BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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How Your Phone Shares Your Location — And How to Control It

And how to control who sees where you are Keep the useful features, cut the tracking

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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1 The Short Version

Your phone knows where you are — that is what makes maps, weather, and finding a nearby restaurant work — and it can share that location with apps, companies, and people in various ways. Some of this sharing is helpful and some of it you may not want, but the good news is that you are in control: your phone has clear settings that let you decide which apps can see your location, how precisely, and when.

Understanding how location sharing works, and how to manage it, lets you keep the convenience while cutting out the sharing you would rather not have.

This guide explains, in plain language, how your phone determines and shares your location, why apps want it, where to find the settings on both iPhone and Android, and how to set sensible permissions that protect your privacy without crippling the useful features. It also covers lesser-known matters like location hidden in your photos, sharing your location with family, and the safety side of the question.

The aim is not to alarm you into turning everything off, but to help you make informed, comfortable choices, so your phone serves you with the location features you want and nothing you do not.

- Your phone knows your location and can share it with apps, companies, and people.
- Some sharing is helpful; some you may not want — and you're in control.
- Clear settings let you decide which apps see your location, how precisely, and when.
- The goal is to keep the convenience while cutting the sharing you don't want.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Your phone knows where you are — that's what makes maps and weather work — and shares it in various ways, some helpful and some you may not want. The good news: clear settings put you in control, so you can keep the convenience and cut the sharing you'd rather not have.

2 Why Apps Want Your Location

It helps to understand why so many apps ask for your location, because the reasons range from genuinely necessary to purely commercial. Some apps truly need it to do their job: a maps app must know where you are to navigate, a weather app to give your local forecast, a ride or food-delivery app to find you. For these, location is the whole point, and sharing it is a fair trade for the service. Granting location to apps like these makes sense.

Other apps want your location for reasons that benefit them more than you: to build a profile of your movements and habits for advertising, to sell to data brokers, or simply because they ask by default. A flashlight or a simple game has no real need for your location, and an app's wanting it does not mean it should have it.

The useful habit is to ask, for each app, whether it genuinely needs your location to do what you use it for. If yes, granting it is reasonable; if not, there is no reason to. Understanding that app requests for location span the essential and the self-serving lets you grant it where it helps you and decline it where it only helps them, which is the heart of sensible location management.

- Some apps truly need location: maps, weather, ride and delivery apps.
- For these, location is the whole point and a fair trade for the service.
- Others want it to profile you for advertising, sell to data brokers, or just by default.
- Ask, per app: does it genuinely need location to do what I use it for?

> **TIP**
>
> For each app, ask: does it genuinely need my location to do the thing I use it for? A maps or weather app, yes — location is the whole point. A flashlight or simple game, no. An app wanting your location doesn't mean it should have it.

3 How Your Phone Knows Where You Are

Your phone works out its location using a few technologies together, and knowing this demystifies the subject. The most precise is GPS, the satellite positioning that pinpoints you outdoors. Your phone also uses nearby Wi-Fi networks and cell-phone towers to estimate location, which helps indoors or where GPS is weak, and these combine to place you quite accurately. This positioning is simply a capability your phone has; the privacy question is not whether your phone can find your location but who it then shares that with.

That distinction matters: your phone knowing where it is, for your own use, is different from your location being sent to an app or company. When you use maps, your phone uses its location for you. When an app has location permission, your phone shares your location with that app, which may use or transmit it further.

So managing location privacy is really about managing who your phone shares its location with, through the permissions you grant, not about the underlying positioning, which you generally want working for features like maps and emergency calls. Understanding that the technology finds your location and the permissions control who receives it clarifies exactly what you are managing when you adjust location settings: the sharing, not the knowing.

- Your phone locates you using GPS satellites, nearby Wi-Fi, and cell towers together.
- This positioning is a capability; the privacy question is who it's shared with.
- Your phone using your location for you differs from sending it to an app or company.
- Managing location privacy means managing who your phone shares its location with.

GOOD TO KNOW

The key distinction: your phone knowing where it is (for your own maps and weather) is different from your location being shared with an app or company. Managing location privacy is about the sharing — the permissions you grant — not the underlying positioning, which you want working.

4 Finding Location Settings

Both iPhone and Android give you a central place to control location sharing, and finding it is the first practical step. On an iPhone, you go to the Settings app, then Privacy & Security, then Location Services, where you can see whether location is on and a list of your apps with their individual location permissions. On an Android phone, you go to Settings, then Location (sometimes under Privacy or Security), where you find a similar master control and per-app permissions, though the exact wording varies by phone brand.

