



An Extended Guide · No. 1971

From Lightning to USB-C — A Household with Old and New iPhones

Which cables and chargers to keep,
and the few adapters worth buying

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One house, two kinds of iPhone — let's make peace

If your family has a newer iPhone and an older one, you've probably noticed their cords don't match anymore. That's not a mistake on your part, and it's nothing to dread. We'll sort it out together.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. For 30-plus years I've helped folks get comfortable with the gear in their homes, patiently and in plain words. A mix of old and new iPhones under one roof is one of the most common tangles I'm asked about.

Here's the short of it: Apple changed the plug on the bottom of the iPhone a little while back. Newer iPhones use the newer plug, called USB-C. Older ones use the older plug, called Lightning. Both still work perfectly well — they just need their own cable.

This guide walks you through which cables and chargers to keep, which car adapters still fit, and the one or two little adapters that are actually worth buying. No jargon, no rush, and nothing you have to memorize.

★ You don't have to figure this out alone

If you'd rather just hand me the basket of cords and the phones, that's a perfect kitchen-table job. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and I'll match every cable to a phone and label them so no one in the house wonders again.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, your mixed-iPhone household is already sorted.

- ❑ **iPhone 15 and later use USB-C** — the small oval plug that goes in either way up.
- ❑ **iPhone 14 and earlier use Lightning** — the slim flat plug with a gold strip you can see.
- ❑ Keep each phone's own cable with that phone — a tag or a loop of tape does the trick.
- ❑ Hang on to one older USB-A charger brick — it still works with the right cable.
- ❑ If you own both eras, one **Lightning-to-USB-C adapter** is often the only thing worth buying.
- ❑ Car ports may be the older USB-A or the newer USB-C — check before you buy a thing.

✓ The habit that ends the confusion

Label the cable, not just the drawer. A strip of tape near the plug that says 'Mom's phone' or 'Grandson's phone' turns a mystery cord into one nobody has to think about.

Why did the iPhone plug change at all?

It helps to know this wasn't done to confuse you — there was a real reason, and in the long run it makes life simpler.

For years, iPhones used Apple's own slim plug, called Lightning. Most other gadgets — newer Android phones, tablets, cameras, even laptops — were moving to a single shared plug called USB-C. Having one plug for nearly everything is the goal, so Apple switched the iPhone over to USB-C too.

The changeover happened at a clear point: iPhone 15 and everything after it use USB-C, while iPhone 14 and everything before it use Lightning. So in many homes the newest phone has the new plug and the hand-me-down phone still has the old one.

The good news is that USB-C is the same plug your newer tablet, camera, and maybe your laptop already use. Over time that means fewer odd cords, not more. For right now, a mix is simply normal, and easy to manage once it's named.

✓ Both plugs are fine — neither is 'wrong'

An older Lightning iPhone isn't broken or out of date just because its cord is different. It charges and works exactly as it always did. You only need to keep the right cable with it.

Telling your household's iPhones apart

Before we sort cables, let's figure out which phone in the house uses which plug. It takes one quick look at the bottom of each phone.

Turn the phone over so the bottom edge faces you and look at the little hole the cable plugs into. If it's a small, smooth oval, that's USB-C — a newer phone. If it's a slim slot a bit thinner than the oval, that's Lightning — an older phone.

If you'd rather go by the name: iPhone 15, 16, and anything newer use USB-C. iPhone 14, 13, 12, and anything older — including the older SE models and the Plus models from those years — use Lightning. You can find the model name in the phone's settings if you're unsure, or just show me.

Which iPhone	Its plug	Plug shape
iPhone 15 and newer	USB-C	Small oval, either way
iPhone 14 and older	Lightning	Slim flat, gold strip

★ **Not sure which is which? Show me the bottom edge**

Send me a close photo of the hole on the bottom of each phone, or bring the phones by, and I'll tell you the plug on each in a moment — free. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

The simplest rule: every phone keeps its own cable

You don't need a cupboard full of matching cords. You need the right cable living with each phone, and a known-good spare.

