



Cloud Photo Libraries — iCloud & Google Photos After a Death

Getting Into iCloud & Google Photos After a Loss Reach a loved one's locked picture library, download it safely, and back it up before it is lost

————— **An Extended Guide · No. 1812** —————

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

1. The Whole Plan on One Page

If you read only one page, read this. Here is the whole idea as a short checklist.

When someone passes away, a lifetime of pictures is often locked inside a cloud account — iCloud, Google Photos, or Amazon. Getting them out comes down to two things: first, getting lawful access to the account, and second, downloading everything before the account ever closes. This guide walks both, slowly and plainly.

- 1 First, get access: use a Legacy Contact key, a saved plan, or the company's official deceased-person request.
- 2 For iCloud: sign in at iCloud.com, open Photos, select, and download in batches.
- 3 For Google Photos: use Google Takeout to export the library as ZIP files.
- 4 For Amazon: sign in and download from Amazon Photos.
- 5 Gather every download into one folder on one computer.
- 6 Back it all up by the 3-2-1 rule before you close or let go of the account.

WATCH OUT

Pull all the pictures out before you ever close the account or let its storage lapse. Once an account is closed or its storage runs out, the photos can be deleted for good, and there is often no getting them back.

The rest of this guide takes each step one page at a time. It is more technical than simple sharing, but it is all doable with patience. And if a step stalls, help is a phone call away.

WHAT THIS IS

2. Getting Into a Locked Cloud Library

This guide is about reaching photos that are trapped inside a cloud account after a death — pictures you cannot simply copy off a drive because they live on Apple's, Google's, or Amazon's servers behind a sign-in. The job is to get in lawfully and get the pictures down safely.

It is the companion to a separate, warmer guide about handing photos over to family — sharing, keepsakes, and books. That one assumes you already have the pictures in hand. This one is for the harder moment when you do not yet, because they are locked in a cloud whose owner has passed away.

- What this is: reaching and downloading photos locked in iCloud, Google Photos, or Amazon.

- What it is not: the warm work of sharing pictures you already have — that has its own guide.
- Who it is for: an executor, spouse, or family member recovering a loved one's cloud pictures.

GOOD TO KNOW

The single biggest heartbreak families face is a lifetime of photos locked behind a password no one wrote down. This guide exists to help you reach them through the proper doors.

ACCESS FIRST

3. Why Account Access Comes First

Before you can download a single picture, you need lawful access to the account that holds it. There is no way around this. The cloud companies protect accounts fiercely, and for good reason, so the first and most important work is getting a key — either one the person left you, or one the company grants through its official process.

- Best case: the person set up an Apple Legacy Contact or a Google plan before passing.
- Good case: you know the person's sign-in email and password.
- Harder case: no plan and no password — you use the company's official deceased-person request.
- In every case: the companies never simply hand over a password.

This guide ties closely to two others — one on setting up an Apple Legacy Contact and Google's Inactive Account Manager in advance, and one on requesting an account after a death with no plan in place. If you have not read those, they explain how to get the key this guide assumes you will use.

GOOD TO KNOW

If a loved one is still living, the kindest thing you can do is help them set up a Legacy Contact or a Google plan now. It turns this whole difficult process into a short, simple one later.

CHECK YOUR ACCESS

4. Do You Already Have What You Need?

Before diving in, take stock of what you already hold. Many families have more than they realize — a password written in a notebook, a phone still unlocked, a Legacy Contact key printed with the will. Knowing what you have decides which road you take.

- Do you have the sign-in email and password? Then you can sign in directly.
- Do you have an Apple Legacy Contact access key and a death certificate? Then Apple's digital legacy path is open.
- Is the person's phone still unlocked, or do you know its passcode? That can be a way in.
- Did they set up a Google plan? A named contact may already have a download waiting.

WATCH OUT

Guessing a password many times can lock an account further, sometimes for good. If you do not know it, do not keep guessing — use the official request process instead.

Gather what you have in one place: any passwords, the death certificate, proof you are the rightful person. Having these ready makes every step smoother, because the companies will ask for them along the way.

iCLOUD: OVERVIEW

5. iCloud Photos — How It Works

Apple keeps iPhone and iPad pictures in iCloud Photos. If you have the Apple Account email and password, the simplest way to reach the pictures is through a web browser at iCloud.com — no Apple device required. You can sign in on any computer, see the whole library, and download what you need.

