 1–62.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/s0065-2601\(08\)60024-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0065-2601(08)60024-6)
- Bickel, W. K., Yi, R., Landes, R. D., Hill, P. F., & Baxter, C. (2011). Remember the Future: Working Memory Training Decreases Delay Discounting Among Stimulant Addicts. *Biological Psychiatry*, 69(3), 260–265. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsych.2010.08.017>
- Fredrickson, B. L., Grewen, K. M., Coffey, K. A., Algoe, S. B., Firestone, A. M., Arevalo, J. M. G., Ma, J., & Cole, S. W. (2013). A functional genomic perspective on human well-being. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(33), 13684–13689. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1305419110>
- Gollwitzer, P. M. (1999). Implementation intentions: Strong effects of simple plans. *American Psychologist*, 54(7), 493.
- Jing, T., Ju, S.-Y., Ridzuan, M. R., Kong, L.-K., Rahman, N. A. S. A., Li, J., Xu, J., & Zhou, M. (2025). Smartphone addiction affects life satisfaction among Chinese university students: the serial mediation effects of social anxiety for social media users and mental well-being. *BMC Psychology*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-03544-9>
- Kovatsi, L., & Nikolaou, K. (2019). Opioids and the hormone oxytocin. *Vitamins and Hormones*, 195–225. <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.vh.2019.05.003>
- Lembke, A. (2021). *Dopamine nation: Finding balance in the age of indulgence*. Penguin.
- McEwen, B. S. (2007). Physiology and Neurobiology of Stress and Adaptation: Central Role of the Brain. *Physiological Reviews*, 87(3), 873–904. <https://doi.org/10.1152/physrev.00041.2006>
- Ren, B., Yuan, Q., Cha, S., Liu, S., Zhang, J., & Guo, G. (2025). Maladaptive Neuroplasticity

Under Stress: Insights into Neuronal and Synaptic Changes in the Prefrontal Cortex.

Molecular Neurobiology, 62(11), 15227–15249. [https://doi.org/10.1007/](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12035-025-05152-5)

[s12035-025-05152-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12035-025-05152-5)

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68.

Ryff, C. D. (2013). Psychological well-being revisited: Advances in the science and practice of eudaimonia. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 83(1), 10–28.

Schulkin, J. (2004). *Allostasis, homeostasis, and the costs of physiological adaptation*.

Cambridge University Press.

Theopilus, Y., Al Mahmud, A., Davis, H., & Octavia, J. R. (2025). Persuasive strategies in digital interventions to combat internet addiction: A systematic review. *International Journal of*

Medical Informatics, 195, 105725. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijmedinf.2024.105725>

Wang, J., & Wang, S. (2025). The Emotional Reinforcement Mechanism of and Phased

Intervention Strategies for Social Media Addiction. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(5), 665.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15050665>

ALTERED

Trainer & Facilitator Guide

From Homeostasis to Eudaimonia

Theory, Facilitation, and Material Design for the 30-Day Programme

WONG Man Sum, Sam · CUHK Department of Psychology · 2026

For use alongside the Altered participant workbook. Not for distribution to participants.

CUHK PSY @ 2026

Contents

- 1. About This Guide** — *Who it is for and how to use it*
- 2. Programme Architecture** — *Overview of the three phases and design logic*
- 3. The Theoretical Foundation** — *All key theories with depth and clinical application*
- 4. The Participant Profile** — *Understanding your target group psychologically*
- 5. Phase 1 Facilitation Guide** — *Disconnection — Days 1–10*
- 6. Phase 2 Facilitation Guide** — *Calibration — Days 11–20*
- 7. Phase 3 Facilitation Guide** — *Meaning Rebuild — Days 21–30*
- 8. Weekly Zoom Session Design** — *How to structure each group session*
- 9. Designing Your Own Materials** — *Principles for slides, handouts, and exercises*
- 10. Assessment and Outcome Tracking** — *How to use the measurement tools*
- 11. Difficult Situations** — *What to do when participants struggle*
- 12. Trainer Self-Care** — *Maintaining your own regulatory capacity*

CUHK PSY @ 2026

1. About This Guide

Who This Guide Is For

This guide is written for anyone facilitating the Altered 30-day programme — whether you are a psychology student, a counsellor, a social worker, a peer supporter, or an educator. You do not need to be a licensed therapist to run this programme. You do need to understand the theory well enough to explain it plainly, respond to unexpected participant reactions, and design supplementary materials that are consistent with the programme's logic.

If you are using this guide as part of a research pilot, this document also serves as the facilitator manual that should accompany your ethics submission.

What This Guide Covers

- The theoretical foundations of the programme in sufficient depth for you to explain any concept in plain language
- A phase-by-phase facilitation guide covering each block of 10 days
- Detailed guidance for structuring the six weekly Zoom group sessions
- Principles for designing your own supplementary materials (slides, handouts, visual aids)
- How to use the assessment instruments included in the workbook
- How to handle common difficulties: emotional dysregulation, dropout risk, perfectionism spirals

What This Programme Is Not

Clinical boundary: Altered is a psychoeducation and behaviour-change programme, not a clinical intervention. It is not suitable as a standalone treatment for clinical-level depression, anxiety disorder, or behavioural addiction meeting diagnostic criteria. If a participant presents with significant clinical distress, refer them to a qualified mental health professional.

Core Design Philosophy

Every design decision in this programme flows from one principle: the problem is biological before it is moral. High-achieving participants have been told — implicitly or explicitly — that their phone use reflects laziness, lack of willpower, or poor character. This programme actively dismantles that narrative and replaces it with an accurate neurobiological account. The job of the trainer is to hold that frame consistently throughout — with warmth, without condescension, and without slipping into toxic positivity.

Design principle: Explain the mechanism, not the judgment. Always tell participants what their brain is doing before you tell them what to do differently.

2. Programme Architecture

The Three-Phase Logic

The three phases are not arbitrary. They follow the sequence that behaviour change science predicts will produce the most durable outcomes: first reduce the grip of the existing habit (antecedent work), then build the alternative reward system (reinforcement work), then anchor the change in identity and meaning (values work). Running the phases out of order reduces effectiveness significantly.

Phase	Days	Primary Goal	Key Mechanisms	Risk if Skipped
1 — Disconnection	1–10	Reduce habit automaticity	Antecedent manipulation, affect labelling, cortisol regulation	Participants jump to meaning work before the habit loop is weakened; relapse rate is high
2 — Calibration	11–20	Build alternative reward architecture	DRA, implementation intentions, mastery, oxytocin activation	No alternative behaviour available when habit is interrupted; void fills with anxiety
3 — Meaning Rebuild	21–30	Anchor change in values and identity	Values affirmation, self-perception, future-self simulation	Change remains behavioural but not identity-level; drifts after programme ends

The Daily Page Structure — Why It Is Built This Way

Each daily page has five components, each with a specific psychological function:

Component 1: Today's Science

Function: Reduce shame and increase engagement through mechanistic understanding. When people understand the biological reason for their behaviour, they move from self-blame to curiosity. Curiosity is a far more productive motivational state than guilt.

Theory: Psychoeducation is itself a therapeutic intervention. In CBT, providing an explanatory model for symptoms significantly reduces distress independent of any behaviour change (Westin & Öst, 2008). The science section in each day serves this function.

Facilitation tip: When presenting science to participants, always start with the person's experience ('You know that feeling when you've been scrolling for an hour and you feel worse than when you started? Here is what is actually happening in your brain...'), then name the mechanism. Never lead with the jargon.

Component 2: The Micro-Task

Function: Create a guaranteed success experience. Tasks in Phase 1 are deliberately almost absurdly easy. This is not accidental — it is based on BJ Fogg's Tiny Habits research (2019), which shows that the most reliable way to start a new behaviour chain is to make the initial behaviour smaller than you think necessary. Every completed micro-task deposits a small amount of self-efficacy into the participant's behavioural account.

Theory: Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory identifies mastery experiences as the most powerful source of efficacy beliefs. A participant who completes thirty consecutive small tasks over thirty days has accumulated thirty mastery experiences, regardless of their content. The cumulative effect on self-concept is substantial.

Common error: Trainers sometimes feel the tasks are 'too easy' and inflate them. Resist this impulse in Phase 1. The point is not difficulty — it is completion. Difficulty is introduced progressively in Phases 2 and 3.

Component 3: Mood Check

Function: Build interoceptive awareness and produce longitudinal mood data. Asking participants to rate mood before and after a task does two things simultaneously: it trains the participant to notice their own internal state (a skill that is typically underdeveloped in high-achieving avoiders), and it generates a dataset that the trainer can reference in group sessions.

Theory: Interoceptive awareness — the ability to sense and interpret signals from one's own body — is a foundational skill in emotional regulation. Research shows that interoceptive awareness training reduces anxiety and improves impulse control (Farb et al., 2015). The daily mood check is the simplest form of this training.

Component 4: Reflection Questions

Function: Activate specific psychological processes through targeted questioning. These are not generic journal prompts. Each question is chosen to activate a particular mechanism:

- 'What was happening just before the urge?' → Habit loop awareness (cue identification)
- 'What were you hoping to feel — or stop feeling?' → Functional analysis of the behaviour
- 'Did naming the emotion change anything?' → Affect labelling efficacy check
- 'What story did your brain tell you?' → Cognitive defusion (ACT)
- 'What does that number tell you?' → Self-perception theory activation

Facilitation tip: In group sessions, use these questions as discussion anchors. Ask participants to share their answers in pairs first, then open to the group. This reduces performance anxiety and increases authentic disclosure.

Component 5: Closing Line

Function: Provide a single consolidation sentence that encodes the day's principle in long-term memory. Research on retrieval practice shows that a single well-formed sentence reviewed at the end of a learning episode improves retention significantly more than re-reading the full content (Roediger & Butler, 2011). The closing lines are designed to be memorable, biological in frame, and non-shaming.

3. The Theoretical Foundation

This section provides the depth behind each theory used in the programme. Read the full section before your first session. Return to specific subsections when preparing materials for individual days.

3.1 Homeostasis and Psychic Homeostasis

The basic concept

Homeostasis (from the Greek *homoios* = similar, *stasis* = standing) refers to the body's drive to maintain stable internal conditions — temperature, blood sugar, pH, heart rate. It is not a passive equilibrium but an active regulatory process: the body constantly monitors deviations from set-points and deploys corrective responses.

Walter Cannon (1932), who coined the term, described homeostasis as the 'wisdom of the body.' Claude Bernard had earlier described the *milieu intérieur* — the internal environment that the body works continuously to defend. These ideas remain central to physiology.

Extension to psychological homeostasis

Contemporary researchers have extended homeostasis to include psychic or psychological homeostasis (Taylor, 1991; Schulkin, 2003): the brain's drive to maintain stable emotional and cognitive conditions, not just physical ones. Just as the body corrects for temperature deviations, the brain corrects for emotional deviations — anxiety spikes, threat responses, social pain, cognitive overwhelm. When these deviations feel too large or too fast, the brain deploys the fastest available corrective mechanism.

For high-achieving participants under chronic performance pressure, the phone has become that fastest mechanism. It reliably delivers a brief reduction in anxiety (through stimulation and distraction) and a brief increase in social safety signals (through likes, messages, content). The brain has learned that scrolling works. The problem is not the goal — maintaining emotional equilibrium — but the strategy used to achieve it.

Key clinical insight: Never frame the phone as the enemy. Frame it as the brain's best available solution to a real problem. Your job is to help the participant develop better solutions, not to pathologise the one they have been using.