The cable that came in the box with a phone is the one you know works for everything that phone can do — charging and moving photos alike. For a USB-C iPhone, that's a USB-C cable. For a Lightning iPhone, that's a Lightning cable. Keep each one near where that phone charges.

A USB-C cable simply will not fit into a Lightning iPhone, and the other way around — the plugs are different shapes. That's not a fault; it just means a cord that works beautifully for one phone is useless for the other. So label each cable with whose phone it belongs to.

If a phone gets handed down to a grandchild or a friend, send its cable along with it. The cable and the phone are a pair. Our guide on telling cables apart has a picture page you can hold a cord right up against if you ever lose track.

✓ One good spare per plug type

Keep one extra USB-C cable and, if you have a Lightning iPhone too, one extra Lightning cable. Two spares cover your whole mixed household — no need for a drawer full.

Don't throw away that old charger brick

The little square block that plugs into the wall is worth keeping, even an older one. Here's why it still earns its place.

The cable and the wall block are two separate pieces. The block is the part with the prongs that go in the outlet; the cable plugs into it. Many older blocks have a flat rectangular hole called USB-A, and newer blocks have the small oval USB-C hole instead.

An older USB-A block is not useless at all. With a cable that has a USB-A end on the charger side, it will happily charge either kind of iPhone — you just need the matching cable. So keeping one or two good USB-A blocks around means more places to plug in, not fewer.

Newer phones can often charge faster from a newer USB-C block, but a slower charge from an older block is perfectly safe and fine for overnight. If you want the quickest charge, use the block that came with the newer phone; for the bedside, the old one is plenty.

✓ Match the cable to the block you'll use

Look at the block's hole before you pick a cable. USB-A block (flat rectangle) needs a cable with a USB-A charger end; USB-C block (small oval) needs a cable with a USB-C charger end. The phone end is a separate matter.

The few little adapters actually worth buying

An adapter is a small connector that bridges one plug to another. You need very few — buying one or two of the right ones saves a drawer of clutter.

The handiest one for a mixed household is a **Lightning-to-USB-C adapter**. If most of your cables have become USB-C but you still have a Lightning iPhone, a tiny adapter on the end of a USB-C cable lets that one cord charge the old phone too. One in a bag, one at the bedside, and you're covered.

The other useful one is a **USB-C-to-USB-A adapter** (or the reverse), so an older block can feed a newer cable or an old cable reaches a newer block. Between those two little parts, almost any cable and block in the house can be made to work together.

That's really all most families need. Resist the urge to buy a bagful of adapters 'just in case' — they get lost and add to the very confusion we're clearing. Our guide on plugging old USB gear into new devices goes deeper if you're curious.

! Adapters are for now and then, not every day

For a phone you charge nightly, a single cable with the right plugs on both ends is tidier and less likely to wiggle loose than a cable plus an adapter. Save adapters for travel and the occasional mismatch.

Charging in the car when the phones don't match

The car is where mixed eras cause the most head-scratching, because cars changed their plugs over the years too. A quick look settles it.

Look at the charging port or the little adapter in your car. An older car often has a flat rectangular USB-A port, or just the round cigarette-lighter socket with a plug-in adapter. A newer car may have the small oval USB-C port instead — or a mix of both.

Match your cable to the car's port, not the other way around. If the car has a USB-A port, use a cable with a USB-A charger end and the right phone end. If it has USB-C, use a USB-C charger end. The phone end still depends on which iPhone you're charging.

A simple plan: keep one cable in the car for each kind of phone that rides in it, matched to the car's port. If that's awkward, a small plug-in adapter for the round socket gives you the ports you want. Our car-charger guide covers choosing one safely.

✓ Snap a photo of the car's port before you shop

You don't have to remember the shapes. Take a picture of the port in your car and one of the bottom of each phone, and you — or I — can pick the exact cable in a moment.

Two kinds of households, two sets of needs

A mixed-iPhone home looks different depending on how many phones are in it. The rule is the same — keep each phone's own cable — but the setup differs.

