BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

AN EXTENDED GUIDE · NO. 2482

Updated November 2026

A Kid's First Laptop or Desktop — What to Buy and a Safe Setup

Chromebook, Windows, Mac, or iPad, plus the free parental controls and a step-by-step safe setup

Plain-English family tech help from:
Bill's Home Tech
Portage County, Ohio

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech
(330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com · Atwater, Ohio

Book a visit · billshometech.com/book

What's Inside

Everything in this guide, with page numbers. Skip to whichever chapter answers your question right now.

The 60-Second Version 3

The Short Version 3

What Does the Child Actually Need It For? 4

The Four Choices Side by Side 5

Laptop or Desktop? 6

Buying Tips That Save Money and Trouble 6

The Most Important Step: A Child Account 7

Setting Up a Chromebook for a Child 8

Setting Up a Windows PC for a Child 9

Setting Up a Mac or iPad for a Child 9

What to Turn On, Whatever You Bought 10

The Safe-Setup Checklist 12

Games, Chat, and Video 13

Make a Simple Family Agreement 13

Common Questions 14

When to Call Bill 15

Everyday Cheat Sheet 16

Plain-English Word List 16

A Note From Bill 17

Your Visit — and My Promise 18

SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

For most children aged 8 to 12, a Chromebook is the simplest and safest first computer; choose Windows for specific programs or games, and Mac or iPad if the family is all-Apple. Whatever you buy, the parent sets it up first and stays the administrator. Then the child gets their own child account linked to the parent: Family Link on a Chromebook, Microsoft Family on Windows (managed at account.microsoft.com/family), or a Family Sharing child account with Screen Time on a Mac or iPad.

Turn on a daily time limit, bedtime, a website filter, and approval for apps and purchases, and turn off guest mode. Keep the computer in a shared room and agree on simple family rules together. Bill can set it up remotely for $49 or at home for $99.

1 The Short Version

A first computer is a big moment for a child, and a big decision for the parents or grandparents buying it. The good news: you don't need the most expensive machine, and you don't need to be a tech expert to set it up safely. You need the right kind of computer for the child's age and needs, and about an hour of careful setup before it's handed over.

This guide compares the four common choices, Chromebook, Windows, Mac, and iPad with a keyboard. Then it walks through the free parental controls each one has, and gives you a safe-setup checklist you can follow step by step.

- For most children aged 8 to 12, a Chromebook is the simplest, safest, and least expensive first computer.
- Choose Windows if the child needs specific programs or games, and Mac if the family is already all-Apple.
- Set the child up with their own child account, managed by a parent. Never let them use the parent's account.

- The parent stays the computer's administrator; the child gets a standard account.
- Put the computer in a shared room, at least at first, and agree on a few simple family rules.

> **TIP**
> If it's a holiday gift, set it up before you wrap it. Updates and account setup can take an hour or more, and that's not how anyone wants to spend Christmas morning.

2 What Does the Child Actually Need It For?

Start with the job, not the brand. A first computer for an eight-year-old who wants to type stories and video-call Grandma is a very different thing from a computer for a twelve-year-old who needs a particular program for a coding club.

- Homework, typing, research, and video calls: almost any choice works, and a Chromebook is the easiest.
- School already uses Google Classroom and Chromebooks: a Chromebook at home will feel familiar.
- Specific games or programs (Minecraft Java edition, some coding or design tools): check they run before you buy. That often means Windows or Mac.
- Drawing, photos, and video projects: an iPad or a Mac often shines here.
- The family already has iPhones and a Mac: an Apple choice keeps everything in one family account system.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Ask the child's school what they use. If the school issues a Chromebook, the home computer may be mostly for fun and family, and that changes what's worth spending. My guide "The School Chromebook Survival Guide" (billshometech.com/guides/school-chromebook) covers the school device itself.

3 The Four Choices Side by Side

	Chromebook	Windows laptop	Mac	iPad + keyboard
Typical cost	Lowest	Low to high	Highest	Mid to high
Ease for a child	Simplest	More to manage	Simple	Simple
Free parental controls	Google Family Link	Microsoft Family	Screen Time	Screen Time
Runs most programs and games	No (web and Android apps)	Yes	Many	App Store apps only
Virus and junk-software risk	Very low	Higher; needs care	Low	Very low
Best for	Homework, web, video calls	Specific programs, gaming	All-Apple families, creativity	Drawing, reading, younger kids

> *For most first computers, simple and well-controlled beats powerful and complicated.*

GOOD TO KNOW

My guide "Chromebook vs. Windows vs. iPad — Which Simple Computer?" (billshometech.com/guides/chromebook-vs-windows-ipad) compares these for adults. The child-specific differences are the controls and the accounts, covered below.