In both, you will find two levels of control: a master switch for location overall, and individual settings for each app. Generally you want to leave the master location on, since turning it off disables useful features and even emergency location, and instead manage privacy through the per-app permissions, which is where the real control lies.

Spend a few minutes in this settings area to see which apps have your location and how; most people are surprised. The exact menus change over time with updates, so if the path differs slightly, look for Location or Privacy in your settings, or search the settings for location. Knowing where these controls live, and that the per-app permissions are the main tool, sets you up to make the specific choices the next chapters describe.

1. On iPhone: Settings > Privacy & Security > Location Services.
2. On Android: Settings > Location (sometimes under Privacy or Security).
3. Find the master location switch and the per-app permission list.
4. Leave the master on, and manage privacy through per-app permissions.

TIP

Find your location controls — iPhone: Settings > Privacy & Security > Location Services; Android: Settings > Location. Leave the master switch on (turning it off disables useful features and emergency location) and do your privacy management through the per-app permissions, where the real control is.

5 Setting Per-App Permissions

The real control over location sharing is in the per-app permissions, where modern phones let you choose, for each app, not just whether it can see your location but when. The usual options are: never, which blocks the app from your location entirely; while using the app, which lets it see your location only when you have the app open and in use; and always, which lets it access your location even in the background when you are not using it.

There may also be an ask-every-time option that prompts you each time.

The sensible default for most apps is while using, which gives apps location when you are actually using them — so maps can navigate while you use it — but denies them the ability to track you in the background when you are not. Reserve always for apps that genuinely need background location for a feature you want, and use never for apps that have no business knowing your location.

Going through your apps and setting each to the least access it needs for how you use it is the single most effective privacy step. Most apps work perfectly well on while using, and this one habit stops the background tracking that is the biggest location-privacy concern. Setting permissions thoughtfully per app, rather than granting always by reflex, is how you keep location features while cutting the unwanted sharing.

- Per-app options usually include: never, while using the app, and always (background).

- 'While using' lets an app see location only when you have it open — the sensible default.
- Reserve 'always' for apps that genuinely need background location for a feature you want.
- Use 'never' for apps with no business knowing your location.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> The most effective privacy step: set each app to the least location access it needs. 'While using' is the sensible default — maps still navigates while open, but can't track you in the background. Reserve 'always' for apps that truly need it, and 'never' for those that don't.

6 Precise vs. Approximate Location

Modern phones add another useful control: the choice between giving an app your precise location or only an approximate one. Precise gives the app your exact spot, down to close detail, which is necessary for things like turn-by-turn navigation or a ride-hailing pickup. Approximate gives the app only a rough idea of your area — enough for, say, local weather or nearby search — without revealing exactly where you are. This lets you grant location that is useful to an app without handing over pinpoint precision it does not need.

The sensible approach is to give precise location only to apps that genuinely need it for their function — maps, navigation, ride and delivery apps — and approximate to apps that only need a general sense of your area, like weather or a store-finder. Many apps work fine with approximate location, which protects you from sharing your exact whereabouts unnecessarily.

When you set an app's location permission, look for this precise-or-approximate toggle and set it to the less-precise option unless the app truly needs exactness. It is a newer, finer control that many people miss, and using it adds a worthwhile layer of privacy: even apps you allow to know roughly where you are need not know exactly.

For these, allow what they need and move on with a clear conscience, giving precision only where it earns it.

- Precise gives an app your exact spot; approximate gives only your rough area.
- Precise is needed for navigation and ride pickups; approximate suffices for weather or search.
- Give precise only to apps that truly need exactness, approximate to the rest.
- Look for the precise/approximate toggle when setting an app's location permission.

TIP

Use the precise-vs-approximate toggle: give exact location only to apps that need it (maps, navigation, ride pickups) and approximate to the rest (weather, store-finders). Many apps work fine knowing only your rough area — a finer privacy control many people miss.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

7 Location Hidden in Your Photos

A form of location sharing people often overlook is the location data tucked inside their photos. By default, many phones record where each photo was taken, embedding the GPS coordinates in the photo file, which is handy for organizing photos by place but means that when you share a photo, you may be sharing exactly where it was taken — including, say, your home, if you photographed something there. This hidden geotagging can reveal more than you intend when you send or post pictures.