If you do not have the password but the person named you as an Apple Legacy Contact, you will set up a special account using the access key and a death certificate; Apple then grants you access for a limited time. Either way, once you are in, the downloading steps are the same, and they are covered on the next pages.

- With the password: sign in at iCloud.com in any web browser.
- With a Legacy Contact key: follow Apple's digital legacy process to gain access.
- Either way: once inside, you select pictures and download them to a computer.

GOOD TO KNOW

You do not need an Apple device to download from iCloud.com. A Windows PC and a web browser work perfectly well. All you need is the sign-in and a steady internet connection.

ICLOUD: SIGN IN

6. Signing In at iCloud.com

If you have the Apple Account email and password, signing in at iCloud.com is the first step. Have the person's phone nearby if you can, because Apple often sends a verification code to it as a second step — that is the two-factor protection, and it can be the trickiest part.

- 1 On any computer, open a web browser and go to iCloud.com.
- 2 Enter the person's Apple Account email, then the password.
- 3 If asked for a verification code, it is sent to a trusted device — the person's iPhone or iPad.
- 4 Type that code in to finish signing in.
- 5 Once in, click Photos to open the library.

WATCH OUT

The verification code usually goes to the person's own iPhone. If that phone is locked and you do not know its passcode, you may be stuck at this step — which is exactly why a Legacy Contact set up in advance matters so much.

If you cannot get past the code because the phone is locked, do not force it. Stop here and turn to the official Apple digital legacy request instead, which is built for exactly this situation.

ICLOUD: DOWNLOAD

7. Downloading From iCloud in Batches

Once Photos is open at iCloud.com, downloading is straightforward, but a large library must come down in batches rather than all at once. The website can be slow with thousands of pictures, so patience and a few sittings are the key.

- 1 In Photos, click the first picture, then hold Shift and click a later one to select a batch.
- 2 Or use Select at the top and choose a range of a few hundred at a time.
- 3 Click the download button — a cloud with a downward arrow — to save that batch.

- 4 Choose to download the originals, at full quality, not optimized versions.
- 5 Let each batch finish, then move the files into your gathering folder before starting the next.

TIP

Work through the library in chunks of a few hundred at a time. Smaller batches are far less likely to stall than trying to grab the whole library in one click.

It is slow, patient work for a big library, but every batch is permanent progress. Keep a simple note of where you left off — by date or album — so you can pick up cleanly next time.

iCLOUD: LEGACY KEY

8. Using an Apple Legacy Contact Key

If the person set up an Apple Legacy Contact before passing and named you, you do not need their password at all. You use the access key they left — a long code, ideally printed and kept with their estate papers — together with a death certificate. Apple reviews the request and then grants you access.

- 1 Find the access key the person left you, printed or saved on your own device.
- 2 Go to Apple's digital legacy page, or use the Request Access link, and sign in with your own Apple Account.
- 3 Enter the access key and upload a copy of the death certificate.
- 4 Apple reviews the request; once approved, you set up a special Legacy Contact account to reach the data.

GOOD TO KNOW

Once approved, Legacy Contact access lasts up to three years, and then the account and its data are permanently deleted. Download everything you want well within that window.

This path cannot reach a few things — purchased movies, music, or books, and the saved passwords in iCloud Keychain. But the photos and videos, the part families most want, come through fully. Those are what to download first.

ICLOUD: NO PLAN

9. iCloud When There Was No Plan

If there is no Legacy Contact and you do not have the password, the road is slower but not closed. Apple Support may be able to help using the Apple Account, a death certificate, and proof of your relationship to the person. This is a formal process that takes patience and paperwork.

- Contact Apple Support and explain that you are recovering a deceased person's account.
- Be ready to provide a death certificate and proof you are the rightful person to receive access.
- Apple reviews each request carefully and does not simply hand over a password.
- Expect it to take time, and to involve more than one phone call or submission.

WATCH OUT

Do not keep guessing the password or repeatedly asking to reset it. Too many failed attempts can lock the account more tightly. Go through Apple's official bereavement channel instead.

This is the hardest of the iCloud roads, and the clearest argument for setting up a Legacy Contact in advance. If you are facing it now, take it one submission at a time, keep copies of everything, and lean on help where you can.

GOOGLE: OVERVIEW

10. Google Photos — How It Works

Google keeps Android pictures, and many iPhone users' pictures too, in Google Photos. The best tool for getting a whole library out is Google Takeout, a free service built into every Google account for exactly this purpose: it packages your data into downloadable files you can keep.