If you're a two-phone couple with mixed eras

Maybe one of you upgraded to a USB-C iPhone and the other is happy on an older Lightning phone. Your job is small and one-time: set up each side so it never grabs the wrong cord.

- Give each person a labeled cable at their own side of the bed.
- Keep one USB-A block and one USB-C block so either can charge anywhere.
- Put one Lightning-to-USB-C adapter in the travel bag you share.
- Toss the leftover cords from phones neither of you owns anymore.

If you're the keeper for a big family across years

Kids, grandkids, and visitors mean iPhones from several years, both plugs, and cords that wander. Your goal is a system the whole house can follow without you standing guard.

- Sort cables into two baskets: USB-C and Lightning, clearly marked.
- Label each daily cable with whose phone it belongs to.
- Keep a 'guest' cable of each type by the main charging spot.
- Send each hand-me-down phone off with its own cable attached.

★ Let's set the whole house up in one sitting

Gather every iPhone and the basket of cords, and I'll match each cable to a phone, label the keepers, note which adapter you actually need, and recycle the orphans — one calm visit. Call (330) 200-8042.

A charging spot the whole family can share

In a busy house, one tidy charging spot beats cords scattered everywhere. The trick is making it work for both plugs at once.

Pick one counter or table near an outlet. A power strip or a multi-port block with several holes lets a few phones charge side by side. If the block has both USB-A and USB-C holes, all the better — it feeds old and new cables from one spot.

Leave a labeled cable of each kind plugged in and ready: a USB-C one for the newer phones, a Lightning one for the older. Then anyone can set their phone down and grab the cord that fits, without hunting or borrowing the wrong one.

Keep the daily cables where they're used and the spares together in one drawer. Our family-charging-spot guide and our labeling guide take this further if you'd like to make it really foolproof.

✓ Two cords, two labels, one happy counter

You rarely need more than one of each plug at the shared spot. Label them 'new iPhones' and 'old iPhones' in plain words, and the daily scramble simply stops.

Deciding what stays and what goes

Half of sorting a mixed household is letting go of cords for phones you no longer own. Here's a gentle way to decide.

Go through the basket one cord at a time. For each, ask a single question: does someone in this house still use a phone this fits? If yes, it's a keeper — label it. If no, and it's not a known-good spare you want, it's clutter you can let go.

- **Keep:** each current phone's own cable, labeled with whose it is.
- **Keep:** one good spare USB-C cable and one spare Lightning cable.
- **Keep:** one or two wall blocks, ideally one USB-A and one USB-C.
- **Let go:** cords for phones no one owns anymore.
- **Let go:** frayed, kinked, or flaky cables that only work 'just so.'

✓ **Recycle cords — don't just trash them**

Old cables and chargers can go to an electronics-recycling drop-off rather than the bin. Many stores and county sites take them. Our mystery-cable-drawer guide points you to the easy options.

Labeling, so a cable always finds its way home

This is the single step that keeps a mixed household sorted for good. It costs two minutes and a bit of tape.

Wrap a small strip of masking tape or a little tag near the plug and write who it belongs to in plain words — 'Dad's phone,' 'the grandkids,' 'car cable.' Now a loose cord isn't a mystery; it's obviously someone's, and it goes back where it came from.

You can add the plug type too if it helps — 'USB-C, new iPhone' or 'Lightning, old iPhone.' For folks with tired eyes, writing it large and plain beats squinting at the tiny shape of the plug every time.

★ I'll bring the labels and do it with you

Labeling every cable in the house is quick, satisfying work, and I'm glad to sit and do it with you so you learn the ropes as we go. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we'll make the whole drawer make sense.

Packing for a trip when phones don't match

Travel is where a mismatched household can leave someone stuck at a dead battery. A little packing plan prevents it.

Pack one labeled cable for each phone traveling, plus one wall block that fits those cables. If everyone's cords are USB-C except one Lightning phone, bring that Lightning phone's cable too — or a single USB-C cable with a Lightning-to-USB-C adapter to cover both from one cord.

A small multi-port block is a traveler's friend: one block in the outlet, two or three cables, and the whole family charges overnight from a single plug. Keep it all in one labeled pouch so nothing wanders off in a hotel room.

