BILL'S HOME TECH

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iPhone Won't Turn On: Calm Recovery Steps

What to check, in order, without the panic From the charger to Recovery mode

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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1 The Short Version

You pressed the button and nothing happened. Before you assume the worst, take a breath, because most iPhones that will not turn on are not broken at all. The battery is simply flat and needs time on the charger, or the screen is dark while the phone is actually running, or it is frozen and needs one firm sequence of three buttons to come back to life.

This guide walks you through the checks in the right order, from the most likely and simplest to the rarest and most serious, so you never skip the easy fix and never panic before you have tried it. In the great majority of cases, one of the first few pages solves the problem in a few minutes.

- A flat battery can look completely dead and may need twenty minutes on the charger before it shows anything.
- A frozen phone, where the screen is black but the phone is on, is cured by a force-restart that erases nothing.
- Start with the charger and the cable; a bad cable is the single most common cause.
- Your photos are almost certainly safe; they live in your iCloud backup, not only on the phone.

> **TIP**
>
> Work through this guide in order and resist jumping ahead. The fixes are arranged from most likely to least, so going straight down the list is the fastest way to a working phone.

2 Dead Battery, Dark Screen, Or Frozen

Three very different situations all look identical from the outside, a black screen that will not respond, and telling them apart points you to the right fix. It helps to think about which of these you are likely facing before you start pressing things.

It might be	The sign	The fix in this guide

A flat battery	Totally dark, no response at all.	Put it on the charger and wait.
A dark screen	You hear it or feel it buzz but see nothing.	Check brightness and a restart.
A frozen phone	It was on, then stuck and will not respond.	A force-restart.
A deeper fault	None of the above brings it back.	Recovery mode or service.

Most of the time it is the first or the third: a battery run all the way down, or a software freeze. Both are ordinary and both are fixable at your kitchen table. The deeper faults are genuinely rare, so leave worrying about them until you have ruled out the common causes.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> A phone that was working fine an hour ago and suddenly went black is far more likely frozen than broken. Software hiccups are common; sudden hardware death is not.

3 If You Only Read One Page, Read This One

If you do nothing else, do these two things in order, because together they cure the vast majority of phones that will not turn on. First, plug it into a known-good charger and wait a full twenty minutes before deciding anything. Second, if it is charged but still black, do a force-restart.

1. Plug the phone into the wall with a cable and brick you know work, and leave it twenty minutes.
2. Watch for a charging symbol or the Apple logo; if it appears, the phone was just flat.
3. If it stays dark after charging, do a force-restart using the steps for your model on the next pages.

4. If neither works, move on through the rest of the guide calmly; you have not harmed anything.

These two steps, charging and a force-restart, are the whole ballgame for most people. Everything else in this guide is for the stubborn minority of cases where these do not do the trick, and even most of those turn out to be fixable.

> *Charge it, then force-restart it. Those two steps bring back most iPhones that seem dead, and neither one can lose a single photo.*

4 Start With The Charger, It Is Usually The Charger

The humble charging cable fails more often than anything else, and a frayed or dirty cable is the hidden cause behind a great many dead phones. Before you suspect the phone itself, suspect the cable, the brick, and the outlet, in that order, because they are cheap and easy to rule out.

1. Try a different cable, ideally one you know charges another device.
2. Try a different wall brick, and a different outlet in case that one is dead.
3. Look into the charging port with a light for pocket lint, and clean it gently with a wooden toothpick, never anything metal.
4. Leave it on the charger a full twenty minutes before expecting any sign of life.

A deeply drained battery can be so empty that the screen stays black for many minutes even once power is flowing, showing nothing until it has gathered enough charge to display the battery symbol. This fools people into thinking the charger is not working when it simply needs more time.

WATCH OUT

Those cheap gas-station charging cables are a frequent culprit and can even damage a phone. A name-brand cable costs a little more and saves a lot of grief; it is worth keeping a good spare.

5 Is It Off, Or Is The Screen Just Dark

Sometimes the phone is running perfectly well and only the screen is dark, which is easy to mistake for a dead phone. A few quick checks tell you whether the phone is alive behind a black screen, which points to a very different and usually minor fix.

- Call the phone from another phone; if it rings or buzzes, it is on and the screen is the issue.
- Press the side button and listen for the gentle click or feel for a buzz.
- Turn the screen brightness up, in case it was dimmed all the way down.
- Make sure the phone is not simply in a very dark case or face-down on a surface.