4 Laptop or Desktop?

A laptop can go anywhere, which is wonderful for homework at the kitchen table, and harder for keeping an eye on things. A desktop stays put, usually in a shared room, which makes it naturally easier to supervise.

- Younger children (8 to 10): a desktop or an all-in-one in the family room, or a laptop that "lives" on the kitchen table, works well.
- Older children (11 to 12 and up): a laptop is practical, with a house rule about where it's used and where it charges at night.
- A laptop can be plugged into a bigger screen and keyboard on a desk, giving you both.

> **TIP**
>
> A simple rule many families like: the computer charges overnight in the kitchen, not in the bedroom. It helps sleep and removes a lot of late-night temptation.

5 Buying Tips That Save Money and Trouble

- Chromebooks have an update end date. Before buying, check how many years of updates it will get. Avoid older models that are close to the end.
- For Windows, look for at least 8 GB of memory and solid-state storage (SSD). Cheaper machines feel slow very quickly.
- A sturdy, spill-resistant or rugged "education" model is worth it for younger kids.
- Buy from a store with a good return policy, and keep the box until you're sure it's the right fit.
- Skip extended warranties pushed at the register unless the price is small and covers accidents.
- Avoid the "free" trial software that comes preloaded on some Windows laptops. You can remove most of it.

GOOD TO KNOW

A good hand-me-down can be a fine first computer, as long as it still gets security updates and is wiped clean first. An old laptop that's past its update life is not a safe choice for a child going online.

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.

6 The Most Important Step: A Child Account

Every parental control system works the same basic way. The child gets their own account, linked to a parent's account, and the parent sets the rules from their own phone or computer. That link is what makes the controls work. If the child signs in with a parent's account, or a shared family login, the controls have nothing to hold on to.

Computer	Child account type	Parent manages from
Chromebook	Google account supervised with Family Link	Family Link app or families.google
Windows	Microsoft account added to your Microsoft family group	account.microsoft.com/family or the Family Safety phone app
Mac / iPad	Apple child account in your Family Sharing group	Screen Time on the parent's iPhone, iPad, or Mac

GOOD TO KNOW

Google says a child under 13 needs a parent-supervised account to use a Chromebook, and Apple's child accounts are designed for kids under 13. For teenagers the options change a little, but the parent can still keep supervision turned on.

7 Setting Up a Chromebook for a Child

1. Turn on the new Chromebook and connect to Wi-Fi.
2. Sign in with YOUR Google account first, so you become the owner of the Chromebook.
3. Let it install any updates and restart.
4. Add a person, and sign in with the child's Google account. If they don't have one, create one during setup; it's linked to your Family Link.
5. On your phone, open the Family Link app and set screen-time limits, website filters, and app approvals.
6. Back on the Chromebook, signed in as the owner, turn off guest browsing and limit who can sign in, so the child can't get around the controls.

WATCH OUT

That last step matters. Google points out that if guest mode is left on, a child can use the Chromebook without any Family Link rules at all. Turning it off closes the gap.

TIP

For the Family Link app itself, see "Kid-Proofing an Android (Family Link)" (billshometech.com/guides/android-family-link). The same app manages the Chromebook.

8 Setting Up a Windows PC for a Child

1. Set up the PC with YOUR Microsoft account. This makes you the administrator.
2. Install all Windows updates (Settings, Windows Update) and restart.
3. Go to Settings, Accounts, Family, and add a family member. Create a Microsoft account for the child, or add their existing one.
4. Make sure the child's account is a standard user, not an administrator.
5. On your phone or computer, go to account.microsoft.com/family (or use the Microsoft Family Safety phone app) and set screen-time limits, content filters, and spending approval.
6. Sign in as the child once to finish their setup and check that the limits work.

GOOD TO KNOW

Microsoft has retired its Family Safety app for Windows itself and no longer adds features to it. Managing your family from the website or the phone app is the way forward, and the controls on the child's PC keep working.

WATCH OUT

Content filters from Microsoft Family work best in the Microsoft Edge browser. Many families block other browsers on the child's account so the filters can't be skipped.