! The one cord you forget is the one you'll need

Before you zip the bag, count phones and count cables — one per phone, plus the block. Going overseas adds a plug-shape question for the wall itself; our travel-charging guide covers that so no one is left searching for an outlet that fits.

Why two look-alike cables don't always behave the same

Even among USB-C cables, two that look identical can do different jobs. It trips up confident folks, so let's make it plain.

The plug shape tells you what fits. It does not promise what the cable can do. One USB-C cable might only carry power to charge the phone. Another carries power and data, so it can also move photos to a computer. They can look exactly alike from the outside.

So a cable that charges your newer iPhone just fine might fail to connect it to a computer — it simply wasn't built for data. It isn't broken, and you did nothing wrong. For moving photos or files, reach for the cable that came with the phone, or one clearly sold for that purpose.

✓ For charging, almost any good cable with the right plug works

Don't overthink everyday charging — a decent cable with the correct plugs will top up either iPhone. It's only data and video that need the original or a cable sold for the job. Our guide on telling cables apart explains the difference in full.

The mix-ups I see most in two-plug homes

A handful of honest mistakes cause most of the trouble. Knowing them ahead of time means you'll breeze right past them.

- **Grabbing the wrong cord in the dark:** label both kinds so a quick glance — or a fingertip — tells them apart.
- **Trying to force a USB-C cable into a Lightning phone:** it won't fit and never will. Different shapes, not a defect.
- **Throwing out the old USB-A block:** it still charges fine with the right cable — keep at least one.
- **Buying a bag of adapters:** one Lightning-to-USB-C adapter covers most needs. More just get lost.
- **Keeping cords for long-gone phones:** if no phone in the house fits it, it's clutter — recycle it.

! Never force a plug

If a cable doesn't slide in with gentle pressure, stop. It's the wrong type, upside down, or there's lint in the port. Forcing it can bend the little pins or crack the socket. Check the shape and try again gently.

Making your good cables last

A cable almost always dies at the ends, where it bends most. A little care keeps your good ones — both kinds — working for years.

The weak spot is right where the cord meets the plug. Pull by the plug, never by yanking the cord, and try not to leave a cable bent sharply over the edge of a nightstand night after night. A loose loop for storage is kinder than a tight wrap.

Heat and pinching are the other enemies — a cord trapped under a chair leg or run beneath a rug takes a beating you can't see. Give your daily cables a gentle path and they'll reward you with a long life.

✓ Signs a cable is on its way out

Fraying near the plug, a kink that won't straighten, or a charge that only works when you hold the cord 'just so' all mean it's time to retire it. A flaky cable isn't worth the daily frustration — swap in your spare.

A simple system so no one hunts for a cord again

Naming the plugs is step one. A light-touch system keeps the whole house sorted — without turning it into a project.

Two labeled baskets or bags do most of the work: one for USB-C, one for Lightning, with the spares inside. Tuck a note of which iPhones use which in with them. When a cable comes loose, it has an obvious home, and anyone can put it back without asking you.

Keep each person's daily cable where they charge — bedside, chair, kitchen counter — and the spares together in one drawer. Our labeling guide and our family-charging-spot guide take this further if you'd like a setup the whole family can run.

✓ Write the household's plug key on an index card

A little card taped inside the drawer — 'New iPhones: USB-C. Old iPhones: Lightning.' with each person's name — turns every question into a five-second glance. Replace it only when a phone changes.

Is it the cable, or something else?

When a phone won't charge, the cable is a common culprit — but not the only one. A quick, orderly check saves you buying the wrong thing.

Try a different cable of the right type that you know is good. If that fixes it, the first cable was the problem. If it doesn't, the trouble may be the wall block, the outlet, or a bit of lint packed into the phone's charging port. We have a whole guide on cleaning a charging port safely before you buy anything.

Swap one thing at a time — cable, then block, then outlet — so you know which one was at fault. It's the same patient approach I'd use on a visit, and it almost always finds the answer without a trip to the store.

