

FOR PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS

Locking down a smartphone for a child

iPhone and Android, step by step, and where each tool is weak.

A new phone opens everything. This guide narrows it down to the apps and the people you choose. Every step was checked against Apple, Google and Samsung's own support pages on September 17, 2026. Menus move every time a phone updates, so if a step doesn't match your screen, the maker's page (listed on the last page) wins.

Three things first, on any phone

1. Give the child their own child account. Every control in this guide hangs on it. A child signed in on a grown-up's account gets a grown-up's phone.
2. Pick a parent code the child doesn't know, different from the code that unlocks the phone.
3. Update the phone before you start.

PART 1

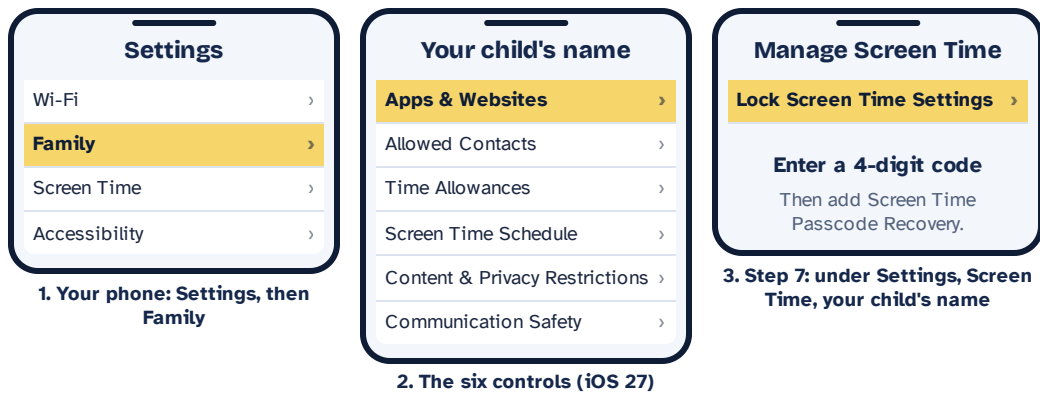
iPhone

Apple's parental controls (start here)

Apple rebuilt these in iOS 27, which came out September 14, 2026. If every device in your Family Sharing group is on iOS 27, you run everything from your own phone at **Settings > Family > your child's name**. If some devices can't update, Apple says you can keep using the earlier version at **Settings > Screen Time > your child's name**. The controls do the same jobs in both places, though some of the names differ.

- 1 **Approve every app.** **Apps & Websites > Restrictions > Ask to Buy**, then turn on **Require Purchase Approval**. Free apps count. Nothing installs until you say yes.
- 2 **Filter the web.** **Apps & Websites > Restrictions > Filtering**. Choose **Limit Adult Websites**, or on iOS 27 choose **Ask to Browse** so a new website needs your OK.
- 3 **Choose who they can talk to.** **Allowed Contacts > During Screen Time > Contacts Only**. Then turn on **Manage Contacts** so you decide who gets added.
- 4 **Set the hours.** **Time Allowances** caps time in kinds of apps (games, social media). **Screen Time Schedule** shuts the phone down for school and for bed.
- 5 **Set the ratings.** **Content & Privacy Restrictions** sets age levels for apps, shows, music and Siri. Apple's App Store now uses five age ratings, including 13+, 16+ and 18+ for older kids.
- 6 **Turn on Communication Safety.** Apple's description: it "warns kids when receiving or sending images and videos containing nudity, and allows them to get help." iOS 27 adds gore and violent content.

- 7 **Lock your work. Settings > Screen Time > your child's name > Manage Screen Time > Lock Screen Time Settings.** Enter a 4-digit code. When it offers Screen Time Passcode Recovery, take it. Apple's words: "it's recommended that you don't skip" that step, because a forgotten code with no recovery locks you out.

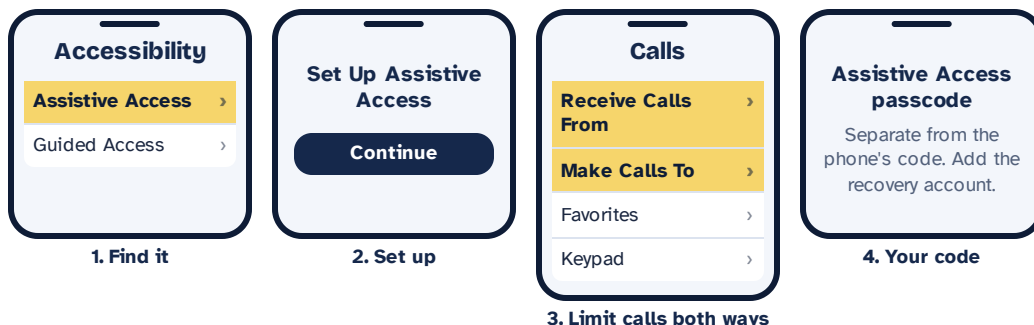


All phone pictures in this guide are drawings, not photographs. Yours may look a little different.