If the phone rings when you call it but shows nothing, the phone itself is fine and the display is the trouble. A force-restart often wakes a stuck screen; if it does not, the display may need service, but the phone and your data are unharmed in the meantime.

GOOD TO KNOW

A phone that buzzes, rings, or makes its camera-shutter sound is very much alive. That alone rules out a dead battery and a dead phone, narrowing the problem to the screen or software.

6 The Force-Restart, The One Trick That Fixes The Most

The force-restart is the single most useful trick in this whole guide, and it is worth learning by heart. It forces a frozen phone to shut down and start fresh, clearing the glitch, and it does not erase a single photo, message, or contact. Think of it as the equivalent of switching a confused appliance off and on.

1. Press and release the Volume Up button quickly.
2. Press and release the Volume Down button quickly.
3. Press and hold the Side button, keep holding past the slider and even past a black screen.
4. Let go only when the Apple logo appears, which can take ten to twenty seconds.

The timing matters: it is a quick press, a quick press, then a long hold. People often let go of the side button too early, see nothing, and give up. Keep holding well past the point where you think nothing is happening, because the logo often appears later than expected.

> **TIP**
>
> This sequence works on every iPhone with Face ID and on the iPhone 8 and SE. The older iPhone 7 and 6s use different buttons, covered next, so check which phone you have before you start.

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 The Older Button Tricks, iPhone 7 And 6s

If you have an older iPhone, the force-restart uses a different button combination, and trying the newer sequence on these models simply will not work. It is a small thing, but it catches people out, so it deserves its own page.

- iPhone 8, SE second and third generation, and all Face ID models: the quick-press, quick-press, long-hold sequence from the previous page.
- iPhone 7 and 7 Plus: hold the Side button and the Volume Down button together until the Apple logo appears.
- iPhone 6s and the first SE: hold the Side or top button and the Home button together until the logo appears.
- In every case, keep holding well past ten seconds; do not give up early.

To tell which method you need, think about whether your phone has a Home button and how old it is. When in doubt, try one sequence, wait, and if nothing happens after a good twenty seconds of holding, try the other. You cannot hurt the phone by trying the wrong combination.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Knowing your phone's model helps here and elsewhere. You can usually find it in Settings under General and About, or engraved in tiny print on the back of the phone.

8 It Turns On But Stops, What That Symbol Means

Sometimes the phone does turn on but gets stuck, showing a symbol instead of the home screen. Each symbol means something specific, and reading it correctly saves a lot of guesswork. None of them means the phone is beyond help.

You see	What it means

A red or empty battery	The battery is flat; leave it charging longer.
The Apple logo, stuck	It is trying to start; a force-restart usually helps.
A cable pointing to a computer	It needs Recovery mode on a computer, covered ahead.
A spinning wheel for a long time	An update or restart is in progress; give it time.

The cable-and-computer symbol is the one that most often sends people into a panic, but it is simply the phone asking to be connected to a computer so it can be repaired through Recovery mode. That is a guided process, not a disaster, and the next pages walk through it gently.

> **WATCH OUT**
> If the phone is stuck on the Apple logo for more than a few minutes with no progress, do a force-restart. A logo that keeps reappearing after restarts points toward Recovery mode as the next step.

9 Recovery Mode, The Repair Shop On Your Computer

When charging and a force-restart both fail, Recovery mode is the next tool, and it is less intimidating than it sounds. You connect the phone to a computer, and the computer offers to repair the phone's software. It is the digital equivalent of taking the phone to a repair shop, done at your own kitchen table.

1. On a Mac, open a Finder window; on a Windows PC, open the Apple Devices app, installing it first if needed.
2. Connect the phone to the computer with a cable.
3. Start the force-restart sequence for your model, but keep holding until the cable-and-computer screen appears.

4. On the computer, choose Update when it offers, not Restore, so your data is kept. The crucial choice comes at the end, between Update and Restore. Update reinstalls the phone's software while keeping all your photos, messages, and contacts. Restore wipes the phone completely back to factory-new. Always try Update first; only a technician should reach for Restore, and only after a backup.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Update keeps your stuff. Restore erases it. If the computer offers both, choose Update, and never let anyone talk you into Restore until you are certain your photos are backed up.