Allostasis

Allostasis (Sterling & Eyer, 1988) extends homeostasis to include predictive, anticipatory regulation. Rather than simply correcting deviations as they occur, the allostatic system predicts future demands and adjusts in advance. This is why high achievers do not just scroll when stressed — they scroll when they anticipate stress, when they imagine a difficult conversation, when they foresee a deadline. The system pre-emptively escapes.

Under chronic stress, this predictive system becomes miscalibrated. The brain begins anticipating threat even in neutral situations, pre-emptively deploying escape behaviours and accumulating allostatic load — the biological cost of chronic regulatory effort. Allostatic load manifests as chronically elevated cortisol, sleep disruption, immune impairment, and inflammatory markers (McEwen, 2007). Many of your participants will describe this as 'always being tired', 'waking up exhausted even after sleeping', or 'feeling drained even when nothing difficult happened today.'

Key clinical insight: Allostatic load is the bridge between 'I can't stop scrolling' and 'I always feel terrible.' When participants understand that their chronic fatigue has a biological name and a biological cause, the shame lifts and engagement increases.

3.2 Eudaimonia — The Empirical Case

Aristotle's original framework

Aristotle distinguished between two forms of well-being in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: *hedonia* (pleasure, comfort, and the removal of discomfort) and *eudaimonia* (flourishing through the realisation of one's potential, the exercise of virtue, and engagement with what is genuinely meaningful). Crucially, Aristotle did not describe *eudaimonia* as the absence of hedonic experience — biological needs must be met. But he argued that a life organised purely around hedonic satisfaction fails to constitute genuine flourishing.

The modern empirical basis

Carol Ryff (1989, 2014) operationalised eudaimonia into six measurable dimensions: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others. Her Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scales have been used in hundreds of studies linking eudaimonic functioning to health outcomes.

The most striking biological evidence comes from Fredrickson et al. (2013), who analysed gene expression profiles in individuals with high hedonic vs. high eudaimonic well-being. Despite similar levels of reported happiness, the two groups showed dramatically different CTRA (Conserved Transcriptional Response to Adversity) profiles: eudaimonic individuals showed lower inflammatory gene expression and stronger antiviral and antibody gene expression. People living with more meaning were biologically healthier, regardless of whether they felt more pleasure.

For material design: This finding is one of the most persuasive pieces of evidence you can share with sceptical participants. Do not lead with philosophy — lead with the gene expression study. High-achieving participants respond to empirical evidence.

The homeostasis–eudaimonia arc

The programme's title — From Homeostasis to Eudaimonia — captures its central movement. Homeostasis is not the enemy: it is the biological floor that eudaimonia builds on. A person who cannot regulate their nervous system cannot pursue meaning. The sequence matters: Phase 1 works on the biological floor (stabilising the nervous system, reducing allostatic load); Phase 2 builds the intermediate structure (reliable alternative behaviours); Phase 3 constructs the upper storey (values, identity, meaning).

3.3 The Dopamine System and Hedonic Homeostasis

Dopamine's actual function

Popular science has described dopamine as the 'pleasure chemical,' but this is misleading. Dopamine in the mesolimbic pathway (the VTA to nucleus accumbens circuit) is more precisely a prediction error signal: it fires when an outcome is better than expected, is suppressed when an outcome is worse than expected, and remains silent when an outcome matches predictions (Schultz, 1998). Dopamine is the currency of anticipated reward, not the experience of pleasure itself.

This matters for the programme because: (1) novelty (which social media delivers in massive quantities) generates dopamine even when the content is not inherently pleasurable; (2) the prediction error function means that the more predictable a reward becomes, the less dopamine it generates — and the more stimulation is needed to achieve the same effect.

Down-regulation and the hedonic set-point

Anna Lembke's work on compulsive behaviours (Dopamine Nation, 2021) provides a clinically useful model: the brain maintains a pleasure-pain balance. Repeated activation of the dopamine reward system pushes the balance toward pain — receptors down-regulate (reduce in number and sensitivity) to compensate for chronic over-stimulation. This means the baseline mood drops: the person feels flat, irritable, or mildly depressed when not stimulating, and needs increasing amounts of stimulation to feel normal. Participants often describe this as 'doomscrolling — I don't even enjoy it anymore but I can't stop.'

A structured reduction in dopamine stimulation — what Lembke calls a 'dopamine fast' — allows receptors to up-regulate over approximately two to four weeks. This is the biological rationale for the 30-day structure. Phase 1's deliberate boredom windows (Day 6) are not incidental — they are allowing receptor recovery.

Key clinical insight: The dopamine dip (Days 5–8) is a predictable phase where participants feel worse before they feel better. Normalise this explicitly in the Week 1 group session. Participants who understand that flatness is recalibration — not failure — are much less likely to drop out.

Opioids, oxytocin, and eudaimonic reward

The endogenous opioid system (activated by warmth, physical comfort, completion of meaningful tasks, and deep social connection) produces a qualitatively different subjective experience than dopamine: slower, warmer, more stable, and associated with a sense of safety rather than anticipation. Research by Inagaki & Eisenberger (2013) shows that the opioid system mediates the subjective experience of social connection and acceptance.

Oxytocin, released by physical proximity, eye contact, and genuine emotional exchange, works synergistically with the opioid system to produce bonding, trust, and a sense of safety. It is also directly anti-cortisol: oxytocin suppresses HPA axis activity and reduces cortisol output (Heinrichs et al., 2003). This is why real human connection reduces stress more reliably than passive social media consumption — it activates a different neurochemical system.

Days 12 (warm drink pause), 13 (real connection), 25 (unrequested act), and the entire prosocial thread of Phase 3 are designed to activate these systems progressively.

3.4 Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)

The three-term contingency

ABA is grounded in the analysis of the Antecedent → Behaviour → Consequence (ABC) contingency. Every behaviour occurs in a context (antecedent), produces an outcome (consequence), and is maintained or extinguished depending on whether that consequence is reinforcing or punishing. For scrolling behaviour:

- Antecedent: Feeling anxious, opening a stressful task, boredom, social discomfort, a notification sound
- Behaviour: Opening social media app, scrolling
- Consequence: Brief relief from anxiety, mild stimulation, social validation signal → negative reinforcement (removal of aversive state)

Understanding that scrolling is maintained by negative reinforcement — the removal of discomfort rather than the delivery of pleasure — is critical. It explains why willpower-based interventions fail: they do not address the antecedent (the anxiety is still there) or provide an alternative consequence (what replaces the relief?).

Antecedent manipulation

Antecedent manipulation (also called stimulus control) changes the environment before the behaviour occurs. The goal is to increase the response effort required to perform the undesired behaviour and decrease the response effort required to perform the alternative. Examples used in Phase 1:

- Greyscale mode: reduces the visual reward value of the screen (antecedent modification)
- App removal from home screen: adds taps between trigger and behaviour
- Phone placement in another room: removes the proximal cue
- Sticky note on phone: inserts a cognitive interrupt ('What am I avoiding right now?')

Research basis: Neal et al. (2011) demonstrated that changing the physical context of a habitual behaviour — even without addressing motivation — significantly reduces habit performance. Context is one of the most powerful antecedent variables.

Differential Reinforcement of Alternative behaviour (DRA)

DRA is a behaviour reduction technique that provides reinforcement for a functionally equivalent alternative behaviour, rather than simply punishing or blocking the target behaviour. The critical word is functionally equivalent: the alternative must serve the same function as the behaviour being replaced. If scrolling serves anxiety regulation, the alternative must also regulate anxiety. If scrolling serves stimulation needs, the alternative must also be stimulating.

This is why Phase 2 micro-tasks are carefully matched to the functions scrolling serves:

Scrolling Function	Alternative Task	Neurochemical Target
Anxiety relief	Cold water / 4-7-8 breath / 90-second sit	Parasympathetic activation, cortisol reduction
Stimulation / novelty	Sensory walk (5-4-3-2-1)	Norepinephrine, sensory cortex activation
Social connection	Real connection task / oxytocin via warmth	Oxytocin, opioid system
Competence / mastery	One-thing completion / new small thing	Dopamine via completion, self-efficacy
Escape from task	If-Then plan + values interrupt	Prefrontal re-engagement

Shaping

Shaping refers to the reinforcement of successive approximations toward a target behaviour. You do not ask a participant to spend an hour reading on Day 1 — you ask them to notice when they reach for their phone. Over thirty days, the complexity and depth of tasks increases gradually. By Day 30, participants are writing future-self letters and designing integration plans — behaviours they could not have sustained on Day 1. The programme is a shaping schedule, not a static demand.

3.5 Implementation Intentions

Gollwitzer (1999) introduced implementation intentions as a supplement to goal intentions. A goal intention ('I want to reduce my phone use') specifies what one wants to achieve. An implementation intention ('If I open Instagram after 11pm, then I will first put cold water on my wrists') specifies when, where, and how one will act. The if-then format pre-loads the response so that when the cue is encountered, the planned response fires automatically — without requiring deliberate decision-making.

A meta-analysis by Gollwitzer & Sheeran (2006) across 94 studies found a medium-to-large effect size ($d = 0.65$) for implementation intentions on goal achievement, across a wide range of behaviours including health behaviours, academic performance, and social behaviours.

Key clinical insight: Implementation intentions work by automating the new response. The participant is not using more willpower — they are using the same automaticity machinery that runs the old habit, but redirected. This framing removes the moralistic 'just try harder' subtext.

For group sessions: Have participants share their If–Then plans with the group in Week 2. Social commitment to a specific plan (as opposed to a vague intention) significantly increases follow-through. The group functions as an accountability and implementation scaffold.

3.6 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Deci & Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory proposes three universal psychological needs whose satisfaction predicts intrinsic motivation, well-being, and sustained behaviour change:

Autonomy

Autonomy is the need to feel that one's behaviour is self-determined — chosen from one's values rather than externally coerced. Behaviour-change programmes that feel like rules, obligations, or monitoring are autonomy-thwarting and typically fail over the medium term. Every element of the Altered programme is designed to be autonomy-supportive: participants choose their micro-task content where possible, the tone is warm and non-coercive, and the framing emphasises choice throughout ('you are choosing to protect your brain,' not 'you must avoid your phone').

Competence

Competence is the need to feel effective and capable in one's actions. High-achieving avoiders paradoxically have very low competence in self-regulatory domains — they can perform academically but cannot sit with an uncomfortable feeling for 90 seconds. Phase 1 rebuilds competence from the ground up by ensuring all early tasks are achievable. The competence curve across 30 days should feel like a gentle climb, not a wall.

Relatedness

Relatedness is the need for genuine connection with others — not networked social interaction, but real belonging. The weekly Zoom group session is the primary relatedness structure in this programme. It is not optional. Research on SDT in behaviour change consistently shows that relatedness is the need most frequently under-satisfied in digital-era young adults — and its satisfaction is a strong predictor of dropout prevention.

Research basis: Ng et al. (2012) meta-analysed 184 studies and found that autonomy support from healthcare providers predicted both initial behaviour change and long-term maintenance. Controlling styles predicted short-term compliance but long-term dropout.

3.7 Cognitive Dissonance and Self-Perception Theory

Cognitive dissonance

Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance holds that people experience psychological discomfort when they hold two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent. This discomfort (dissonance) motivates either behaviour change or belief revision. In the Altered programme, mild dissonance is engineered at Day 17 (values inventory) by asking participants to rate how much their current behaviour reflects their stated values. The gap between 'I value creativity' and 'I spent 4 hours today scrolling' is a source of motivation — if it is surfaced carefully and without shame.

Important: Dissonance is a motivator only when it is surfaced with compassion and paired with a concrete path forward. Dissonance without agency produces shame and paralysis. The values inventory must always be followed by a concrete action question ('What is one thing you could do tomorrow that would reduce this gap?').