You have control here too. Your phone's camera or location settings usually let you turn off recording location in photos if you prefer photos without it, and when sharing a photo, some phones offer an option to remove the location before sending.

For most casual sharing this is a minor concern, but it is worth knowing about, especially before posting photos publicly or sending pictures taken at home or other sensitive places to people you do not fully trust.

Being aware that photos can carry their location, and knowing you can turn it off or strip it when sharing, lets you avoid inadvertently broadcasting your whereabouts through pictures. It is one of those quiet details of location privacy that, once known, is easy to manage according to how cautious you wish to be.

- Phones often record where each photo was taken, embedding GPS in the file.
- Sharing such a photo can reveal exactly where it was taken, including your home.
- You can turn off recording location in photos in your camera or location settings.
- Some phones let you remove a photo's location when sharing it.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Photos can carry hidden location data — sharing one may reveal exactly where it was taken, including your home. You can turn off recording location in photos, or strip it when sharing. Worth doing before posting photos publicly or sending home photos to people you don't fully trust.

8 Sharing Location With People

Distinct from apps and companies is sharing your location with people you choose — a feature many find genuinely useful. Both iPhone and Android let you share your live location with family or friends, so they can see where you are, through built-in features (like Find My or location sharing in maps) or messaging apps.

Families use this to keep track of each other, to know a relative got home safely, or to coordinate meeting up, and it can be reassuring, especially for family members who want to look out for one another.

This sharing is under your control: you choose whom to share with and can stop at any time, and it is only shared with the specific people you select, not broadcast. It is worth being thoughtful about who you share your live location with and reviewing

those settings occasionally, since you may have shared with someone long ago and forgotten.

Used deliberately among trusted family, location sharing is a helpful tool; the key is that it is intentional and limited to people you trust. Understanding this kind of sharing as separate from app permissions — a deliberate choice to let specific loved ones see where you are — lets you use it for its real benefits while keeping it under your control, sharing with whom you want for as long as you want and no more.

- Both phones let you share your live location with chosen family or friends.
- Families use it for safety, reassurance, and coordinating — it can be genuinely helpful.
- You choose whom to share with, it's limited to them, and you can stop anytime.
- Review occasionally who you're sharing with, in case you shared long ago and forgot.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Sharing your live location with chosen family — via Find My or maps — is a helpful, controllable tool: you pick who, it's limited to them, and you can stop anytime. Just review occasionally who you're sharing with, since it's easy to share long ago and forget.

9 Location and Advertising

One of the main reasons to manage location sharing is advertising and data collection, which operate largely out of sight. Some apps and the companies behind them collect your location, often in the background, to learn your habits, movements, and the places you visit, building a profile used to target advertising or sold to data brokers who trade in such information.

This is why a seemingly free app may want your location constantly — your location data is valuable to them, even if the app itself has no real need for it.

The per-app permissions and the while-using and approximate settings already covered are your main defense, since denying an app always-on precise location largely stops this background profiling. Phones also offer broader advertising-privacy settings that limit ad tracking generally, worth exploring in your privacy settings. The point to grasp is that much location sharing exists to feed advertising and data markets rather than to serve you, which is a good reason to be stingy with location permissions for apps that do not genuinely need them.

You do not need to be alarmed, only deliberate: granting location by the least-access principle naturally cuts off most of this commercial harvesting. Knowing that advertising drives a lot of location hunger strengthens the simple habit of giving apps only the location access their function requires, which protects you from being quietly tracked and profiled.

- Some apps collect location in the background to profile your habits for advertising.
- The data may be used to target ads or sold to data brokers — your location is valuable.
- The per-app, while-using, and approximate settings are your main defense.
- Phones also have broader ad-tracking-limit settings worth exploring.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Much location hunger exists to feed advertising and data brokers, not to serve you — which is why a free app may want your location constantly. The least-access habit (while-using, approximate, never) naturally cuts off most of this background profiling; phones' ad-tracking settings limit it further.

10 The Safety Side of Location

Location sharing has a safety dimension worth understanding in both directions. On the protective side, location features can genuinely help: emergency services can often use your phone's location to find you when you call for help, which is a strong reason to keep location services on overall, and location sharing with trusted family can provide reassurance and help in an emergency. These benefits are real and argue against turning location off entirely.