As with Apple, you first need lawful access — the sign-in, or access granted through Google's process. Once you can sign in, Takeout does the heavy lifting. It is the right tool for a lifetime library, because it exports whole albums at once rather than making you save pictures one by one.

- The tool is called Google Takeout, found at takeout.google.com.
- It exports the whole Google Photos library, or chosen albums, as ZIP files.
- You need to be signed in to the account, or have access granted through Google's process.

- It is free and built in — no extra program to install.

GOOD TO KNOW

Takeout exports whole albums, not individual pictures. That makes it ideal for rescuing an entire library, which is usually exactly what a grieving family wants.

GOOGLE: TAKEOUT

11. Google Takeout, Step by Step

Using Takeout is a matter of telling Google what to export and then waiting for it to prepare the files. The preparing can take hours or even longer for a huge library, and Google emails a download link when it is ready. Set it running and come back later.

- 1 On a computer, go to takeout.google.com and sign in to the Google account.
- 2 Click 'Deselect all' so you are not exporting everything Google holds.
- 3 Scroll to Google Photos and check only that box.
- 4 Click Next, then choose how to receive the export and how large each file should be.
- 5 Start the export; Google prepares the files and emails a link when they are ready.

TIP

Selecting only Google Photos keeps the export focused and smaller. You can always run Takeout again later for other things like email or contacts if the family needs them.

The download link Google sends usually stays valid for a limited number of days, so download the files promptly once they arrive. If the window passes, you can simply run the export again.

GOOGLE: OPTIONS

12. Choosing Albums and Export Settings

Takeout offers a few choices worth understanding. You can export the entire Google Photos library or pick particular albums, and you can set how the finished files are delivered and how big each ZIP file is. The right settings make the download far easier to handle.

- All photos, or selected albums: for a full rescue, choose all; for one event, pick the album.
- Delivery: a download link by email is simplest; it can also go straight to a cloud service.
- File size: choosing a moderate size per ZIP means several smaller files instead of one giant one.

- Smaller ZIP files are easier to download and less likely to fail partway.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you choose a moderate size per ZIP file, a large library arrives as several files. That is a good thing — if one download fails, you only redo that one piece, not the whole library.

For most families recovering a loved one's pictures, the simplest choice is: all of Google Photos, delivered by email link, in moderate-sized ZIP files. That balances completeness with downloads you can actually manage.

GOOGLE TO ICLOUD

13. Sending the Export Straight to iCloud

Here is a quiet convenience many people miss. If the family lives in Apple's world and wants everything in iCloud Photos, Google Takeout can send the export directly to iCloud, rather than to your computer first. It is a tidy way to move a whole library from one cloud to the other.

- 1 In Takeout, at the delivery step, look for the option to add the export to another cloud service.
- 2 Choose iCloud as the destination, if it is offered, and sign in to approve it.
- 3 Takeout then places the exported files into the iCloud account you chose.
- 4 From there, you can bring the pictures into the iCloud Photos library.

GOOD TO KNOW

Sending straight to iCloud saves you downloading and re-uploading a huge library. It is especially handy when the family has decided to keep everything in Apple's photos going forward.

If this option is not offered or feels confusing, there is no harm in the ordinary route: download the ZIP files to a computer, then upload the pictures into iCloud yourself. Both arrive at the same place.

GOOGLE: UNZIP

14. Downloading and Opening the ZIP Files

When Takeout emails the link, you download the ZIP files and then open them to reach the pictures inside. A ZIP file is like a sealed box holding many files; opening, or 'extracting,' it lays the pictures out so you can use them. Both Windows and Mac do this with no extra program.

- 1 Click the link in Google's email and download each ZIP file to your computer.
- 2 Find the downloaded files, usually in the Downloads folder.
- 3 On Windows, right-click a ZIP and choose 'Extract All'; on a Mac, double-click it to unzip.
- 4 The pictures appear in a new folder; move them into your gathering folder.
- 5 Repeat for each ZIP until the whole library is extracted and gathered.

WATCH OUT

Make sure a ZIP finishes downloading fully before you open it. A ZIP opened while still partly downloaded will seem broken. Wait for the download to complete, then extract.

Takeout includes small information files alongside the pictures that record dates and details. You can ignore those; they are harmless. The picture and video files are what you keep and gather.