Self-perception theory

Bem's (1972) self-perception theory proposes that we infer our own attitudes, emotions, and identity in part from observing our own behaviour, much as we observe others. This has a powerful implication for the Altered programme: the act of completing the workbook — repeatedly, daily — is itself evidence that the participant is someone who takes their psychology seriously, who is willing to try, who is building a different life. The Evidence Log on Day 24 makes this inference explicit.

Self-perception effects accumulate. A participant who has completed 24 days of micro-tasks has 24 data points suggesting that they are someone who acts in line with their growth intentions. This is identity-level change, and it is more durable than behavioural change alone.

3.8 Delay Discounting and Episodic Future Thinking

Delay discounting refers to the tendency to subjectively devalue rewards in proportion to their temporal distance: \$100 tomorrow feels more valuable than \$100 in a year. High phone use amplifies delay discounting — the brain becomes calibrated to expect rewards within seconds, making future goals feel increasingly unreal. This is one reason high achievers can hold ambitious long-term goals while simultaneously being unable to delay a 10-second scroll.

Episodic future thinking (EFT) — vividly imagining a specific future event — has been shown to reduce delay discounting by temporarily increasing the perceived value of future outcomes (Benoit et al., 2011; Atance & O'Neill, 2001). Day 14's Future Flash exercise and Day 28's Flourishing Day exercise operationalise EFT as a delay-discounting intervention. The effect is temporary but cumulative: repeated EFT practice gradually re-weights the subjective value of long-term goals.

3.9 Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) — Values-Congruent Action

ACT (Hayes et al., 1999) is a third-wave cognitive-behavioural therapy that targets psychological flexibility: the capacity to engage fully with the present moment and take action in line with one's values, even in the presence of uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. The relevant ACT processes in this programme are:

- Defusion (cognitive defusion): observing thoughts as mental events rather than literal truths ('I notice I'm having the thought that I will fail' rather than 'I will fail'). This appears in the Day 4 and Day 9 reflection questions.
- Values clarification: identifying what genuinely matters, independent of what one feels like doing. Days 17, 23, and the entire Phase 3 are structured around this.
- Committed action: taking specific, progressive steps toward values-congruent goals, even in the presence of anxiety or discomfort. The micro-task structure is committed action in small units.

Key clinical insight: ACT does not ask participants to feel better before acting. It asks them to act in line with their values regardless of how they feel. This is crucially different from positive-thinking approaches and is more credible to high-achieving, intellectually sceptical participants.

4. The Participant Profile

Who You Are Working With

The target participant is a high-achieving young adult (typically 18–35) who is caught in what the programme calls the performance-anxiety-avoidance cycle. Understanding this profile deeply is essential for calibrating your facilitation tone, your language, and your pacing.

The Core Psychological Profile

1. Extremely high internal standards

These participants have typically internalised standards of performance that are genuinely unrealistic — not in the colloquial sense, but in the clinical sense: standards whose violation produces shame rather than disappointment, and which are applied globally (a single failure in one domain invalidates the entire self). This is perfectionistic self-presentation (Hewitt & Flett, 1991) rather than high standards in a healthy sense.

2. Performance anxiety as a chronic state

Anxiety for this group is not episodic — it is background. They are not anxious before a specific exam; they are anxious as a default state, with moments of relief. The phone provides those moments of relief. This is why simple screen-time limiting apps fail: they remove the relief without addressing the anxiety.

3. Dissociation as a coping style

Many participants describe scrolling as a kind of mental disappearance — 'I just zone out', 'I stop thinking', 'time disappears.' This is mild dissociation: a functional disconnection from threatening internal experience. It is not pathological dissociation, but it is a significant avoidance strategy that prevents the affect processing and meaning-making that eudaimonic growth requires.

4. Shame-based rather than guilt-based self-evaluation

The distinction matters clinically (Brown, 2006): guilt is 'I did something bad'; shame is 'I am bad.' Participants in this programme typically feel shame about their phone use — not 'I scrolled too long,' but 'I am weak,' 'I am hopeless,' 'I will never change.' Shame is a paralysing emotion; guilt can motivate behaviour change. One of the programme's constant tasks is converting shame-language into guilt-language and then into action-language.

5. Intellectual sophistication as both asset and defence

High-achieving participants are often very good at understanding ideas and very resistant to applying them. They will understand homeostasis immediately and then find seventeen reasons why it 'doesn't apply to them.' Intellectual engagement is not the same as personal application. Expect and plan for this defence. The most effective response is not more information — it is grounding the conversation in the participant's specific experience: 'You described scrolling last night at 1am after the assignment stress. That is the exact pattern we are talking about. What happened just before you opened the app?'

Common Resistance Patterns and Responses

Resistance Pattern	What It Sounds Like	Recommended Response
Intellectualisation	'This is interesting but my situation is different because...'	Acknowledge the intellectual point, then anchor immediately to specific personal experience from their workbook.
Perfectionism about the programme	'I missed two days so there's no point continuing'	Invoke the no-failure frame: 'There are only pauses. Go back and do the missed days. The evidence says consistency matters more than perfection.'
Minimisation	'I don't really have a problem, I just wanted to learn about the theory'	Gently reflect their baseline scores back to them. 'Your Bergen score of 22 is in the problematic range. That's not a judgment — it's data.'

Emotional shutdown	Goes quiet, gives one-word answers, stops completing workbook	Lower the demand: 'Just do Day 1 again. One tally mark. That's all.' Reach out individually between sessions.
Comparison to others	'Everyone else seems to be doing better than me'	Normalise variation explicitly: 'Progress in this programme is not linear, and it is not competitive. Your job is to compare yourself to your own Day 1.'

CUHK PSY @ 2026

PHASE 1 — FACILITATION GUIDE

Days 1–10: Disconnection

5. Phase 1 Facilitation Guide — Disconnection

The Trainer's Focus in Phase 1

Your primary role in Phase 1 is normalisation. Every concept you introduce should be framed as a description of what the brain does under stress, not a diagnosis of character. The most important thing you can communicate is: 'What you are doing makes biological sense. We are going to understand it first, and then gently change it.'

Expect participants to arrive with significant shame. Expect some to minimise ('I don't really have a phone problem'). Expect some to over-commit ('I'm going to do a full digital detox starting tomorrow'). Your job is to hold the middle: take the problem seriously without catastrophising, and take the goal seriously without demanding heroism.

Day-by-Day Trainer Notes — Phase 1

Day	Science Concept	Trainer Note
1 — The Tally	Habit loop automaticity	Emphasise that Day 1 is observation only. There is no behaviour change required. This is important — participants who feel they 'failed' Day 1 because they scrolled a lot are misunderstanding the task.
2 — Cold Reset	Mammalian dive reflex / parasympathetic activation	Demonstrate the cold water task in the group if possible. The physical reality of the task ('this feels genuinely calming') is more persuasive than any explanation.
3 — Emotion Naming	Affect labelling, amygdala regulation	Introduce the Lieberman (2007) UCLA research here. The phrase 'name it to tame it' is clinically accurate and easy to remember. Have participants practise the naming formula in pairs.
4 — 90-Second Sit	Bolte Taylor's 90-second emotional wave	This day often produces the strongest resistance. Participants who rely heavily on dissociation find 90 seconds of non-distraction extremely uncomfortable. Validate this: 'If 90 seconds feels like a long time, that is important information about how much your nervous system needs this practice.'
5 — Space Redesign	Antecedent control, stimulus control	Ask participants to share their redesign in the group. Hearing each other's creative solutions builds group cohesion and generates a shared vocabulary around environmental design.
6 — Boredom Window	Dopamine dip, receptor up-regulation	Explicitly name the dopamine dip for the group this week. 'Some of you may be feeling flatter or more irritable than usual. This is expected. Your receptors are adjusting. It typically peaks around Day 7–9.'
7 — Week 1 Review	Self-perception, consistency principle	The mood graph is a key tool here. Even if scores are flat or mixed, the act of seeing a week of data produces a different self-relationship than recall alone.
8 — If-Then Plans	Implementation intentions	Be specific about specificity: 'If I open Instagram' is too vague — 'If I open Instagram after 10pm when I am in bed' is effective. The context specificity is what drives the automaticity.
9 — 4-7-8 Breath	Vagal nerve activation, HPA axis regulation	Breathwork is often dismissed as 'soft' by intellectually-oriented participants. Ground it in the physiology: 'Extended exhalation activates the vagus nerve, which directly suppresses cortisol production.'
10 — Completion	Dopamine via completion, avoidance function analysis	Ask participants to reflect on what they have been avoiding. This is often the first time they articulate the avoidance function clearly. 'What does avoiding that task protect you from feeling?' is a useful follow-up.

PHASE 2 — FACILITATION GUIDE

Days 11–20: Calibration

6. Phase 2 Facilitation Guide — Calibration

The Trainer's Focus in Phase 2

Phase 2 introduces the principle of replacement rather than removal. By now, participants have weakened the habit loop's automaticity and begun to understand the functions their phone use serves. The trainer's job is to help them find genuine substitutes — not distractions, not punishments, not obligations, but real-world activities that deliver something the nervous system actually needs.

The risk in Phase 2 is the productivity trap: high-achieving participants may begin substituting 'useful' activities (studying, exercising, working) for scrolling and miss the programme's deeper point — that eudaimonic living is about meaning and genuine engagement, not just output. Watch for participants who replace scrolling with 'productive' avoidance and help them notice the difference.

Day-by-Day Trainer Notes — Phase 2

Day	Science Concept	Trainer Note
11 — Sensory Walk	DRA, sensory activation	The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique has roots in trauma-informed care (it is used in EMDR and trauma-focused CBT). Its use here is preventive, not therapeutic — but the sensory anchoring function is the same.
12 — Warm Drink Pause	Endogenous opioid system	This is the most deceptively simple day. Participants often report that sitting quietly for five minutes with a cup of tea was harder than they expected. This is the data: how difficult simple presence has become.
13 — Real Connection	Oxytocin, HPA suppression	Share the Heinrichs et al. (2003) finding: oxytocin suppresses cortisol more reliably than any behavioural intervention currently available. Real connection is not just emotionally nice — it is biologically protective.
14 — Future Flash	Delay discounting, episodic future thinking	This is the first explicitly future-oriented task. Some participants find it difficult because imagining a positive future activates grief about the present. Validate this: 'If imagining a better version of your life feels sad, that is important information. It means you know what you want.'
15 — New Small Thing	Mastery, SDT competence need	The choice of activity matters less than the novelty and the slight challenge. Physical activities are particularly effective because they generate embodied competence rather than cognitive competence alone.
16 — Body Reset	BDNF, cortisol, endorphins	Movement is the most evidence-based single intervention for mood regulation available without prescription. Share the data plainly: '10 minutes of moderate movement reduces cortisol by approximately 15% and produces BDNF, a protein that literally grows new neural connections.'
17 — Values Inventory	Cognitive dissonance, ACT values	This is often the emotionally heaviest day in the programme. Have a tissue metaphorically ready. Participants frequently discover that they have been living significantly out of alignment with their stated values — and the gap is painful. Keep the session focused on the action question, not the grief.
18 — Chosen Hour	Autonomy, SDT, intrinsic motivation	Ask participants: 'How much of your typical day is freely chosen?' Most will say very little. This question often catalyses significant reflection about the degree to which their lives are organised around obligation rather than vitality.
19 — Story Edit	Narrative identity, cognitive defusion	McAdams (2001) identifies narrative identity — the story we tell about who we are — as a core component of psychological health. Disrupting a self-limiting narrative is not easy. The workbook's 'Story Edit' is a gentle entry point, not a complete therapeutic intervention.
20 — Habit Stack	Habit formation, behaviour chaining	The habit replacement stack is the participant's personalised behaviour prescription for Phase 3. Spend group time on this: have participants share their stacks and help each other troubleshoot specificity and feasibility.