✓ Keep one trusted test cable of each type

Set aside one USB-C and one Lightning cable you know work perfectly and label them 'test.' When a phone won't charge, they're the first things you reach for — an instant way to tell a bad cable from a bigger problem.

A sensible spare kit for a mixed household

You don't need many spares — you need the right few, kept where you'll find them. Here's the short list that covers almost everything.

One spare USB-C cable, one spare Lightning cable, one USB-A wall block, and one USB-C wall block. Add a single Lightning-to-USB-C adapter if you own both phone eras. That small kit, kept in one labeled drawer, handles a dead cable, a guest's phone, and most surprises.

Buy spares from a seller you'd trust for anything else, and favor a sturdy cable of a good length over a fancy name. Very cheap, unbranded chargers are a place to be a little careful — our guide on safe charger shopping covers what to look for.

★ Text me your phones and I'll list what to buy

Tell me which iPhones are in the house and I'll write out the exact short list of cables and blocks to keep — so you order once and never scramble. No commission, just a straight answer. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Your quick reference, start to finish

The short version you can lean on any time the cords in the house have someone stumped.

- ❑ iPhone 15 and newer = USB-C; iPhone 14 and older = Lightning.
- ❑ Keep each phone's own cable with it, and label whose it is.
- ❑ Hold on to one USB-A block and one USB-C block.
- ❑ Buy few adapters — a Lightning-to-USB-C one covers most needs.
- ❑ Match car cables to the car's port: USB-A (older) or USB-C (newer).
- ❑ For data or photos, use the cable that came with the phone.
- ❑ Never force a plug — check the shape, the direction, and for lint.

★ Keep this guide in the drawer

You don't have to hold any of this in your head. Keep these pages with your cords, and when in doubt, I'm a phone call away at (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from families juggling old and new iPhones, answered plainly.

Q: Which iPhones use USB-C and which use Lightning?

iPhone 15 and everything newer use USB-C — the small oval plug. iPhone 14 and everything older use Lightning — the slim plug with a gold strip. Just look at the hole on the bottom of the phone, or check the model name in settings.

Q: Can I use one cable for both my old and new iPhone?

Not directly — the plugs are different shapes. But a single USB-C cable with a small Lightning-to-USB-C adapter on the end can charge both. For everyday use, it's often simpler to keep each phone's own cable with it.

Q: Should I throw out my old USB-A charger blocks?

No — keep at least one. With a cable that has a USB-A charger end, an older block charges either kind of iPhone just fine. It may charge a newer phone a bit slower, which is perfectly safe for overnight.

Q: What adapters are actually worth buying?

Very few. If you own both phone eras, one Lightning-to-USB-C adapter is the most useful. A USB-C-to-USB-A adapter helps old and new cables and blocks work together. That's usually all a household needs.

Q: Will my car charge both phones?

It depends on the car's port. Older cars often have a flat USB-A port; newer ones may have USB-C. Match your cable to the car's port and the phone you're charging. Snap a photo of the port and I'll tell you exactly what to use.

★ Still have a cord you can't place?

Sorting a mixed-iPhone household is one of my favorite little jobs — quick, satisfying, and it ends a real daily annoyance. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we'll match every phone to its cable.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made your household's mix of old and new iPhones feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do licensed electrical, gas, or appliance-repair work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

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Which iPhone Uses Which Plug

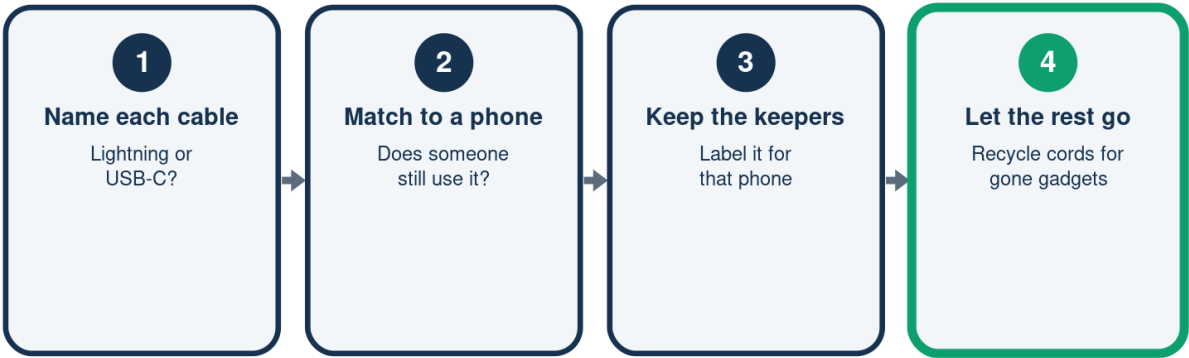
One quick look at the bottom edge tells you