GOOGLE: NO PLAN

15. Google When There Was No Plan

If you cannot sign in and the person set up no plan, Google has an official process to submit a request about a deceased person's account. Google reviews these carefully. It may help close the account, and in some cases release some content, but it never gives out the password.

- Search for Google's 'request regarding a deceased user's account' and follow the steps.
- Be ready to provide identification and proof, such as a death certificate.
- Google reviews each request individually; the outcome is not guaranteed.
- If content is released, you then download it as described in this guide.

WATCH OUT

If you ask Google to close the account, you may not be able to get the contents afterward. Always finish any request for the photos and content first, before requesting closure.

This path takes patience and can have an uncertain ending, which is why a Google plan set up in advance is so valuable. If you are facing it now, submit everything carefully and keep copies of what you send.

GOOGLE: SAVED PLAN

16. When a Google Plan Was Set Up

Google offers a feature called Inactive Account Manager, which a person sets up in advance to decide what happens if their account goes unused for a long stretch. If a loved one set this up and named you, reaching their photos may be far simpler than you feared.

- If you were named, Google sends you a notice after the account has been inactive long enough.
- You receive a download of the data categories the person chose to share — which may include Google Photos.
- You do not get the password or direct login; you get a download link to the chosen data.
- Download it promptly and gather it with the rest.

GOOD TO KNOW

The plan only shares the data categories the person picked when they set it up. If they chose to include Google Photos, the pictures come to you in the download — no request process needed.

This is the smooth path, and it only exists if the person set it up beforehand. It is the single best reason to help a living loved one turn on Inactive Account Manager now, while they still can.

AMAZON PHOTOS

17. Amazon Photos and Prime Photos

Many families forget that Amazon offers photo storage too, included with a Prime membership. If your loved one used it, there may be a whole library there as well. If you can sign in to the Amazon account, downloading is much like the others: select and save to a computer.

- Sign in to the Amazon account and open Amazon Photos on the web.
- Select pictures or whole albums and use the download option to save them.
- Download in batches for a large library, as with the other services.

- To close or settle the account, contact Amazon customer service with the requested details.

WATCH OUT

Amazon's generous photo storage is tied to the Prime membership. When Prime ends, the extra storage shrinks, so pull the pictures out before any membership lapses or the account closes.

If you cannot sign in, Amazon's customer service can help with a deceased person's account when you provide the information they request. As always, download the pictures before asking to close anything.

WHEN IT CLOSES

18. What Happens When the Account Closes

It is vital to understand what happens when a cloud account is closed, because once it is, the pictures inside are usually gone for good. This is why the whole order of this guide matters: download first, close last.

- Closing an account typically deletes everything in it, including every photo and video.
- Apple's Legacy Contact access ends after up to three years, then the account and data are deleted.
- Google can be asked to close an account, after which content is no longer retrievable.
- A Microsoft account closes automatically after about two years of no sign-ins.

WATCH OUT

Never close an account to 'tidy up' before you are certain every picture is safely downloaded and backed up in at least two other places. Closure is almost always permanent.

Treat closing the account as the very last step, long after the pictures are safely in your gathering folder and backed up. There is no rush to close it, and every reason to wait until you are sure.

WHEN STORAGE LAPSES

19. What Happens When Storage Lapses

Even an account that stays open can lose its pictures if its paid storage lapses. Cloud storage is rented, and when the payment stops, the services begin to limit the account — and eventually, to delete. Knowing each one's behavior helps you act in time.

- iCloud: if storage is over its free limit and payment stops, Apple may stop new backups and eventually remove data over the limit.
- Google: an over-limit account can lose the ability to add new pictures, and content may be removed after a long period over quota.
- Amazon: when Prime ends, storage drops to a small free amount; over-quota content faces deletion after a grace period.
- In every case, there is usually a warning and a grace period — but do not rely on catching it.

WATCH OUT

A lapsed payment can quietly start a countdown to deletion. If a loved one's card has stopped working, the pictures may be on a clock. Download them promptly rather than waiting.

The safest response to any uncertainty about payment or storage is simple: get the pictures out now. Once they are in your own backup, no lapsed payment or storage limit can ever touch them again.

STOP THE TIMERS

20. Stopping Auto-Delete and Inactivity Timers

Several services quietly run timers that can delete data after a period of inactivity or on a schedule. If you have access to the account, it is worth pausing or disabling these while you work, so nothing vanishes mid-download.