10 About The Photos, Take A Deep Breath

The fear underneath almost every dead phone is the same: the photos. Here is the reassuring truth. If you had iCloud Backup or iCloud Photos switched on, which most people do, your pictures are safely copied to Apple's servers and will come right back the moment the phone or a replacement is working again.

- Photos saved to iCloud live on Apple's servers, not only on the phone in your hand.
- A force-restart and an Update in Recovery mode both keep your photos.
- Only a full Restore or factory wipe erases what is on the phone, and even then iCloud brings it back.
- You can see your photos right now from any computer by signing in at icloud.com.

If you are not sure whether backups were on, you can check later from another device, but for now, know that a black screen does not mean lost photos. The pictures are almost always safe, and panicking about them is the one part of this you can set down.

> **TIP**
>
> Once the phone is working again, confirm iCloud Backup is on in Settings under your name. That single setting turns the next dead phone from a tragedy into a mild inconvenience.

11 If It Got Wet Or Took A Fall

A phone that went dark right after a drop or a dunking needs slightly different handling, because now hardware may genuinely be involved. The instinct to rush is strong, but with water especially, patience is your friend and haste can make things worse.

- If it got wet, do not charge it; power through a wet port can cause real damage.
- Dry the outside, stand it upright, and leave it in a dry, airy place for a day before charging.
- Skip the bag-of-rice folklore; it does little and the dust can get into the port.
- After a hard fall, a force-restart is still worth trying; a cracked screen can still work.

Modern iPhones resist a splash well, but a long soak or salt water is another matter. Give a wet phone a full day to dry before you plug it in, however tempting it is to check sooner. If it will not revive after drying, that is a clear case for professional service.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Charging a wet phone is the mistake that turns a recoverable soaking into a dead phone. However impatient you feel, let it dry completely first.

12 Knowing When To Stop, And Habits That Prevent This

There is a point where more button-pressing stops helping and starts risking a worse outcome, and knowing when to stop is its own kind of skill. If you have charged it, force-restarted it, tried Recovery with Update, and it still will not come back, the phone needs a technician, and that is nobody's fault.

- Stop and seek help if Recovery mode with Update does not revive it.

- Stop if there is physical damage, a swollen battery, or a smell of burning; unplug it and set it aside.
- Prevent trouble by charging nightly, keeping iOS updated, and keeping iCloud Backup on.
- Keep a good spare cable, and keep the phone out of hot cars, which age batteries fast.

A dead phone also attracts a particular kind of scammer: a web search for help can surface fake support numbers that charge to fix nothing. Only ever use Apple's official support or a technician you trust, and never let a stranger take remote control of a computer to help with a phone.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Good habits turn a dead phone from a crisis into a shrug. Nightly charging, current software, and iCloud Backup on are the three that do the most, and all three are free.

13 Recap

Most iPhones that will not turn on are flat, dark, or frozen, not broken. Charge it on a cable you trust and wait a full twenty minutes, then force-restart it with the right button sequence for your model. If it is stuck on a symbol, read what the symbol means; if all else fails, Recovery mode with Update is the next step, and your photos are almost certainly safe in iCloud.

- Charge first, with a known-good cable and brick, and wait before judging.
- Force-restart cures most freezes and erases nothing.
- In Recovery mode, always choose Update over Restore.
- Keep iCloud Backup on so a dead phone never means lost memories.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Last verified November 2026. Button sequences differ by model and menus shift with iOS updates, so a step may look slightly different on your phone. If it still will not wake after these steps, do not keep wrestling with it. Call Bill at (330) 200-8042.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy. Work down it in order when a phone will not turn on.

The situation	Do this...
It is totally dark	Plug into a known-good charger and wait twenty full minutes
Charged but still black	Force-restart: Volume Up, Volume Down, hold Side to the Apple logo
Older iPhone 7	Hold Side and Volume Down together until the Apple logo appears
Older iPhone 6s or first SE	Hold the top or side button and Home together to the logo
Screen dark but it rings	The phone is on; force-restart to wake a stuck screen
Stuck on the Apple logo	Force-restart; if it repeats, use Recovery mode on a computer
Cable-to-computer symbol	Connect to a computer and choose Update, never Restore
It got wet	Do not charge; dry it upright a full day first
Worried about photos	They are in iCloud; check them at icloud.com from any computer
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

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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