CUHK PSY @ 2026

PHASE 3 — FACILITATION GUIDE

Days 21–30: Meaning Rebuild

7. Phase 3 Facilitation Guide — Meaning Rebuild

The Trainer's Focus in Phase 3

Phase 3 operates at the deepest level of the behaviour change hierarchy: identity. A participant who has changed their behaviour but not their identity will relapse when the programme ends, because there is nothing holding the new behaviour in place. A participant who has begun to see themselves differently — as someone who protects their attention, who acts in line with their values, who is building a life with meaning — has an internal anchor for the new behaviour that does not depend on willpower or external accountability.

Your facilitation role in Phase 3 is to be a mirror: help participants see the evidence of who they are becoming. This is not cheerleading — it is reflective facilitation, grounded in the actual data of their workbook. 'You have now completed twenty consecutive days. Look at what you wrote on Day 17 about your values. Look at what you did on Day 25. What does that evidence suggest about who you are?'

Day-by-Day Trainer Notes — Phase 3

Day	Science Concept	Trainer Note
21 — Meaning Inventory	Eudaimonia, Fredrickson gene expression	Share the Fredrickson et al. (2013) PNAS findings here in full. This is the capstone science moment of the programme. Participants who understand that meaning literally changes their biology tend to experience a significant motivational shift.
22 — One Present Thing	Killingsworth & Gilbert mind-wandering	The 47% mind-wandering finding is reliably surprising to participants. It normalises how little presence most people experience and frames the practice as recovery of something that was always theirs.
23 — Values Action	ACT committed action	The critical distinction here: committed action is not doing what you feel like doing. It is doing what matters, even when you do not feel like it. This is the anti-avoidance core of ACT and the clearest answer to the 'motivation' question.
24 — Evidence Log	Self-perception theory, Bem (1972)	This day often produces the most powerful emotional responses in the programme. Have participants read their evidence log aloud in the group if they are willing. Hearing oneself named as evidence of growth — spoken aloud, in company — is qualitatively different from private reading.
25 — Unrequested Act	Prosocial behaviour, warm glow effect	The 'no announcement' instruction is psychologically important. When we share prosocial behaviour on social media, the reward is social recognition — dopaminergic. When the act is invisible, the reward is internal — opioidergic. This distinction teaches participants to notice the difference in subjective quality.
26 — Long-View Choice	Prefrontal training, delay discounting	Connect this day explicitly to Day 14's future flash. 'The person you imagined on Day 14 — what choice would they make today?' This uses EFT retroactively as a decision-making tool.
27 — Three Specific Things	Negativity bias, Baumeister et al.	Specificity is the key to effective gratitude practice. 'I am grateful for my family' is too abstract to produce neurochemical effects. 'I am grateful for the moment this morning when my housemate made me laugh before I had said anything about my day' is specific enough to activate the autobiographical memory network.
28 — Flourishing Day	Mental simulation, neural rehearsal	Mental simulation research (Taylor et al., 1998) shows that process simulation (imagining the steps) is more effective than outcome simulation (imagining the result). Encourage participants to write the details of how the day unfolds, not just how it feels at the end.
29 — Integration Plan	Eudaimonia + homeostasis synthesis	This is the final theoretical synthesis: the programme's argument is not that eudaimonia replaces biological need, but that it is built on top of it. A person who sleeps badly, eats poorly, and never moves is not going to find meaning — they are trying to build the upper storeys without the foundation.

30 — Future-Self Letter	Identity consolidation, completion	Allow extra time for this in the final group session. Reading letters aloud is optional but profoundly powerful when it happens. The letter is the participant's direct communication to their own future — a commitment device, a reminder, and a record of change.
-------------------------	------------------------------------	--

CUHK PSY @ 2026

8. Weekly Zoom Session Design

Session Overview

Six weekly sessions are held across the 30 days. Each session is 60 minutes. Sessions follow a consistent structure so that participants develop a rhythm — predictability reduces cognitive load and supports the autonomy need. Below is the template, followed by session-specific content.

Standard Session Template (60 minutes)

Time	Segment	Purpose
0:00–0:05	Opening anchor	Brief grounding activity: one breath together, one word to describe the week. Activates present-moment focus and group cohesion.
0:05–0:15	Week review	Participants share one thing from their workbook — something they noticed, something they found hard, something that surprised them. Trainer reflects back patterns.
0:15–0:35	Psychoeducation deepdive	Trainer teaches the primary theoretical concept for the upcoming week in accessible language. Interactive Q&A embedded throughout.
0:35–0:50	Application exercise	Paired or group activity applying the concept: practising an If–Then plan, sharing values inventories, reading evidence logs aloud.
0:50–0:58	Commitment + preview	Each participant states one specific commitment for the coming week ('This week I will...'). Trainer previews the next phase.
0:58–1:00	Closing	One word for how they are leaving. Same format as the opening anchor — creates bookends.

Session-by-Session Content Guide

Session 1 (Before Day 1): Orientation

Goal: Build group safety, establish the biological frame, set baseline expectations.

- Introduce the programme logic: homeostasis → eudaimonia
- Ask everyone to share: 'What brought you here? What do you want to be different?'
- Walk through the three environmental changes (greyscale, app friction, phone location)
- Complete baseline assessments together — frame them as a 'photograph of where you are right now'
- Preview Week 1: 'We are not changing anything yet. We are observing.'

Session 2 (After Days 1–7): The Dopamine Dip

Goal: Normalise the dip, consolidate Week 1 insights, deepen affect labelling.

- Review mood graphs from Days 1–7 — ask who is feeling the dip
- Teach the dopamine down-regulation model (Lembke) — include the set-point concept
- Practise affect labelling in pairs: 'Name three emotions you felt this week as specifically as possible'
- Share environment redesigns (Day 5) — what worked, what didn't
- Preview Week 2 focus: If–Then plans and breathing practice

Session 3 (After Days 8–14): Building the Alternative

Goal: Introduce DRA explicitly, troubleshoot Phase 1 completion, introduce Phase 2 energy.

- Introduce the DRA table — match scrolling functions to alternative tasks
- Share If–Then plans from Day 8 — discuss specificity and any implementation challenges
- Future Flash sharing (Day 14): invite 2–3 participants to share what they imagined

- Introduce the SDT framework — ask participants to rate their week on autonomy, competence, relatedness (1–10 each)

Session 4 (After Days 15–20): The Values Session

Goal: Process the values inventory, begin identity language, build momentum for Phase 3.

- Values inventory sharing (Day 17) — pairs first, then whole group
- Discuss the dissonance gap: where is the largest gap between stated values and actual behaviour?
- Introduce the Story Edit concept (Day 19): what stories are participants carrying about themselves?
- Have participants share their habit replacement stacks (Day 20) and get group feedback on feasibility

Session 5 (After Days 21–25): The Evidence Session

Goal: Make identity change visible, activate self-perception effects, deepen prosocial thread.

- Evidence Log sharing (Day 24) — invite participants to read their five pieces of evidence aloud
- Trainer reflection: 'Based on what I have heard across five weeks, here is what I see about who you are becoming...'
- Discuss the Fredrickson (2013) gene expression findings — connect to participants' own eudaimonic actions
- Prosocial act sharing (Day 25) — what did participants do? What was the subjective experience?

Session 6 (Day 30 or after): The Completion Session

Goal: Consolidate identity change, celebrate completion, create post-programme commitments.

- Future-self letter sharing — optional but encouraged; create space without pressure
- Compare Day 30 Bergen and EWB scores with baseline — discuss patterns as a group
- Each participant states: 'The one thing I am carrying forward from this programme is...'
- Discuss the Week 8 follow-up page and how to use the Quick Reference Card
- Trainer closing: genuine, specific, personal observations about each participant's growth

9. Designing Your Own Materials

Core Design Principles

If you create supplementary materials — slides, handouts, visual aids, social media posts, posters — these principles should govern every design decision.

Principle 1: Explain the mechanism, not the judgment

Every piece of material should describe what the brain does and why, before suggesting what to do. The sequence is always: Observation → Mechanism → Strategy. Never reverse this. Materials that open with 'here is what you should do' are immediately resistance-triggering for the target audience.

Example: Wrong: 'Try to reduce screen time by setting phone limits.' Right: 'When you pick up your phone after a stressful moment, your brain is running a dopamine loop — a learned circuit that bypasses the prefrontal cortex entirely. Here is how to interrupt it.'

Principle 2: Biological frame, not moral frame

Every word choice matters. Review all your materials for moral language and replace it with biological language:

Moral Frame (avoid)	Biological Frame (use)
You lack willpower	Your prefrontal cortex is overloaded under stress
You are addicted	Your dopaminergic system has been recalibrated by high-frequency stimulation
You are wasting time	Your dopamine baseline has shifted — natural rewards no longer register
Just try harder	Add friction before the behaviour and an alternative consequence after
You should exercise more	Movement generates BDNF and reduces cortisol — your brain responds to this within 10 minutes

Principle 3: Accessible without being condescending

The target audience is highly educated. They will notice and resist any material that feels patronising, oversimplified, or corporate-wellness in tone. Aim for the register of a thoughtful science journalist explaining something genuinely complex in plain English — rigorous, accessible, and respectful of the reader's intelligence.

Test: Read every piece of material and ask: 'Would a smart, sceptical postgraduate student roll their eyes at this?' If the answer is yes, revise.

Principle 4: One idea per visual

Slides and handouts should carry one idea per unit. The brain cannot process and retain multiple concurrent ideas from visual materials. A slide with five bullet points teaches nothing. A slide with one clear statement and one supporting fact teaches one thing reliably. For a programme about reducing overstimulation, materials that are cluttered and dense are self-undermining.

Principle 5: Use the participants' own language

The most effective psychoeducation materials you can create are those that reflect language participants themselves have used to describe their experience. In early sessions, collect their phrases: 'I just zone out', 'I feel like I'm waiting for something but I don't know what', 'I hate myself after but I can't stop'. Build these into your materials. Recognition is a more powerful engagement mechanism than instruction.

Slide Design Guidance

Colour and visual identity

The Altered programme uses a three-phase colour system: teal (#01696F) for Phase 1 (Disconnection), dark blue (#1A5276) for Phase 2 (Calibration), and deep purple (#5B2C6F) for Phase 3 (Meaning Rebuild). Use this system in your slides to give participants a visual orientation cue. A participant who sees teal knows you are talking about grounding and antecedent work; purple signals identity and meaning.

Typography

Use a single sans-serif font throughout (Calibri, Arial, or Trebuchet MS for slides). Body text should be no smaller than 18pt. Heading text no smaller than 28pt. Never use decorative fonts — they undermine the credibility of the scientific content.

Data and citations

Always cite your sources on slides, even if briefly. For this audience, 'Research by Lieberman et al. (2007), UCLA' is more persuasive than 'studies show.' Specificity signals that you have done the work and that the claims are real.

Handout Design Guidance

The one-page principle

Every handout should fit on one A4 page. If the content requires more space, it should become two separate handouts with two distinct purposes. A two-page handout is never read as carefully as a one-page handout.

Structure

Every handout should have: a clear header stating the concept; a two-to-three sentence explanation; a practical application instruction; and a space for the participant to write their own response. The write-in space is critical — it converts passive reading into active processing.