- Google's Inactive Account Manager can be set to delete an account after inactivity — check and pause if needed.
- A Microsoft account auto-closes after about two years of no sign-ins; signing in resets that clock.
- Some phones and services auto-delete items from a trash or 'In recent years Deleted' folder after about a month.

- Check the 'In recent years Deleted' folder too — precious pictures may be sitting there with a countdown.

GOOD TO KNOW

Simply signing in to an account can reset an inactivity timer and buy you time. If you have lawful access and are mid-rescue, a periodic sign-in keeps the clock from running down.

You cannot always see every timer, so the surest protection remains the same: download everything promptly. Timers only threaten pictures that are still sitting in the cloud and nowhere else.

PULL FIRST

21. Pull Everything Before You Change Anything

If there is one rule that governs this entire guide, it is this: get all the pictures safely out before you change, close, or cancel anything. Every other decision — closing the account, canceling storage, memorializing a profile — should wait until the download is finished and backed up.

- 1 Download every photo and video to your gathering folder first.
- 2 Back it up in at least two more places before touching the account's settings.
- 3 Confirm the backups open and look complete.
- 4 Only then consider closing the account, canceling storage, or other final steps.

WATCH OUT

Canceling a storage plan, closing an account, or asking a company to delete the profile can all trigger permanent deletion of the pictures. Finish the rescue completely first, with no exceptions.

There is no deadline forcing you to close an account quickly, and every reason to be slow and careful. The pictures cannot be re-created. Treat the download as sacred and everything else as patient afterthought.

CONSOLIDATE

22. Bringing It All Into One Place

A loved one's pictures may be spread across more than one cloud, plus a phone and old drives. Once you have downloaded from each source, the next step is to bring everything together into one organized home, so the family has a single, complete collection rather than scattered pieces.

- 1 Make one master folder on a computer for the whole collection.
- 2 Move each download — iCloud, Google, Amazon, the phone — into it.
- 3 Keep the sources in clearly named subfolders at first, so you can tell what came from where.
- 4 Look for obvious duplicates where the same pictures came from two clouds, and tidy gently.

GOOD TO KNOW

The same pictures often appear in more than one cloud, because people back up to several at once. Some duplication is normal and harmless; do not worry about removing every copy.

Consolidating turns a confusing scatter into one clear collection the whole family can share. From here, the warmer guide on handing photos over takes the story onward — books, shared albums, and copies for everyone.

BACK IT UP

23. Backing Up What You Pulled

The pictures you have just rescued are irreplaceable and, for now, may exist in only one place — the computer you downloaded them to. That is dangerous. Before anything else, protect them with the same 3-2-1 rule that guards any precious collection.

- Three copies: the computer copy plus two backups.
- Two kinds of media: for example, an external hard drive and a cloud account you control.
- One kept off-site: the cloud, or a drive at another family member's home.
- Do this before closing the loved one's original account.

WATCH OUT

Do not treat the download on your computer as the finished job. A single copy on one computer is one spilled coffee away from being lost all over again. Back it up at once.

Only when the rescued pictures live safely in three places, on two kinds of media, with one copy elsewhere, is the rescue truly complete. At that point nothing short of extraordinary bad luck could lose them again.

VERIFY

24. Checking the Download Is Complete

A quiet danger is thinking you have everything when a download stopped short. Before you close any account, spend a little time confirming that what you pulled is actually complete and that the files really open. A few checks now prevent a terrible discovery later.

- 1 Compare rough counts: does the number of pictures you downloaded roughly match what the cloud showed?
- 2 Open a scattering of pictures and videos from different years to confirm they actually play and display.
- 3 Check that videos, not just photos, came through — they are large and sometimes lag behind.
- 4 Look for any 'failed' or incomplete downloads and redo those batches.

TIP

Open a few of the oldest and largest files especially. If those work, the download most likely came through whole. Large videos are the ones most likely to have been cut short.

Verifying is not glamorous, but it is the difference between a rescue that worked and one that only seemed to. Do it before you let go of the original account, while you can still go back for anything missing.

BIG LIBRARIES

25. When the Library Is Enormous

A lifetime in the cloud can run to tens of thousands of pictures and many hours of video. Rescuing it is not harder, only longer. Downloads may run for hours, and you will likely work across several sittings. Expecting this keeps it from feeling like something has gone wrong.