On the cautionary side, unwanted location sharing can be a safety risk in specific situations, most seriously where someone might misuse knowledge of your whereabouts — for instance in cases of stalking or domestic abuse, where an abuser's access to a victim's location can be dangerous. Anyone in such a situation should be especially careful about which apps and people can see their location, review sharing settings, and seek appropriate help, as this is a serious safety matter beyond ordinary privacy.

For most people the safety angle simply reinforces sensible management: keep location on for emergencies and trusted sharing, but control app and people access deliberately. Understanding both sides — location as a safety aid and, if misused, a risk — helps you set it up to protect rather than endanger you, which for the great majority means keeping the protective features while limiting unwanted sharing.

- Protective side: emergency services can use your location to find you; family sharing helps.
- These benefits argue against turning location off entirely.
- Cautionary side: unwanted sharing can be dangerous in stalking or abuse situations.
- Anyone at such risk should carefully review who can see their location and seek help.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Location cuts both ways: it helps emergency services find you and lets trusted family look out for you, but unwanted sharing can be dangerous in stalking or abuse situations. Anyone at such risk should carefully review which apps and people can see their location and seek appropriate help.

11 A Sensible Middle Ground

With all this in mind, the goal for most people is not to turn off location entirely — which sacrifices maps, weather, emergency location, and useful features — nor to grant it freely to everything, but to strike a sensible middle ground. That middle is: keep location services on overall; give the apps that genuinely need it the access they need (precise and while-using, or always only where truly required); give apps that need only a rough area approximate location; and deny location to apps that have no good reason for it.

Share your live location only with trusted people, deliberately.

This balanced approach keeps everything useful working while cutting off the background tracking, data harvesting, and unwanted sharing that are the real privacy concerns. It takes only one session to go through your apps and set these permissions, after which you can grant sensible access to new apps as you install them. You do not need to be a privacy hardliner or to live in fear of your phone; you need only be deliberate, applying the least-access principle and reviewing occasionally.

This middle ground gives you the best of both: the genuine convenience of location-aware features and protection from the sharing you do not want. For most people, this considered, moderate management is exactly right, delivering privacy without sacrifice, which is the sensible aim.

- The goal is a middle ground, not all-off (losing features) or all-on (no privacy).
- Keep location on; give needed apps the access they need, rough apps approximate, others none.
- Share live location only with trusted people, deliberately.
- One session sets your permissions; grant sensibly to new apps as you install them.

GOOD TO KNOW

Aim for the middle, not all-off or all-on: keep location services on, give apps that truly need it the right access, give rough-area apps approximate location, deny the rest, and share your live location only with trusted people. One deliberate session gives you convenience without the unwanted sharing.

12 A Simple Way to Take Control

If you want to manage how your phone shares your location, here is a clear path to a sensible setup.

1. Open your location settings — iPhone: Privacy & Security > Location Services; Android: Location.
2. Leave the master location switch on, for features and emergency use.
3. Go through your apps, setting each to the least access it needs — mostly 'while using.'
4. Give precise location only to apps that truly need it; approximate to the rest.
5. Consider turning off or stripping location in photos, and review who you share live location with.
6. Explore ad-tracking-limit settings, and recheck these occasionally.

> *Your phone will share your location with anyone you let it — and plenty of apps would love to be let. A single afternoon setting sensible permissions keeps the maps and weather you want while quietly closing the door on the tracking you don't, which is privacy without sacrifice.*

13 Recap

Your phone locates you with GPS, Wi-Fi, and cell towers, and shares that location with apps, companies, and people through permissions you control. Manage privacy through per-app permissions rather than turning location off: set most apps to 'while using,' reserve 'always' for those that truly need background location, and deny apps with no good reason.

Use approximate location for apps that only need your rough area, be aware of location hidden in photos, and share your live location only with trusted people. Advertising drives much location hunger, so the least-access habit protects you; keep location on overall for emergencies and useful features. A sensible middle ground gives you convenience and privacy both.

- Your phone locates you via GPS, Wi-Fi, and cell towers; permissions control sharing.
- Set most apps to 'while using,' 'always' only where truly needed, 'never' for the rest.
- Use approximate location for rough-area apps; mind location hidden in photos.
- Share live location only with trusted people; advertising drives much location hunger.
- Keep location on overall for emergencies and features — aim for a sensible middle ground.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Take control through per-app permissions, not an all-off switch: most apps to 'while using,' precise only where needed, approximate for the rest, and none for apps with no reason. Mind photo geotags, share live location only with trusted people, and keep location on for emergencies — convenience and privacy together.

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

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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.

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