Example handout template

Element	Content	Purpose
Header	THE DOPAMINE DIP: WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT MATTERS	Concept identification
Mechanism (2–3 sentences)	When you reduce high-frequency stimulation, dopamine receptors temporarily up-regulate. This produces a period of flatness and irritability — typically peaking Days 6–10.	Normalisation through mechanism
What you might feel	Flat, bored, mildly irritable, craving stimulation, difficulty concentrating	Recognition of personal experience
What to do	Complete the Boredom Window (Day 6). It is the only evidence-based way to accelerate receptor recovery.	Concrete action
Your experience this week	Write one word that describes how you are feeling right now: _____	Active engagement and self-monitoring

10. Assessment and Outcome Tracking

The Measurement Framework

The programme uses four measurement points: baseline (Day 0), mid-point (Day 20), end (Day 30), and follow-up (Week 8). The mid-point measure is Bergen SMAS-SF only. The full battery is administered at baseline, Day 30, and Week 8.

Instrument	Constructs	Items	Scoring	Cut-offs
Bergen SMAS-SF	Social media addiction	6 items, 1–5 scale	Sum: 6–30. Higher = more problematic use	Score \geq 19: potential addiction (Andreassen et al., 2012)
PHQ-9	Depression severity	9 items, 0–3 scale	Sum: 0–27. Bands: 0–4 minimal, 5–9 mild, 10–14 moderate, 15–27 severe	Score \geq 10: clinically significant depression — consider referral
PSQI	Sleep quality (single-item version used)	1 item, 1–5 scale	Higher = better quality	Score \leq 2: poor sleep — note for Phase 3 integration
EWB Scale (programme version)	Eudaimonic well-being	5 items, 1–5 scale	Sum: 5–25. Higher = greater eudaimonic functioning	No clinical cut-off; track change from baseline

How to Use the Data

Baseline

Before the group begins, review individual baseline Bergen scores. Anyone scoring \geq 24 (very high) should be monitored closely in early sessions and offered additional individual check-ins. Anyone with PHQ-9 \geq 15 should be referred to CUHK CPSC or equivalent before beginning the programme.

Mid-point (Day 20)

Review Bergen scores as a group in Session 4. Present the aggregate data: 'Across the group, the average change so far is...' This creates a shared sense of collective progress without requiring individual disclosure. Participants who want to share their own scores can do so voluntarily.

Day 30

Day 30 scores form the primary outcome data for any research reporting. Ensure all participants complete this before the final group session, so that Day 30 data can be incorporated into the closing session discussion.

Week 8

The Week 8 follow-up is the most important data point for determining whether change is sustained. Follow up individually with participants who do not return the Week 8 page — even a brief message ('How are you doing? The follow-up page is whenever you're ready') maintains relational continuity and increases response rate.

PHQ-9 monitoring: If any participant's PHQ-9 score increases by 5 or more points between baseline and Day 30, treat this as a flag requiring individual follow-up. A rising PHQ-9 during a behaviour-change programme is unusual and warrants attention.

11. Difficult Situations

Emotional Flooding in Session

Occasionally, a participant will become unexpectedly distressed in a group session — triggered by a values inventory question, a disclosure from another group member, or their own workbook content. Signs: sudden silence, voice change, tears, withdrawal from the discussion.

In the moment:

1. Slow the room. Do not rush past the emotion or try to resolve it quickly.
2. Acknowledge without labelling. 'I can see something landed there. We don't need to go anywhere right now — we can just sit with it.'
3. Offer grounding. 'Let's take one breath together before we continue.'
4. Do not press for disclosure. Allow the participant to choose whether to speak.
5. Follow up individually after the session.

Dropout Risk

Participants are most likely to drop out at three points: Days 4–8 (the dopamine dip), Day 17 (values inventory — can feel too confronting), and Days 20–22 (transition to Phase 3 — the meaning work feels harder than the behaviour work).

Prevention:

- Explicitly name the dropout risk points at the start of the programme: 'There will be a week around Days 6–10 where you feel worse than when you started. This is normal. Please come to the session that week even if you have done nothing in your workbook.'
- Make the group session non-conditional on workbook completion. Participants who feel they have 'failed' the workbook are the ones most likely to skip the session and drop out.
- Send a brief individual message between Sessions 2 and 3 to anyone who was quiet or flagged difficulty.

Perfectionism About the Programme

Some participants will treat the workbook as a performance domain and feel they have failed if they miss a day, write a 'wrong' answer, or score higher than they expected on the Bergen. This is the programme's central problem reproduced inside the programme itself — and it is actually a powerful clinical moment.

Clinical opportunity: When a participant says 'I missed three days so I've ruined it,' reflect this back: 'Notice what just happened. You applied your all-or-nothing standard to a programme designed to help you with your all-or-nothing standard. What does Day 4's reflection prompt ask you to do with a thought like that?' The programme contains its own antidote — use it.

A Participant Discloses Significant Distress

If a participant discloses suicidal ideation, self-harm, clinical-level depression, or significant trauma history in session, respond calmly, validate, and refer:

1. Acknowledge: 'Thank you for trusting the group with that. What you are describing sounds really hard.'
2. Do not attempt to provide clinical support in the group setting.
3. After the session, follow up individually and provide referral information: CUHK CPSC (cpsc.sa.cuhk.edu.hk), or in Hong Kong, Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong hotline: 2382 0000.
4. Document the disclosure and your response.

Mandatory reporting: If you are a CUHK-affiliated researcher or student, you are subject to institutional guidelines on mandatory reporting of risk. Familiarise yourself with your department's protocols before the programme begins.

12. Trainer Self-Care

Why This Section Exists

Facilitation work is emotionally demanding. You will hear disclosures of shame, anxiety, loneliness, and meaninglessness from participants who are often functioning at high external levels. The gap between how they appear and how they feel is a significant emotional load for a facilitator to hold. If you do not have structures for your own regulation, you will find it increasingly difficult to hold the group's experience from a place of genuine stability.

Minimum Self-Care Practices for Trainers

- Complete a brief debrief after each session — either with a co-facilitator, a supervisor, or in writing. Do not carry undisclosed group content alone.
- Notice if you are doing more emotional work in the 24 hours before or after a session than usual. This is a signal of secondary stress load.
- Do the programme's own practices yourself. Trainers who have personally experienced the cold water task, the 90-second sit, and the values inventory facilitate these with qualitatively different credibility.
- Maintain your own supervision or peer consultation if facilitating with a research or clinical population.

Countertransference Awareness

High-achieving participants may trigger identification (you see yourself in them) or frustration (you cannot understand why someone so capable is stuck). Both are forms of countertransference that can impair facilitation. Common signs:

- Feeling impatient with a participant who is 'not applying the theory'
- Over-investing in a particular participant's progress
- Finding yourself giving advice rather than facilitating reflection
- Feeling personally responsible for a participant's dropout or setback

Supervision prompt: At your next debrief, ask yourself: 'Which participant am I most drawn to, and which one am I most frustrated by?' The answers to both questions contain important clinical information about your own countertransference.

ALTERED: Trainer & Facilitator Guide

WONG Man Sum, Sam · CUHK Department of Psychology · 2026

For facilitator use only. Not for distribution to programme participants.

ALTERED

From Homeostasis to Eudaimonia

PHASE 1 Disconnection PHASE 2 Calibration PHASE 3 Meaning Rebuild

A 30-Day Workbook for High-Achieving Avoiders

A structured programme to transform phone-as-avoidance into phone-as-tool — grounded in neuroscience, applied behaviour analysis, and eudaimonic psychology.

CUHK · Psy-Connection Award 2025–2026 · Sam WONG Man Sum

CUHK PSY @2026

Welcome

You are not lazy. You are not weak. You are not broken.

You are a nervous system under pressure — doing exactly what nervous systems do when the demands placed on them feel unbearable. You reach for your phone because it works. It numbs the anxiety, quiets the inner critic, and gives your brain a small hit of relief. Biologically, that is a completely rational response to stress.

The problem is not the relief. The problem is that over time, fast digital relief crowds out everything slower and deeper — the sense of meaning, the feeling of real accomplishment, the quiet satisfaction of a day lived in line with who you actually want to be. The phone stops being a refuge and starts being a cage.

Altered is not about willpower. It is not about punishing yourself for scrolling or tracking how many hours you 'wasted.' It is about understanding what your brain is actually doing — and gently, systematically, showing it a better way to feel okay.

Over the next 30 days, you will move through three phases:

- Phase 1 — Disconnection (Days 1-10): Reduce the grip of the habit by changing your environment and introducing tiny grounding tasks.
- Phase 2 — Calibration (Days 11-20): Replace the scroll with small, real-world actions that release genuine satisfaction.
- Phase 3 — Meaning Rebuild (Days 21-30): Connect your daily behaviour to your values, your identity, and your future.

Each day takes about 10-15 minutes. There is one page per day. You do not need to be perfect. You only need to show up.

Your nervous system is already on your side. Let's give it something better to work with.

How to Use This Workbook

Each daily page has five parts:

1 — Today's Science

One concept from neuroscience or psychology, explained in plain language. Understanding why you feel what you feel changes how you respond to it.

2 — Micro-Task

One small, specific action to complete today. These start almost absurdly easy. That is intentional — your brain needs to experience success before it will trust you enough to take on more.

3 — Mood Check

Rate your mood from 1 to 10 before and after your micro-task. You are building data, not performing wellness.

4 — Reflection

Two or three targeted questions designed to activate specific psychological processes: affect labelling, values clarification, self-perception. These are not open-ended journal prompts — they have a purpose.

5 — Closing Line

One sentence to carry into the rest of your day.

Ground Rules

- Fill in the workbook at the same time each day if possible — habit stacking reduces cognitive load.
- If you miss a day, do not skip ahead. Do the missed day when you return. There is no failure here, only pauses.
- The weekly Zoom group session is a companion to this workbook, not a replacement. Bring one thing from the week you want to discuss.
- Be honest. No one is grading this. The only person who benefits from your honesty is you.

Programme Overview

Phase	Days	Core Focus	Psychological Mechanism
Disconnection	1-10	Reduce habit grip; add friction to scrolling; introduce grounding	Antecedent manipulation, affect labelling, cortisol discharge
Calibration	11-20	Replace scrolling with micro-tasks; build If-Then habits	DRA, implementation intentions, mood tracking
Meaning Rebuild	21-30	Connect actions to values and identity	Values affirmation, self-perception theory, future-self visualisation

Your three environmental changes — set these up before Day 1:

- Set your phone to greyscale mode (Settings > Accessibility > Colour Filters). A grey screen is less rewarding to look at and interrupts the automatic visual pull.
- Move your most-used social media apps off your home screen. Add one extra tap between you and them. Small friction matters more than you expect.
- Choose a physical location in your home where your phone will live during your designated phone-free hours. Even one hour counts. Write the hours here: _____

Baseline Self-Assessment

Complete this before you start. You will complete the same questions again on Day 30 and at your Week 8 check-in.

Section A — Social Media Use

On a typical day, approximately how many hours do you spend on social media?

Hours per day:

Which platforms do you use most?

Platforms:

At what times do you most often reach for your phone? (circle all that apply)

Morning / Before starting work or study / After a setback or mistake / When feeling anxious / Late at night / When bored / When avoiding something

How often do you feel a compulsive urge to check your phone even when you don't want to?

1 — Never / 2 — Rarely / 3 — Sometimes / 4 — Often / 5 — Almost always

Section B — Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS-SF)

Rate each statement: 1 = Very rarely, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Very often

#	Statement	Baseline
1	You spend a lot of time thinking about social media or planning how to use it.	
2	You feel an urge to use social media more and more.	
3	You use social media to forget about personal problems.	
4	You have tried to cut down on social media use without success.	
5	You become restless or troubled if you are unable to use social media.	
6	You use social media so much that it has had a negative impact on your work or studies.	