- Download in batches or let Takeout split the export into several manageable files.
- Start long downloads before bed or before going out, and let them run.
- Keep the computer plugged in and awake so a long download is not interrupted.

- Keep a simple note of what you have finished, so you can resume cleanly.

GOOD TO KNOW

A download that seems frozen is usually just working through a very large video. As long as it is still progressing, even slowly, let it continue. Interrupting is the main thing to avoid.

Patience is the real skill here, not technical know-how. Break the giant library into pieces, finish one each sitting, and in a few quiet evenings an entire cloud is safely in your hands.

SHARED LIBRARIES

26. When Photos Belong to Several People

Sometimes a loved one's cloud mixes their own pictures with a family's shared library, or holds photos a spouse also contributed. It helps to think about whose pictures are whose, both to respect the living and to avoid downloading the same things twice.

- A shared family album may hold pictures many relatives already have copies of.
- A spouse's own pictures may be mixed in; they belong to the living spouse.
- Download everything for safety first, then sort out whose is whose afterward if needed.
- Be gentle and inclusive — err toward sharing with family rather than withholding.

GOOD TO KNOW

When in doubt, download it all now while you have access, and sort ownership later. You can always decide who gets what once the pictures are safe; you cannot go back once the account is gone.

The goal is to lose nothing and to honor everyone. Gathering generously now, and dividing thoughtfully later, serves both. No one is ever hurt by a family having too complete a record of its own memories.

FILE QUIRKS

27. Live Photos, HEIC, and Other Oddities

Cloud pictures sometimes arrive in formats that puzzle a Windows computer or an older device. A couple of common oddities are worth knowing so you are not alarmed when a file looks strange or will not open at first.

- iPhone pictures are often HEIC files, which some Windows programs do not open without a small free add-on.

- Live Photos — the ones that move a little — may download as a still picture plus a short video file.
- Google and Apple videos are usually MP4 or MOV, which open almost everywhere.
- A file that will not open is nearly always a format issue, not a damaged picture.

GOOD TO KNOW

HEIC pictures are not broken; Windows just needs a small, free helper to show them, or they can be converted to the familiar JPG. A tech helper can set this up in minutes.

Do not let an unfamiliar file type worry you. These quirks are cosmetic. The pictures themselves are safe inside, and converting them to a familiar format is quick and keeps every bit of the image.

PRIVACY

28. Handling Private and Sensitive Pictures

A person's cloud may hold private things alongside the family memories — photographed documents, cards, passwords, or images meant only for certain eyes. As you gather, a little care protects both the person's dignity and the family's safety.

- Watch for photographed documents — identification, bank cards, passwords — and keep those separate and secure.
- Treat anything clearly private with discretion; not everything in a cloud is meant for the whole family.
- Shred or securely delete photographed sensitive documents once the estate no longer needs them.
- Share tender or private pictures thoughtfully, with the one person meant to have them.

WATCH OUT

A loved one may have photographed cards or passwords for their own convenience. Those images are a gift to thieves if shared carelessly. Handle them as you would the physical cards themselves.

This is not cause for worry, only for a gentle eye. The overwhelming majority of what you find will be ordinary, joyful family pictures. A quiet watch for the few sensitive items is all that is asked.

STAY SAFE

29. Scams That Prey on the Bereaved

Thieves watch for grief, because a grieving family is distracted and rushed. As you work through a loved one's accounts, be alert to a few scams that target exactly this moment. A calm, suspicious eye is your best protection.

- Fake 'your photos will be deleted' emails demanding a payment or a sign-in through their link.
- Callers posing as Apple, Google, or Amazon asking you to 'verify' a password or read out a code.
- Emails about the account that create false urgency — a locked account, a pending deletion.
- Anyone demanding payment by gift card, wire, or a money app is a scammer, always.

WATCH OUT

No real company will ever call and ask for the account password or a verification code. Anyone who does is a thief. Hang up, and reach the company yourself through its official site.

A separate guide covers scams targeting the newly bereaved in more depth. The rule for all of them is the same: if a message rushes or frightens you, slow down and verify independently. Haste is the scammer's only weapon.

COMMON WORRIES

30. Common Worries, Answered

Families recovering cloud pictures tend to ask the same few questions. Here are plain answers to steady you before you begin the work.