	The plug	Which iPhones
Lightning	Slim, gold strip	iPhone 14, older
USB-C	Oval, either way	iPhone 15, newer

Keep each phone's own cable with it -- they are a pair.

Sorting The Charging Drawer

Work through the basket one cord at a time



Keep one old USB-A block -- it still charges with the right cable.

What To Keep, What To Buy

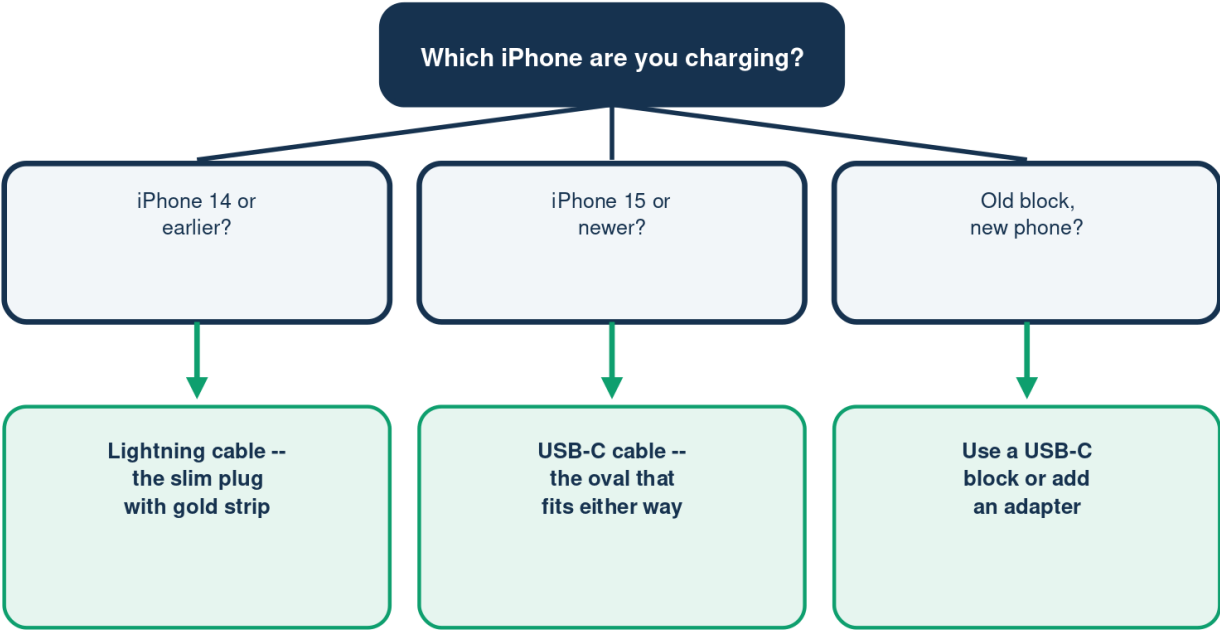
You already own most of what you need

	Keep (you have it)	Buy (just a few)
Phone cables	Each phone's own	--
Wall blocks	An old USB-A one	--
Adapters	--	Lightning-to-C
Car charger	If it fits	If ports differ

Buy few adapters -- one Lightning-to-USB-C covers most needs.

Which Cable For This Phone?

Work from the iPhone in your hand



Keep each phone's own cable with it -- and label the ends.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

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