Total: _____ / 30

Section C — Eudaimonic Well-Being

Rate each statement from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much)

#	Statement	Baseline
---	-----------	----------

1	I feel that my life has direction and meaning.	
2	I am actively working toward goals that matter to me.	
3	I regularly engage in activities that feel genuinely fulfilling.	
4	I feel connected to others in ways that matter.	
5	My daily actions reflect who I truly want to be.	

Total: _____ / 25

Section D — Quick Baseline

Average hours of sleep last week: _____ Sleep quality (1-5): _____

Overall mood this week (1-10): _____ Current stress level (1-10): _____

CUHK PSY @ 2026

PHASE 1

DISCONNECTION

Days 1-10: Breaking the Grip

Phase 1 is about interruption, not elimination. You are not trying to stop using your phone. You are trying to introduce a pause between the urge and the action — and in that pause, make a different choice, even once. The environment changes you make this week will do most of the work. Willpower is not the strategy. Design is.

CUHK PSY @ 2026

Today's Science: The Habit Loop

Every automatic behaviour — including phone scrolling — follows a neurological loop: Cue > Routine > Reward (Duhigg, 2012). The cue triggers a craving; the routine is the behaviour; the reward reinforces it. What makes phone habits so strong is that the reward is immediate and reliable. Today, you map your own loop — not to judge it, but to understand it. You cannot redesign a system you cannot see.

Today's Micro-Task: Map Your Loop

Before you look at your phone today, pause for three seconds and ask: What just happened? Note three instances across the day.

Cue 1: _____ Routine: open phone

Reward I was seeking: _____

Cue 2: _____ Routine: open phone

Reward I was seeking: _____

Cue 3: _____ Routine: open phone

Reward I was seeking: _____

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. What was the most common cue that triggered your phone use today? Was it a feeling, a situation, or a time of day?

2. What reward were you actually seeking in the most common cue? Did the phone deliver it?

"You cannot change what you cannot see. Today, you started looking."

Today's Science: The Allostatic Load

Neuroscientist Bruce McEwen coined the term allostatic load to describe the cumulative wear on the body and brain caused by chronic stress. Under high allostatic load, the brain increasingly relies on fast, reliable relief — and few things are faster or more reliable than a phone. Scrolling lowers stress in the short term by flooding the brain with novelty and social stimulation. The problem is the rebound: each scroll session slightly raises the baseline anxiety level it was meant to lower.

Today's Micro-Task: The Cold Reset

The next time you feel the urge to pick up your phone — especially if you are anxious, restless, or avoidant — go to a sink and run cold water over your wrists and forearms for 30 seconds. Notice what happens in your body.

Did you complete this today? Yes / No / Not triggered yet (that's fine)

What did you notice in your body during or after?

Before the task: ____ / 10 After the task: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. How did your body feel before the cold water — tight, heavy, buzzing, flat? Name it as specifically as you can.

2. Did the urge to scroll reduce even slightly afterward? What does that tell you about what you were actually looking for?

"Your nervous system can be calmed with water and thirty seconds. You do not always need the phone."

Today's Science: Naming Tames

Research by Matthew Lieberman at UCLA shows that putting feelings into words — affect labelling — measurably reduces activity in the amygdala, the brain's threat-detection centre. When you name an emotion, you activate the prefrontal cortex, which has a calming regulatory effect on the limbic system. The moment you write 'I feel overwhelmed,' the intensity decreases slightly. This is not toxic positivity. It is neuroscience.

Today's Micro-Task: The Emotion Naming Log

Three times today — morning, afternoon, and evening — pause and complete this sentence: 'Right now I feel _____ because _____.' You do not need to fix the feeling. You only need to name it.

Morning: Right now I feel _____ because _____

Afternoon: Right now I feel _____ because _____

Evening: Right now I feel _____ because _____

Overall mood today: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Which emotion was hardest to name? What made it difficult?

2. Did naming the emotion change anything — even slightly — about how it felt in your body?

"Language is a tool your nervous system can use. Name the feeling. Reduce the noise."

Today's Science: The Cost of Escape

When you scroll to escape an uncomfortable feeling, you get short-term relief — but you also train your brain that the feeling is too dangerous to face. Over time, your tolerance for discomfort decreases. This is why, after a long scrolling session, high achievers often feel worse, not better. The escape became the trap. Today, we practice a 90-second sit: neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor found that the neurochemical surge of an emotion typically peaks and begins to dissolve within 90 seconds, if you let it.

Today's Micro-Task: The 90-Second Sit

When you next feel a strong urge to scroll — especially triggered by a task you are avoiding — set a timer for 90 seconds. Put the phone down. Sit with the feeling. Do not distract yourself. Just watch what happens.

What triggered the urge?

What did the feeling do over 90 seconds — did it peak, shift, or dissolve?

Before the 90-second sit: ____ / 10 **After:** ____ / 10

Reflection

1. What was the story your mind was telling you during those 90 seconds? (e.g., 'This is unbearable', 'I'm failing')

2. Was the feeling still at its peak at the end of 90 seconds, or had something shifted?

"Emotions are visitors, not residents. Most of them leave within two minutes if you let them."

Today's Science: Environment Design

One of the most powerful principles in Applied Behaviour Analysis is antecedent control: changing the environment before the behaviour occurs. You are far less likely to scroll if the phone is not in the room. Reducing access — adding just one or two extra steps between you and the habit — can dramatically reduce its frequency without requiring any willpower at all.

Today's Micro-Task: The Space Redesign

Choose one context where you scroll the most — in bed, at your desk, on the sofa. Make one change to that physical space that makes phone use slightly harder and phone-free activity slightly easier. Examples: remove phone from bedroom; put a book on your bedside table; add a glass of water and notebook to your desk; place a sticky note on your phone screen reading: 'What am I avoiding right now?'

What change did you make?

What activity would you most like to do in that space instead of scrolling?

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Does the space you chose feel different after your change? What feels different?

2. What activity would you most like to do in that space instead of scrolling? Write it as concretely as possible.

"You are not fighting your habits. You are redesigning the stage they perform on."

Today's Science: The Dopamine Dip

You may have noticed over the past few days that reducing scrolling has made some moments feel flat, boring, or mildly irritable. This is expected — it is biological. When you repeatedly activate the dopamine system with fast stimulation, the system adjusts its baseline downward. When you reduce the stimulation, you temporarily fall below baseline. This is the dopamine dip. It is not depression. It is recalibration. Your receptors are beginning to up-regulate.

Today's Micro-Task: The Boredom Window

Choose one 20-minute block today where you deliberately do nothing stimulating. No phone, no music, no podcast. You can sit, walk slowly, look out a window, make tea. Let the boredom be there. This is not wasted time — it is the dopamine system recalibrating.

When did you do it? _____ How long? _____

What did boredom actually feel like in your body? _____

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. What thoughts came up during the boredom window? Were they anxious, creative, random?

2. At the end of the 20 minutes, was the boredom more or less tolerable than at the start?

"Boredom is not emptiness. It is the system resetting. Let it."

Today's Science: The Consistency Principle

You have completed six days. Research on habit formation shows that the brain begins to encode a new routine after just a few consistent repetitions — not because the behaviour becomes automatic, but because the brain starts building a narrative: 'This is something I do.' Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) suggests we infer our own character from observing our own behaviour. Every day you complete in this workbook, you are building evidence for a new self-story.

Today's Micro-Task: The Week 1 Review

Look back over Days 1-6 and answer the questions below.

Which day felt most useful or meaningful? Why?

Which day was hardest? What made it hard?

Average daily mood score this week: _____

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. What is one thing you have noticed about yourself this week that you did not notice before?

2. Write one sentence completing this: 'This week I acted like someone who _____'

"Seven days of showing up. Your nervous system is taking notes."

Today's Science: The If-Then Bridge

One of the most well-researched behaviour change techniques is the implementation intention (Gollwitzer, 1999): forming a specific plan in the format 'If [situation], then [response].' This bridges the gap between intention and action by pre-loading the decision before the moment of temptation arrives. Studies show implementation intentions can significantly reduce automatic habit responses — not by adding willpower, but by replacing one automatic reaction with another.

Today's Micro-Task: Write Your If-Then Plans

Complete the following sentences as specifically as possible.

If I open [app] _____ after [time] _____,
then I will first _____.

If I feel _____ and reach for my
phone, then I will first _____.

Action: Photograph or copy these onto a sticky note
somewhere visible.

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. What is the most common 'if' situation for you — what most reliably triggers the reach?

2. Does having a pre-made plan for that moment feel reassuring, or does something resist it? What is the resistance?

"A plan made before the moment is worth ten decisions made inside it."

Today's Science: Cortisol and the Prefrontal Cortex

Chronic high stress physically impairs the prefrontal cortex — the part of the brain responsible for planning, impulse control, and long-term thinking. Under cortisol load, the brain defaults to faster, more automatic responses like scrolling. This is not moral failing. It is neurochemistry. Today's task targets cortisol directly through one of the most evidence-based methods available: slow, extended exhalation, which activates the vagus nerve and the parasympathetic nervous system.

Today's Micro-Task: The 4-7-8 Breath

Once today — ideally when you feel the strongest pull toward your phone — try this breathing pattern: inhale for 4 counts, hold for 7 counts, exhale slowly for 8 counts. Repeat three times. Total time: under 2 minutes.

When did you do it? _____ What triggered it?

What changed in your body after three cycles?

Before breathing: ____ / 10 After breathing: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Does regulating your nervous system directly — through your breath — feel like a realistic alternative to scrolling in moments of stress? What feels easy or difficult about it?

2. If your body had words for what it needs when you feel most anxious, what would it say?

"Your exhale is a direct line to your parasympathetic nervous system. Use it."

Today's Science: Completion and Dopamine

The dopamine system responds not just to pleasure, but to completion — the moment a task is finished. Even small completions trigger a mild but genuine dopamine release. Unlike scrolling-dopamine, which is passive and wears off fast, completion-dopamine builds on itself: each finished task increases the likelihood of starting another. This is why highly productive people are not more disciplined — they have structured their lives to experience more small completions.

Today's Micro-Task: The One-Thing Completion

Identify one small task that you have been avoiding for at least three days. It does not matter how trivial it seems. Complete it today before you allow yourself to open any social media.

The task I will complete: _____

Time I completed it: _____ How did it feel when it was done?

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. What made you avoid that task? What story were you telling yourself about it?

2. How does the feeling of completing something compare to the feeling of scrolling? Describe both as physically and specifically as you can.

"Every completion is a small deposit into your brain's sense of safety and capability."

Phase 1 Complete — Reflection

Take a moment before you move into Phase 2. You have spent ten days noticing, naming, breathing, redesigning, and completing. You have not been perfect. That is exactly right.

What has changed — even slightly — in the past ten days?

What still feels automatic or hard to interrupt?

Rate your current relationship with your phone:

1 = completely in control of me ----- 10 = I have real choice about it

My score: _____

Phase 2 begins tomorrow. The work gets more personal from here.

PHASE 2

CALIBRATION

Days 11-20: Building a New Reward System

In Phase 2, we shift from reducing the pull of the old habit to building the reward architecture of the new one. Each day introduces a micro-task with a genuine payoff — a real-world action that activates the slower, deeper reward systems your brain has been starved of.

CUHK PSY @ 2026

Today's Science: Differential Reinforcement

In behavioural psychology, Differential Reinforcement of Alternative behaviour (DRA) means reinforcing a new, healthier behaviour that serves the same function as the old one. The key is that the alternative must genuinely deliver something. Scrolling delivers stimulation, novelty, and simulated social connection. The alternative needs to offer at least a version of those things. Today's task offers novelty and stimulation through your physical environment rather than a screen.