A simple phone for a young child: Assistive Access

Assistive Access is built into iPhones on iOS 17 or newer. It strips the phone down to big buttons and only the apps you add. Apple made it for people who need a simpler phone, and it works well for a young child's first phone or a hand-me-down.

- 1 **Settings > Accessibility > Assistive Access > Set Up Assistive Access,** then **Continue.**
- 2 Check that the Apple Account on the screen is the child's.
- 3 Add only the apps you want. Apple has simplified versions of Calls, Camera, Messages, Photos, Music, Magnifier and Apple TV. Other apps already on the phone can be added too, and they keep their normal look. Install what the child will use before you start.
- 4 Open **Calls** and set both **Receive Calls From** and **Make Calls To**. Apple gives three choices: anyone, all contacts, or favorites only. For a child, pick contacts or favorites on both.
- 5 Choose the layout, **Rows** or **Grid**.
- 6 Confirm the phone's passcode, then set a separate Assistive Access passcode. Create the recovery Apple Account when it's offered. Apple is blunt about skipping it: "you will have to reset your iPhone."
- 7 To leave the mode, triple-click the side button (the Home button on older iPhones), tap **Exit Assistive Access** and enter your code. To change apps later: **Settings > Accessibility > Assistive Access > Manage Apps.**



Two things Apple says about phones in this mode

Updates don't announce themselves. Apple: "there is no Settings app or notifications in Assistive Access that indicate whether an update is available." Exit the mode once a month and check **Settings > General > Software Update**.

An emergency call still works: triple-click the side button, then tap **Emergency**. Emergency SOS by satellite does not work inside the mode, and Apple says "All other automatic dialing to Emergency Services isn't available in Assistive Access."

Read this before you rely on Assistive Access

Apple built it for accessibility and doesn't present it as a parental control. Since 2024, parents on Apple's own support forum have reported the same hole: on an ordinary iPhone, a child who can open Settings can set up Assistive Access with a passcode of their own, add any app, and the Screen Time limits don't follow them in. One parent reported being told by Apple Support that there was no setting to block it. We found no announcement from Apple that it has been closed.

So use it for a young child who lives inside the simple mode and doesn't know your code. For an older child, the parental controls above are the tool. And if Screen Time limits suddenly stop working, look in **Settings > Accessibility > Assistive Access** to see whether someone turned it on.

PART 2

Android

Google Family Link (any Android phone)

Free from Google, and you can run it from an Android phone or an iPhone. From your own phone you approve or decline app downloads and purchases, set daily limits and school or bedtime schedules, lock the child's phone, block sites, and see where the phone is on a map.

- 1 Install **Google Family Link** on your phone and sign in.
- 2 On the child's phone open **Settings > Google > All services**, find **Kids & Family**, tap **Parental controls**, then **Let's do this**, and choose the child's Google Account to supervise. (On many phones **Settings > Digital Wellbeing & parental controls** gets you to the same place.)
- 3 Set app approvals, the daily limit and the schedule from your phone.

Google is plain about the limits. Its filters "are not perfect, so explicit, graphic, or other content you may not want your child to see makes it through sometimes." One thing did get stronger: a child who turns 13 can no longer switch supervision off alone. Google's current rule is "Children need parent approval to stop supervision until they turn 18."

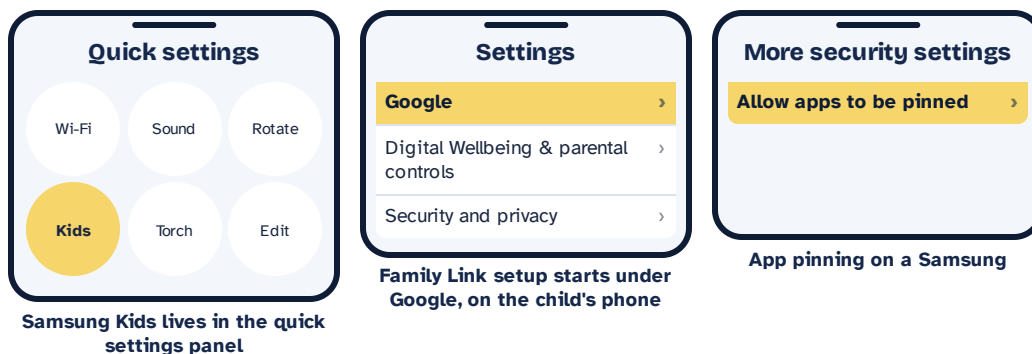
Samsung Kids (a young child on a Galaxy)

A closed-off home screen with only the apps you approve, on Galaxy phones and tablets running Android 9 or newer.

