

Unconscious Use of Digital Media

Modules:	<i>Health and well-being</i>
Topic:	<i>Unconscious use of digital media</i>
Title:	<i>Creating if-then intentions</i>
Target group:	<i>Middle and high school</i>
Starting Point:	<i>Students feel tempted to reach for digital devices in many situations without necessarily consciously noticing it (bus, train, desk, bed, couch). It is often an unconscious decision that has become automated through repetition. Sitting at a desk, for example, can in itself be a trigger to reach for one's mobile phone. However, on the one hand, in some situations this wastes valuable time, and on the other hand, the focus on the actual activity (e.g., learning) is repeatedly interrupted. Mobile phone use does not have to be problematic in every situation. However, it is important to be aware of when and under what circumstances device use is less sensible, and how to avoid it when this is the case.</i>
Aim:	<i>The aim for students is to think consciously about their actions and become aware of how often they reach for digital devices. The next step is to break these automatisms in situations where they are disruptive and develop new intentions.</i>
Implementation:	<i>This exercise is intended to use in class and as homework.</i>
Estimated Duration:	<i>In class: 1 lesson; homework: the whole week; debriefing in class: 20 minutes</i>

More detailed content and instructions:

The aim of the exercise is to become aware of how often you automatically reach for digital devices without intention and, in the next step, to develop if-then intentions to stop automatically reaching for digital devices and instead pursue other, more productive actions.

1. In class, the students are asked to think of situations in which they often reach for their mobile phone, even though they may not want to/should not, or actually want to do something else and in retrospect regret having spent the time on the mobile phone. The aim is to identify a specific situation in which one often uses the mobile phone and would like to change this because it is disturbing, interrupts another activity, or one could do something else instead. Table 1 can be used for this purpose.
 - Examples are: at the desk, on the couch, at the dining table, on the bus, in the car, etc.

At this stage, it can also be helpful if students check how much they use their mobile phones on average and which apps they spend a lot of time on (this can be checked on their mobile phone, e.g., under 'screen time'). Potentially, patterns can be identified of when or what the mobile phone is used for most often.

2. These situations are then collected in the class and students can reflect in which situations digital devices can be rather harmful/unnecessary. In contrast, it can also be discussed in which situations it can be useful and helpful to use digital devices (social contact, Google Maps, boredom, etc.).

3. The next step is to consider how to avoid the use of digital devices in those situations where they have proven to be unnecessary.

Here, **if-then** intentions are particularly useful. You try to link the situations in which you want to avoid using digital devices with other actions. (If situation X occurs, then I will show behaviour Y).

For example:

- **When** I sit on a bus, **then** I take out my book and read.
- **When** I sit down at my desk, **then** the first thing I do is turn off my mobile phone.
- **When** I sit down at the dining table, **then** I put my mobile phone in the next room.
- **When** I do homework, **then** I don't go on Instagram.
- **When** I start my math homework, **then** the first thing I do is put my phone in silent mode.

Thus, forming if-then intentions is about creating new automatisms so that one is no longer tempted to automatically reach for digital devices, but instead pursues more useful activities. If-then intentions are particularly helpful for this because the decision of how to act in a specific situation is made in advance and there is a clear instruction for action. If I only plan not to be on my mobile phone on the bus, I do not yet know how I am going to do it. This step is facilitated by if-then intentions because you already have an alternative action in mind. This simplifies the decision-making process.

4. Some examples of if-then intentions can be collected together in class. However, everyone may have their own situations in which they especially want to avoid digital device use.
5. In the next step, students should identify their own if-then intentions for situations in which they would like to change their behaviour. It is sufficient to set only one intention for a certain behaviour, but several intentions can also be thought of. Table 2 can be used for this purpose.
6. The students are then given the task of trying to implement this intention for one week.
7. After a week, students can reflect and share how successful the intentions were implemented. One possibility is to note the amount of mobile phone use and compare it with the previous week. Alternatively, students can write down their experiences to hand them in.

Table 1

Here the students can collect situations and rate them with smileys or ticks/X:

Situation in which I use digital devices	Rating: Was it helpful (😊/✅) or not (😞/❌)?
<i>...bus</i>	😊/✅
<i>...dining table</i>	😞/❌

Table 2

Here the students can write down their intentions:

Situational cue (if...)	Reaction (then...)
"If situation X occurs,	then I will do Y".
<i>When I sit at my desk,</i>	<i>then I will turn off my mobile phone first.</i>