Today's Micro-Task: The Sensory Walk

Go for a 10-minute walk outside. This is not exercise. The only rule: for the entire walk, name five things you can see, four you can hear, three you can physically feel, two you can smell, one you can taste. No phone during the walk.

See: _____ Hear: _____ Feel: _____
Smell: _____ Taste: _____

Before walk: ____ / 10 After walk: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Did the sensory walk feel like an adequate substitute for the stimulation of scrolling, or did it feel flat by comparison?

2. What does that tell you about what your brain currently finds rewarding?

"The physical world is full of sensory data your brain is currently ignoring. Today, you let some of it in."

Today's Science: The Opioid System

Most conversations about addiction focus on dopamine — but there is another reward system that matters for well-being: the endogenous opioid system. This system is activated by warmth, physical comfort, social connection, and deep satisfaction. Unlike dopamine, which spikes and fades fast, opioid-mediated reward is slow, warm, and stable. Eudaimonic well-being is linked to opioid system activity. Today, we activate it with something simple: warmth and stillness.

Today's Micro-Task: The Warm Drink Pause

Make yourself a warm drink — tea, coffee, warm water, whatever you like. Sit with it for five minutes without your phone. Hold the cup with both hands. Notice the warmth, the steam, the flavour. Do not multitask. This is the complete task.

Did you complete it? Yes / No

What did you notice?

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. How often do you do something like this — sit quietly with a small pleasure — without simultaneously scrolling?

2. What does any resistance to 'doing nothing but drinking tea' tell you about how you relate to stillness?

"Your opioid system is waiting. It activates with warmth, presence, and stillness. You have all three."

Today's Science: Oxytocin and Real Connection

Scrolling simulates social connection — you see people, receive reactions, feel the buzz of social information. But passive social media consumption does not activate the oxytocin system the way real interaction does. Oxytocin is released primarily through eye contact, physical proximity, shared laughter, and genuine emotional exchange. It is the neurochemical of belonging — associated with reduced cortisol, lower blood pressure, and a sense of safety. Today, you create a real moment of it.

Today's Micro-Task: The Real Connection

Send a genuine, personal message to one person you have been meaning to reach out to — or, better, call them or see them in person. This is not a check-in emoji. It is a real sentence: something you have been thinking about, something you appreciate about them, a question you genuinely want to ask.

Who did you reach out to?

What did you say (roughly)?

Before: ____ / 10 After: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. How did it feel to send a real message compared to passively browsing someone's profile?

2. Is there something about real connection that feels harder or more risky than social media connection? What is it?

"Oxytocin cannot be streamed. It has to be exchanged."

Today's Science: Delay Discounting

Delay discounting is the tendency to value rewards less the further they are in the future. High phone use amplifies this — the brain becomes calibrated to expect rewards within seconds, making longer-term goals feel distant and unreal. Today's task uses 'episodic future thinking' — vividly imagining a future version of yourself — which research shows can temporarily reduce delay discounting and increase investment in long-term goals.

Today's Micro-Task: The Future Flash

Close your eyes for two minutes (set a timer). Imagine yourself three months from now. You have completed this programme. Your relationship with your phone has shifted. Picture a specific morning — what does it look like? Where are you? What are you doing before noon? How does your body feel?

Write what you saw:

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. In your future image, what was notably absent? What was present that isn't in your life right now?

2. What would need to change in the next 30 days to make that image more likely?

"Your future self is not a stranger. They are the person you are building, day by day."

Today's Science: Mastery and the Competence Drive

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) identifies three core psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Competence — the feeling of being effective and capable — is especially vulnerable in high achievers caught in avoidance cycles. Avoidance shrinks the behavioural repertoire: things that once felt manageable start feeling impossible. Mastery experiences — completing even tiny, novel tasks — rebuild the competence signal and gradually expand what feels possible.

Today's Micro-Task: The New Small Thing

Do one small thing today that you have never done before, or haven't done in a long time, that requires a tiny amount of skill or effort. Examples: cook something new, learn three words in a new language, write a six-word story, draw something with your non-dominant hand.

What did you do?

How did it feel? Was there any resistance before starting?

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. What stopped you from doing this kind of thing more often? What story did your brain tell you?

2. On a scale of 1-10, how much did it feel like 'you' to do this? What does that number tell you?

"Competence grows from doing, not from waiting until you feel ready."

Today's Science: The Body-Mind Signal

The relationship between physical movement and psychological state is bidirectional — movement does not just follow mood, it shapes it. A 10-minute moderate-intensity activity reduces cortisol, increases BDNF (a protein promoting neural growth and resilience), and generates mild endorphin release. You do not need to exercise vigorously. You need to move your body through space with some intentionality. Today, movement is the medicine.

Today's Micro-Task: The Body Reset

At some point when you feel the urge to scroll — especially late afternoon or evening when energy dips — do 10 minutes of intentional physical movement. This can be a brisk walk, stretching, dancing to one song, going up and down stairs five times, or any movement that involves your whole body.

What movement did you choose?

Time of day: _____

Before movement: ____ / 10 **After movement:**
____ / 10

Reflection

1. Did the mood score change? If yes, what does that suggest about what your body was actually asking for when it wanted the phone?

2. What is the smallest version of this movement task you could realistically do every day?

"Your body is the fastest mood regulation tool you own. It comes with you everywhere."

Today's Science: Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) is the discomfort of holding two contradictory beliefs simultaneously. 'I am a high achiever who wants to build something meaningful' and 'I spent four hours today on my phone doing nothing' create dissonance. The brain resolves dissonance either by changing behaviour or changing the belief. Today, you will deliberately surface this tension — not to shame yourself, but to use the discomfort as useful energy.

Today's Micro-Task: The Values Inventory

Write down your top five personal values — the things that matter most to you when you are at your best. Examples: creativity, learning, honesty, connection, health, contribution, craft, family, growth, courage.

My top five values: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
 _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

How much does your current daily behaviour reflect each value? (1 = not at all, 5 = very much)

1. ___ 2. ___ 3. ___ 4. ___ 5. ___

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Where is the biggest gap between a value you hold and how you are currently living? What does that gap feel like?

2. If you were living in full alignment with your top value tomorrow, what would you do differently in the first hour after waking?

"Dissonance is not guilt. It is information about the distance between who you are and who you want to be."

Today's Science: Autonomy and the 'I Choose' Frame

One reason behaviour-change programmes fail is that they feel coercive — the person feels controlled by rules rather than empowered by choice. Self-Determination Theory identifies autonomy as a core psychological need: we are much more likely to sustain behaviour that we feel we chose. Today, you will explicitly reframe today's micro-task as a choice — not an obligation. The task itself is identical. The frame is everything.

Today's Micro-Task: The Chosen Hour

Choose one hour today that you will spend entirely on something you genuinely want to do — not something you should do, not something productive necessarily, but something you would choose freely. Reading, cooking, drawing, walking, playing an instrument. No phone and no screens.

What did you choose to do?

What time? _____ How long did you actually spend? _____

Before: ____ / 10 **After:** ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Notice the word 'choose' — did framing this as something you wanted rather than something you had to do change anything about how it felt?

2. How often do you do things in a day that you would describe as genuinely, freely chosen?

"Autonomy is not doing whatever you feel like. It is acting from your deepest self rather than your most reactive one."

Today's Science: The Narrative Self

Humans are story-making creatures. We do not just have experiences — we turn them into narratives about who we are. The stories we tell ourselves ('I always give up', 'I can't focus', 'I have no discipline') become self-fulfilling because they shape what we attempt and how we interpret outcomes. Today, you will rewrite one line of your story.

Today's Micro-Task: The Story Edit

Complete the following two prompts. Then write your new story on a sticky note and place it somewhere visible for tomorrow morning.

Old story I have been telling myself about my phone use or my focus:

New story (honest, oriented toward growth, not toxic positivity):

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Where did the old story come from? Who told it to you first — yourself, a teacher, a parent, a pattern of events?

2. What would change about your behaviour tomorrow if the new story were true?

"Your story is not a diagnosis. It is a draft. You are allowed to revise it."

Today's Science: The Habit Replacement Stack

You have now practised ten different micro-tasks across two phases. Research on habit replacement suggests that the most durable changes are built by stacking new behaviours onto existing anchors — using something you already do reliably (waking up, making coffee, finishing work) as the cue for the new behaviour. Today, you will build your personal replacement stack.

Today's Micro-Task: Build Your Phase 3 Stack

Review the tasks from Days 11-19. Write the three that felt most useful, most natural, or most rewarding:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Now attach one to each of three existing anchors in your day:

After/during _____, I will _____
instead of scrolling.

After/during _____, I will _____
instead of scrolling.

After/during _____, I will _____
instead of scrolling.

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Looking back at Phase 2, what surprised you most about what your brain found rewarding?

2. What does your phone still provide that none of the micro-tasks have fully replaced? Be honest.

"You are not eliminating the phone. You are demoting it from a coping strategy to a tool."

CUHK PSY @ 2026

Phase 2 Complete — Mid-Point Check

You have reached the halfway point. Take stock honestly.

Bergen SMAS-SF — Mid-Point

#	Statement	Mid-Point
1	You spend a lot of time thinking about social media or planning how to use it.	
2	You feel an urge to use social media more and more.	
3	You use social media to forget about personal problems.	
4	You have tried to cut down on social media use without success.	
5	You become restless or troubled if you are unable to use social media.	
6	You use social media so much that it has had a negative impact on your work or studies.	

Mid-point total: _____ / 30 Baseline total: _____ / 30 Change: _____

What are you most proud of from the first 20 days?

Phase 3 begins tomorrow. The deepest work is ahead.

PHASE 3

MEANING REBUILD

Days 21-30: Living Toward Who You Want to Be

In Phase 3, the work shifts from managing a habit to building an identity. You are not just reducing scrolling — you are constructing a daily life with more meaning, more presence, and more alignment with the person you genuinely want to become. The biology follows: eudaimonic living is associated with lower cortisol, better immune function, and more stable long-term well-being.

CUHK PSY @2026

Today's Science: Eudaimonia and the Body

Aristotle described eudaimonia as flourishing through the realisation of one's potential and the living of a virtuous life. Modern research has given this a biological substrate: Fredrickson et al. (2013) found that individuals with high eudaimonic well-being show significantly healthier gene expression profiles than those who primarily pursue hedonic pleasure — including reduced inflammatory gene expression and stronger antiviral and antibody genes. Living meaningfully is not just psychologically better. It is physically better.

Today's Micro-Task: The Meaning Inventory

Answer these questions without overthinking:

What activities make you lose track of time in a good way?

What would you spend more time on if no one was watching and nothing was being evaluated?

When do you feel most like yourself?

Today's mood: _____ / 10

Reflection

1. How much of your current daily life contains the activities you described above?

2. What is stopping more of your day from looking like your answers?

"Eudaimonia is not a destination. It is the direction you face when you get out of bed."

Today's Science: The Present Moment

A landmark study by Killingsworth and Gilbert (2010) found that people spend nearly 47% of waking hours thinking about something other than what they are currently doing — and that mind-wandering consistently predicts lower happiness, regardless of activity. Today you practice returning to the present — not by force, but by giving your senses something real to anchor on.

Today's Micro-Task: The One Present Thing

Choose one ordinary activity today — eating a meal, washing dishes, walking somewhere — and do it with complete, deliberate attention. No phone, no music, no podcast. Just the activity. When your mind wanders (it will), gently return without judgment.

