YOUR ATTENTION BELONGS TO YOU

SMARTER PHONES. SHALLOWER THINKING?

From agitation to cogitation.
A short guide to making room for your own ideas.



ANOTHER SWIPE?



ONE MORE CHAPTER?

AGITATION

Feeling restless, stirred up or scattered.

Ever stopped scrolling but still felt busy inside?

COGITATION

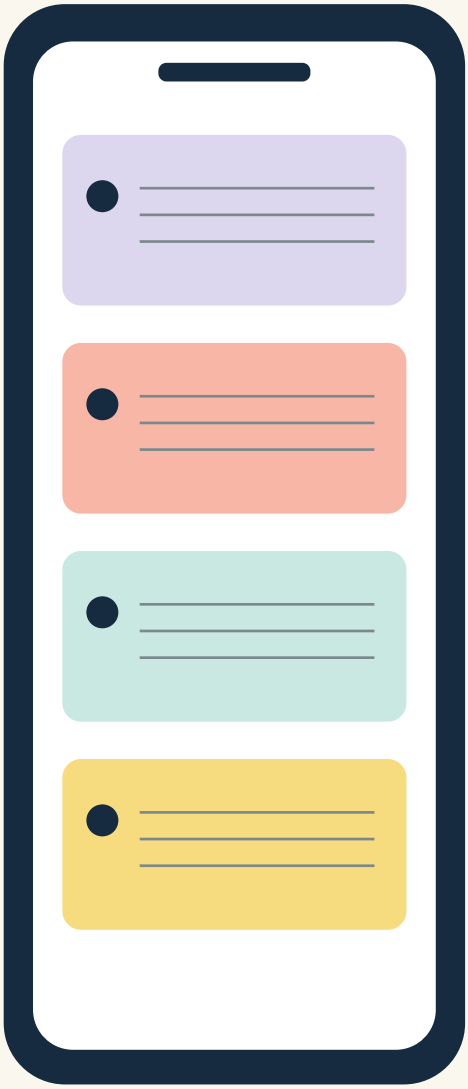
Careful, deliberate thinking.

Following an idea. Asking why. Working something out.

This is an invitation to experiment. You do not need to give up everything you enjoy online.

01 / NOTICE THE DESIGN

WHY IS STOPPING SO HARD?



INFINITE SCROLL

No final page to tell you: that is enough.

AUTOPLAY

The next video starts before you choose it.

NOTIFICATIONS

A ping invites you back, even during something else.

These features can keep you engaged for longer. That is supported by design research. It does not prove every app is trying to upset you. [4]

TRY ONE CHANGE

Switch off one non-essential notification. Choose when to check it instead.

02 / THE RESEARCH, WITHOUT THE HYPE

WHAT DO WE ACTUALLY KNOW?

BOOKS + THINKING

10,000+ young people

Earlier reading for pleasure was linked with stronger cognitive scores and fewer attention symptoms later. A link does not prove books alone caused it. [1]

MEDIA + ATTENTION

2,587 teenagers

Frequent use of more types of digital media was linked with later attention and hyperactivity symptoms. This does not show screens cause ADHD. [2]

IQ: A MIXED PICTURE

394,378 US adults

Some test scores fell across 2006-2018; spatial rotation improved in 2011-2018. This was an online adult sample. It did not show phones caused the changes. [6]

A FAMILY EXPERIMENT

Two weeks, 89 families

A trial found short-term improvements in parent-rated wellbeing and helpful behaviour after a big cut in leisure screen use. Lasting effects are unknown. [3]

THE HONEST ANSWER

These studies do not prove that humans are “getting dumber” because of smartphones. IQ scores, attention and feeling agitated are different things. Your habits are worth exploring without that claim.

03 / SIX WAYS TO MAKE SPACE

LESS REACTING. MORE REFLECTING.



01

FOLLOW YOUR INTEREST

Pick a comic, novel, poem or fact book you actually want to open.



02

START SMALL

Try five or ten minutes. Read together or listen to a story if that helps.



03

ASK ONE GOOD QUESTION

Why did they do that? What else could happen? Give your idea time.



04

NOTICE SOMETHING REAL

Go outside. Sketch a leaf or cloud. What changes when you look longer?



05

MAKE A PLAN

Cook, build or play a board game. Plan, try, rethink. That is thinking too.



06

CHOOSE A QUIET POCKET

Put the phone aside for one activity. Ask your adults to join you.

Small is a starting point, not a score. Adapt these ideas to what works for you.

04 / MAKE IT YOUR OWN

THE SEVEN-DAY ATTENTION EXPERIMENT

Try it on your terms. No streaks. No grades. Just curiosity.





EACH DAY: A LITTLE READING + ONE OFFLINE ACTIVITY

Choose a comfortable few minutes. Try drawing, making, moving, a puzzle or a walk. Suggested activities are not a treatment or a test.

MARK A DAY YOU TRIED IT. MISSED ONE? JUST BEGIN AGAIN.

1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐	6 ☐	7 ☐

Before: one word or doodle about how I feel

After: what did I notice?

At the end of the week: what would I like to keep?

05 / FOLLOW THE EVIDENCE

YOUR MIND.
YOUR QUESTIONS.

A useful question to take away

**“Is this helping me do what I chose,
or keeping me here longer than I meant?”**

If you often feel upset, overwhelmed or unable to sleep, tell a trusted adult. You deserve support, not blame.

THE SOURCES / TAP TO EXPLORE

1 **Reading for pleasure**
Sun et al., Psychological Medicine (online 2023). Large observational youth study.

2 **Digital media and attention symptoms**
Ra et al., JAMA (2018). Teenagers followed for about two years.

3 **A short family screen break**
Schmidt-Persson et al., JAMA Network Open (2024). Randomised family trial.

4 **How platforms are designed**
National Academies, Social Media and Adolescent Health (2024). Evidence review.

5 **IQ trends before smartphones**
Bratsberg & Rogeberg, PNAS (2018). Norwegian male cohorts: reversal after the 1975 birth cohort. Causes were not identified.

6 **Recent US cognitive test trends**
Dworak, Revelle & Condon, Intelligence (2023). Different adult participants over time, not the same people losing ability.

The IQ downturn in Norway predates smartphones. [5] No study here demonstrates a direct chain from phones to agitation to lower IQ.

Created by Ian Banyard for Screenfreehub | October 2026
Illustrations are visual metaphors. Activities are suggestions, not a validated programme.