- Do I need the person's device? For iCloud.com, no — but a verification code may be sent to their phone.
- Will downloading change the originals? No. You are copying; the cloud copy is untouched until you choose to delete it.
- What if I only get part of it? You can download the rest as long as the account is still open — do not close it first.
- Is Takeout safe to use? Yes. It is Google's own official tool, built for exactly this purpose.

GOOD TO KNOW

There is no penalty for going slowly. The only real mistake is closing or canceling the account before the pictures are safely out. Take all the time you need before that final step.

If a worry is holding you back, it is almost always smaller than it feels, and you do not have to face it alone. A short call can turn a daunting account into a manageable afternoon.

FOR THE EXECUTOR

31. The Order of Operations

If you are the executor or the family member leading this, it helps to have the whole sequence in order. Doing the steps in the right order is what keeps a rescue from turning into a loss. Here is the safe path from start to finish.

- 1 Secure lawful access first — password, Legacy Contact key, or an official request.
- 2 Download every photo and video from each cloud, in batches, to one gathering folder.
- 3 Verify the downloads are complete and the files actually open.
- 4 Back everything up by the 3-2-1 rule, in at least two more places.
- 5 Only then close the account, cancel storage, or memorialize a profile.

TIP

Keep a plain checklist of which accounts you have rescued and which remain. In the fog of grief, a written list is worth far more than trusting memory to hold it all.

Go gently on yourself. This is hard work at a hard time, and there is no prize for speed. One account at a time, in order, is how the whole job gets done safely and well.

ONLY THE PHONE

32. When You Have the Phone but No Password

A common situation is holding the person's unlocked phone but not knowing the account password. The phone itself can be a valuable path, because the pictures are often right there in the Photos app, and the phone can receive the verification codes the clouds send.

- If the phone is unlocked or you know its passcode, the pictures may be viewable right in the Photos app.
- You can often copy pictures off directly by plugging the phone into a computer with a cable.

- The phone can also receive the verification code needed to sign in at iCloud.com on a computer.
- Do not let the phone's battery die or its screen lock permanently before you have copied the pictures.

WATCH OUT

If you do not know the phone's passcode and it locks, you may lose this path entirely. Act while the phone is accessible, and do not restart it unless you know you can unlock it again.

The phone is often the single most useful key the family holds, because it bridges so many locked doors. Treat it carefully, keep it charged, and copy its pictures before anything else slips away.

A SIMPLE START

33. If You Only Do Three Things

If the whole process feels overwhelming, start with the three steps that protect the most. Done in order, they rescue the bulk of the pictures and buy you time for everything else.

- 1 Get lawful access to the account — with a password, a Legacy key, or an official request.
 - 2 Download every photo and video to one folder on a computer, in batches.
 - 3 Copy that folder to an external drive and to a cloud you control, before closing anything.
- That is a complete rescue. The pictures are now out of the loved one's account and safe in your own hands, on two kinds of media. Everything else — sorting, sharing, closing the account — can follow calmly from there.

WATCH OUT

The one step you must never skip or rush is the last: do not close or cancel anything until the pictures are safely downloaded and backed up. That single discipline prevents the worst outcome.

TROUBLESHOOTING

34. When a Step Will Not Work

Rescuing cloud pictures sometimes hits a snag — a code that will not arrive, a download that fails, a ZIP that seems broken. Most of these have calm fixes, and none of them put the pictures in danger. Here are the common ones.

- No verification code arrives: the phone it is sent to may be off or locked; try the Legacy or official path instead.
- A download fails partway: redo just that batch or ZIP; smaller batches fail less often.
- A ZIP seems broken: make sure it finished downloading fully before you opened it.
- A file will not open: it is likely a format like HEIC that needs a small helper or conversion.
- Takeout is taking a very long time: large libraries can take many hours — let it run and watch for the email.

GOOD TO KNOW

A failed step almost never means a lost picture. The pictures stay safe in the cloud until you have them. If a step stalls, pause and try again rather than forcing it.

When a step truly will not budge, that is the moment to ask for help rather than risk a mistake under pressure. A patient helper can usually clear a stuck step in minutes without endangering a single photo.

FINISH THE JOB

35. Finish the Job Soon

You now know the whole path: get lawful access, download everything in batches, verify it, back it up, and only then close the account. The best time to begin is soon, because a lapsed payment or an inactivity timer can start a quiet countdown you cannot see. One account, one batch, is enough to start.