What activity did you choose?

How long did you maintain presence before the first mind-wander? _____

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Where did your mind go when it wandered — past, future, or social evaluation?

2. What did you notice about the ordinary activity when you gave it full attention?

"Presence is not the absence of thought. It is the return to now, repeated as many times as needed."

Today's Science: Values-Congruent Action

Research in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) consistently shows that psychological well-being is not primarily about reducing negative emotions — it is about increasing values-congruent action: doing more of what matters, even in the presence of discomfort. Today you will take one action that is directly aligned with a value from your Day 17 inventory.

Today's Micro-Task: The Values Action

Look back at your top five values from Day 17. Choose one. Do one concrete, specific action today that expresses that value. The action can be small — five minutes is enough. What matters is that it is real and deliberate.

Value chosen: _____

Action taken: _____

Before: ____ / 10 After: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Did acting in line with your value feel different from completing a random productivity task? How?

2. What would a week look like if you did one values-congruent action every day?

"A value without action is just a preference. Today, yours became a behaviour."

Today's Science: Self-Perception and Identity

Bem's (1972) self-perception theory states that we infer our own attitudes and character in part from observing our own behaviour. You are, right now, building a body of evidence about who you are. Every micro-task completed, every moment of presence, every values-aligned action is data your brain uses to construct its self-concept. You are not waiting to become someone who lives differently. You are becoming them by acting.

Today's Micro-Task: The Evidence Log

Look back through this workbook from Day 1. List five specific things you did — not feelings, not intentions, actual actions — that are evidence of the person you want to become.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Before you listed these, did you think of yourself as someone who had already changed? After listing them, does that self-assessment shift at all?

2. What kind of person do these five actions suggest you are becoming?

"Identity is not who you decide to be. It is what the evidence says about how you have lived."

CUHK PSY @ 2026

Today's Science: Prosocial Behaviour and Well-Being

A robust body of research shows that prosocial behaviour — doing something for someone else without expectation of return — is one of the most reliable generators of subjective well-being. It activates both the opioid system (warm glow) and the dopaminergic system (novelty, action) simultaneously, while strengthening social bonds and oxytocin release. It is, in neurochemical terms, one of the most efficient uses of your time.

Today's Micro-Task: The Unrequested Act

Do one thing today for another person without being asked and without expecting anything back. It can be making someone a cup of tea, helping a classmate, leaving an encouraging note, cooking a meal for a housemate. No announcement. No post about it.

What did you do?

Before: ____ / 10 **After:** ____ / 10

Reflection

1. How did it feel to do something for someone else without scrolling about it or announcing it?

2. How does the feeling from this action compare to the feeling of receiving a like or positive comment online?

"Real generosity is invisible. And it still releases all the same neurochemicals."

Today's Science: The Long-View Brain

The prefrontal cortex — the seat of planning, perspective-taking, and long-term thinking — is suppressed by chronic stress and constant short-cycle stimulation. Every time you resist an immediate impulse in favour of a delayed but more meaningful reward, you are literally training the prefrontal cortex. This is not willpower as moral virtue. It is neural exercise. Today you make one long-view decision.

Today's Micro-Task: The Long-View Choice

Identify one small decision you will face today where you could choose either the immediate comfortable option or the slightly harder but more meaningful one. Make the harder choice. Examples: starting a task you have been avoiding, having a conversation you have been putting off, going to bed 30 minutes earlier, spending time on a project that matters to you instead of TV.

What was the decision?

Which option did you choose?

Today's mood: _____ / 10

Reflection

1. What was the 'pull' of the easier option? How strong was it?

2. After making the harder choice, how did you feel — in your body, in your mood, in your sense of yourself?

"Every long-view choice is a small act of respect toward your future self."

Today's Science: Gratitude and Negativity Bias

The human brain has a negativity bias — it registers and stores negative experiences more readily than positive ones (Baumeister et al., 2001). This is evolutionarily adaptive but corrosive in modern environments where threats are largely psychological. Gratitude practices counteract negativity bias by deliberately directing attention toward positive experiences. This is not about pretending everything is fine. It is about giving your brain accurate information about what is also good.

Today's Micro-Task: The Three Specific Things

Write three specific things from the past 24 hours that you are genuinely grateful for. Do not write abstractions. Write sensory, specific moments: 'I am grateful for the warmth of the coffee this morning and having five minutes of quiet before my day started.'

1.

2.

3.

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Did any of the three things surprise you — things you would normally have missed or dismissed?

2. How does actively generating gratitude compare to scrolling a feed of other people's highlights?

"Your life contains more than your anxiety gives it credit for."

Today's Science: Visualising the Flourishing Self

Mental simulation of future behaviour activates many of the same neural pathways as actual performance. Research on mental rehearsal shows that vividly imagined future actions increase the probability of those actions occurring. Today you will spend time with your future flourishing self — not as a fantasy, but as a blueprint.

Today's Micro-Task: The Flourishing Day

In as much sensory detail as possible, write what a typical Tuesday looks like for you one year from now — a version where you have rebuilt your relationship with your phone, your work, and yourself. What time do you wake? What do you do in the first hour? How do you spend your energy? Who do you connect with? What have you made or contributed?

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. What was the emotional tone of what you described — peaceful? Energised? Purposeful? Something else?

2. What is the single most important behaviour change that connects where you are now to that day?

"The future is made of present moments. Today was one of them."

Today's Science: Integration — Survival and Flourishing Together

Eudaimonia does not mean transcending the body's needs. It means building a life where meeting biological needs — rest, nourishment, movement, connection — is integrated with pursuing what is meaningful. The phone became a problem because it served basic regulatory needs without delivering deeper ones. The goal was never to eliminate comfort. It was to make comfort the foundation of flourishing rather than a substitute for it.

Today's Micro-Task: The Integration Plan

Design tomorrow — one full day — that intentionally includes both: biological care (sleep, movement, real food, genuine rest) AND at least one eudaimonic action (something creative, connective, or meaningful).

Morning (what, when):

Afternoon (what, when):

Evening (what, when):

One eudaimonic action:

Phone rules for tomorrow:

Today's mood: ____ / 10

Reflection

1. Does 'designing your day' feel like something you could realistically do each morning? What makes it harder or easier?

2. Looking at the 30 days ahead from where you started: what shifted most?

"You do not have to choose between surviving and flourishing. Both are your birthright."

CUHK PSY @ 2026

Today's Science: Homeostasis Restored, Eudaimonia Begun

Thirty days ago, your nervous system was in survival mode — using the phone as a fast, reliable way to restore a fragile sense of safety. You have spent a month introducing your brain to a different kind of safety: one built on self-knowledge, biological regulation, genuine connection, small completions, and values-aligned action. This is not the end of the work. It is the establishment of a new baseline. Homeostasis, restored to something higher.

Today's Micro-Task: The Future-Self Letter

Write a letter to yourself from your future self — the version of you who completed this programme and carried it forward. What does that person want this-version-of-you to know? What did the 30 days teach you that you most need to remember on a hard day? Write at least one full paragraph.

Day 30 — Final Self-Assessment

Complete these without looking at your baseline first. Compare scores after.

Bergen SMAS-SF — Day 30

#	Statement	Day 30
1	You spend a lot of time thinking about social media or planning how to use it.	
2	You feel an urge to use social media more	

	and more.	
3	You use social media to forget about personal problems.	
4	You have tried to cut down on social media use without success.	
5	You become restless or troubled if you are unable to use social media.	
6	You use social media so much that it has had a negative impact on your work or studies.	

Day 30 total: _____ / 30 Baseline total: _____ / 30 Change: _____

Eudaimonic Well-Being — Day 30

#	Statement	Day 30
1	I feel that my life has direction and meaning.	
2	I am actively working toward goals that matter to me.	
3	I regularly engage in activities that feel genuinely fulfilling.	
4	I feel connected to others in ways that matter.	
5	My daily actions reflect who I truly want to be.	

Day 30 total: _____ / 25 Baseline total: _____ / 25 Change: _____

Sleep quality today (1-5): _____ Baseline sleep quality: _____

One sentence: How has your relationship with your phone changed?

Today's mood: _____ / 10

Final Reflection

1. What are you most proud of from these 30 days?

2. What do you want to carry forward from Phase 3 into everyday life?

3. What does your phone mean to you now, compared to

30 days ago?

"You arrived here in survival mode. You are leaving with a map to something better. Keep walking."

CUHK PSY @ 2026

Week 8 Follow-Up

Complete this page 8 weeks after Day 30.

Welcome back. Some things that changed over the 30 days will have stayed changed. Others will have drifted. That is normal. What matters now is an honest look at where you are.

Bergen SMAS-SF — Week 8

#	Statement	Week 8
1	You spend a lot of time thinking about social media or planning how to use it.	
2	You feel an urge to use social media more and more.	
3	You use social media to forget about personal problems.	
4	You have tried to cut down on social media use without success.	
5	You become restless or troubled if you are unable to use social media.	
6	You use social media so much that it has had a negative impact on your work or studies.	

Week 8 total: _____ / 30 Day 30 total: _____ / 30 Baseline total: _____ / 30

Eudaimonic Well-Being — Week 8

#	Statement	Week 8
1	I feel that my life has direction and meaning.	
2	I am actively working toward goals that matter to me.	
3	I regularly engage in activities that feel genuinely fulfilling.	
4	I feel connected to others in ways that matter.	
5	My daily actions reflect who I truly want to be.	

Week 8 total: _____ / 25 Day 30 total: _____ / 25

Three Questions

What from the 30 days has lasted?

What drifted back, and what do you think caused the drift?

If you were to run one 'refresh week' right now using only three days from the workbook, which three would you choose and why?

CUHK PSY @ 2026

Quick Reference Card

Cut out or photograph this page and keep it accessible.

When You Feel the Urge to Scroll

- Name the feeling — 'I feel _____ because _____'
- Choose one: Cold water (30 sec) / 4-7-8 breath (x3) / 90-second sit / Sensory walk
- Ask: 'What do I actually need right now?'
- If the urge is still strong: use your If-Then plan (from Day 8)

Your Personal If-Then Plans

If _____, then _____.

If _____, then _____.

Your Top Three Values (from Day 17)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Your Replacement Habit Stack (from Day 20)

After _____, I _____ instead of scrolling.

After _____, I _____ instead of scrolling.

After _____, I _____ instead of scrolling.

Your New Story (from Day 19)

On a Hard Day, Remember

Your brain is not broken. It is a survival machine that learned the wrong shortcut. You have spent 30 days teaching it better ones. Come back to Day 4 (the 90-second sit) or Day 6 (the boredom window) when you need to reset.

Going Further

Recommended Reading

- Dopamine Nation — Anna Lembke (the neuroscience of compulsive behaviour)
- The Willpower Instinct — Kelly McGonigal (Stanford course on self-regulation science)
- Indistractable — Nir Eyal (practical strategies for attention management)
- Man's Search for Meaning — Viktor Frankl (the original argument for meaning over pleasure)

Academic Starting Points

- Self-Determination Theory: Deci & Ryan (2000). Self-determination and intrinsic motivation.
- Eudaimonia & gene expression: Fredrickson et al. (2013). PNAS, 110(33).
- Affect labelling: Lieberman et al. (2007). Psychological Science.
- Implementation intentions: Gollwitzer (1999). American Psychologist.
- Delay discounting: Bickel et al. (2014). Annual Review of Clinical Psychology.

Your Support Resources

- Weekly Zoom group: link provided by programme coordinator
- Crisis support (HK): Samaritans of Hong Kong — 2389 2222 (24-hour)
- CUHK CAPS: Student counselling services — 3943 7208