- 1 Swipe down from the top of the screen with two fingers to open the quick settings panel. Tap **Kids** (Samsung Kids), then **Continue**. If the button isn't there, tap the pencil to edit the panel and add it.
- 2 Set the PIN when it asks.
- 3 Tap **More options** (three dots), then **Add and edit apps** to choose the apps, and **Parental controls > Screen time** to set a daily limit.
- 4 To leave: **More options > Close Samsung Kids**, then your PIN.

App pinning (handing over your own phone for ten minutes)

Pinning locks the phone to one app. On a Samsung: **Settings > Security and privacy > More security settings > Allow apps to be pinned**. On most other Android phones Google gives the path as **Settings > Security (or Security & location) > Advanced > App pinning**. Then open your recent apps, tap the icon at the top of the app you want, and tap **Pin** (on a Samsung, **Pin this app**). Google says a pinned phone asks for your PIN, pattern or password before it unpins. Test that before you hand the phone over: try to unpin it yourself and make sure it asks.



PART 3

"Can I put a password on the Settings app?"

An iPhone has no lock for the Settings app itself, and most Android phones don't either. You lock the settings inside it that matter. On an iPhone that is step 7 in Part 1, **Lock Screen Time Settings**. A child can still open Settings and look around, and can't change your limits without your code. On Android, Family Link's rules are changed from the parent's phone, or on the child's phone only after the parent signs in or enters a parent access code.

Changed in this edition. The earlier version of this guide named Norton App Lock and said many Samsung phones have a built-in App Lock. Norton retired that app on June 11, 2024, and as of September 2026 Samsung phones have no built-in app lock. Both lines are gone, and we no longer name any third-party app locker.

The setting that isn't on the phone

Every tool here can be worked around by a determined child, and new workarounds show up all the time. In Common Sense Media's 2026 census of 1,204 kids ages 9 to 17, "more than 4 in 10 kids say no parent or guardian has ever talked with them about AI safety." So keep phones in shared rooms and out of bedrooms at night. Ask what they're using and who they're talking to. Sit down with the phone together once a month. The tools buy you time to have those conversations.

Sources, all checked September 17, 2026

Apple Support, "Set up parental controls to manage your child's iPhone or iPad," article 105121, published September 14, 2026. Apple Support, "How to set a Screen Time passcode," article 126533, September 14, 2026. Apple Support, "Use Screen Time to manage your child's iPhone or iPad," article 108806, July 1, 2026. Apple Newsroom, "Apple previews new child safety features," June 8, 2026, and "Apple expands tools to help parents protect kids and teens online," June 2025. Apple, Assistive Access User Guide for iPhone: "Set up Assistive Access," "Set up and use Calls," and "Understand certain differences in Assistive Access" (iOS 17, 18, 26 and 27). Apple Support Community, parent reports, threads 255620405 (May and June 2024) and 255964055 (February 2025). These are user reports, not Apple statements. Google For Families Help, "Add & manage supervision on a current Google Account," "Get started with Family Link" and "How Google Accounts work when children turn 13"; Google Family Link FAQ (families.google); Google Safety Center, "Parental controls and Family Link." Samsung Support, "Samsung Kids on your Galaxy phone or tablet" and "Pin an app to the screen on your Samsung phone or tablet." Google Android Help, "Pin and unpin screens." Norton Support, "End-of-Life announcement for Norton App Lock" (support ended June 11, 2024). Common Sense Media, "The Common Sense Media Census: AI Use by Tweens and Teens," released June 8, 2026. Common Sense Media is an advocacy group that campaigns for chatbot laws, and its Youth AI Safety Institute is funded partly by technology companies. Makers' own pages: support.apple.com/105121 · families.google/familylink · samsung.com/us/support (search "Samsung Kids") This handout is educational. No tool replaces an adult who stays involved. © 2026 The Truestone Project.