If a step gives you pause — a verification code you cannot receive, a Takeout export that will not finish, a library too vast to wrangle — that is exactly the kind of thing I help neighbors with. We can sit down together and bring a loved one's pictures safely home, one patient step at a time.

GOOD TO KNOW

You do not have to remember all of it. You just have to remember you can call. Friendly, in-home help, and I come to you — (330) 200-8042.

Rescuing a loved one's pictures is one of the most meaningful things you can do for a grieving family. Take it gently, do it in the right order, and know that once the memories are in your hands and backed up, they are safe for good.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy. It points you straight to what to do for each task. I want to... Do this

Get access first A password, an Apple Legacy key, a Google plan, or an official request

Download from iCloud Sign in at iCloud.com, open Photos, select, download originals in batches

Export from Google takeout.google.com, deselect all, pick Google Photos, export as ZIP files

Open the ZIP files Extract each ZIP into your gathering folder on the computer

Check Amazon Photos Sign in, download albums; pull them out before Prime lapses

Download before closing Never close an account or cancel storage until pictures are safely out

Back it up The 3-2-1 idea: three copies, two kinds of media, one kept off-site

If a step stalls Redo just that batch; a stuck step rarely means a lost picture

Get help Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Three Clouds, One Goal

Each holds the pictures differently — but each has a way out.

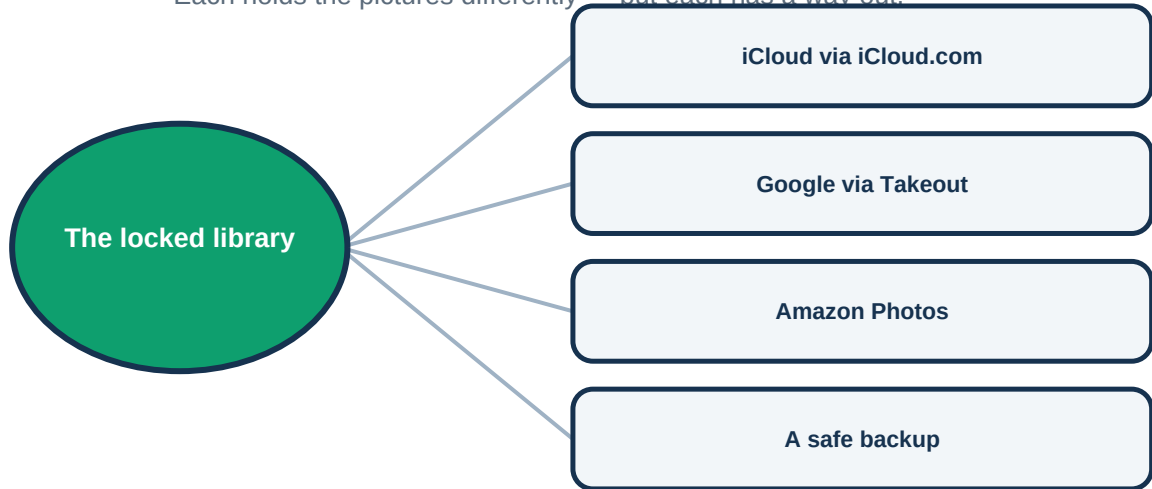


Illustration — a schematic. Set-up screens differ; each takes only a few minutes.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Get In, Get It Out

Do one box at a time — this guide walks each one slowly.

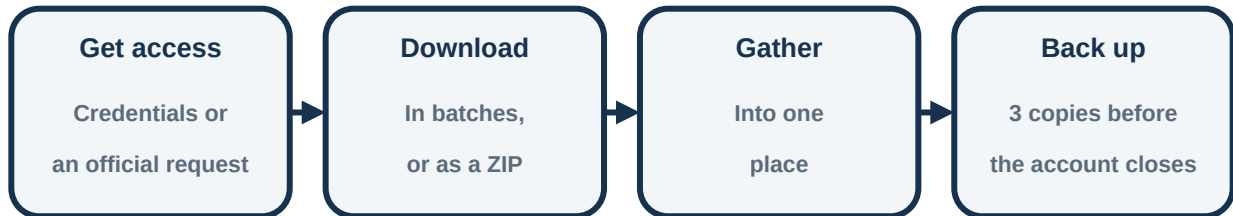


Illustration — a schematic. The order is a suggestion; do one box at a time.

A schematic of the plan — company steps vary; the order does not have to.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.



HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: **billshometech.com/book** · **bill@billshometech.com**

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.