9 Setting Up a Mac or iPad for a Child

1. Make sure you have Family Sharing set up on your own iPhone or Mac, with you as the organizer.
2. Create a child account for your child in Family Sharing, or add their existing one.
3. On a Mac: create a separate standard (not administrator) user on the Mac for the child, signed in with their Apple Account.
4. On an iPad: sign in to the iPad with the child's Apple Account.
5. On your own device, open Screen Time, choose the child's name, and set downtime, app limits, and content restrictions.
6. Turn on Ask to Buy, so app downloads and purchases come to you for approval.

GOOD TO KNOW

Apple says that for children under 13, some protections are on by default, including filtering adult websites and Communication Safety, which warns about nude images in messages. You can adjust them in Screen Time.

TIP

See "Kid-Proofing an iPhone or iPad (Screen Time)" (billshometech.com/guides/iphone-screentime) and "Setting up an iPad or Fire Tablet for a Child" (billshometech.com/guides/kid-tablet-lockdown) for more Apple-specific detail.

10 What to Turn On, Whatever You Bought

The names differ, but every system offers the same handful of controls. Here are the ones that matter most for a first computer, and a sensible starting point for each.

Control	A sensible starting point
Screen-time limit	A daily limit on school nights, more on weekends
Bedtime / downtime	Computer unavailable from bedtime until morning
Website filter	Block adult content; consider "approved sites only" for under-10s
App and game approval	Child asks; parent approves from their phone
Purchases	Require approval for every purchase
Safe search	Locked on in the browser

GOOD TO KNOW

Start a little stricter than you think you need. It's much easier to loosen rules as a child shows responsibility than to tighten them later.

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.

11 The Safe-Setup Checklist

Done?	Step
	Computer updated before the child uses it
	Parent is the administrator; child has a standard account
	Child account linked to the parent's family group
	Screen-time limits and bedtime set
	Website filter and safe search on
	App, game, and purchase approval on
	Guest mode or extra accounts turned off
	Built-in virus protection on (Windows Security on Windows)
	Child's password written down and kept by the parent
	Computer placed in a shared room; charges outside the bedroom
	Family rules talked through and agreed

TIP

Print this page and tick it off as you go. It's the same list a professional would follow.

12 Games, Chat, and Video

For many kids, the first computer is mostly about games and talking to friends. That's where most of the real risks are, so it's worth a few extra minutes.

- Check the age rating of each game before approving it.
- Many games have their own chat and friend settings. Set chat to friends only, or off, for younger children.
- YouTube has a separate experience for younger kids and supervised options for older ones.
- Teach the child never to share their full name, school, address, or photos with someone they met online.
- Make it clear they won't be in trouble for telling you about something that made them uncomfortable.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> My guide "Keeping Kids Safe in Online Games" (billshometech.com/guides/kids-safe-online-gaming) goes deeper on game chat and in-game purchases.

13 Make a Simple Family Agreement

Controls do part of the job. The other part is a conversation. A short, friendly agreement, written down together, sets expectations and gives everyone something to point back to.

- Where the computer is used, and where it charges at night.
- How much time on school days and weekends.
- Homework first, then games or videos.
- Ask before downloading anything or buying anything.
- Tell a grown-up about anything scary, mean, or strange online, with no punishment for telling.
- We'll review these rules on your birthday each year.

> **TIP**
> Let the child help write it. Kids are far more likely to follow rules they helped make.

14 Common Questions

Can a grandparent set this up instead of a parent?

Yes, but the child's account should be linked to a parent's account, since the parent sets the rules day to day. A grandparent can do the setup with the parent's permission and sign-in, or with the parent on the phone.

Do I need to buy antivirus software?

Not usually. Chromebooks, Macs, and iPads are well protected as they come, and Windows includes Windows Security for free. Keep it turned on and keep the computer updated.

Should I use a monitoring app that reads my child's messages?

The free built-in controls cover what most families need. Heavier monitoring apps can damage trust and sometimes collect a lot of data themselves. If you're worried about something specific, it's worth a conversation first.

When can the controls come off?

Gradually, as the child shows they can handle it. Many families loosen limits each birthday rather than all at once.

15 When to Call Bill

Setting up a child's first computer well is mostly patience and getting the accounts in the right order, and it's a lovely job to help with. I can help you choose what to buy, set the computer up with the parent as administrator, create and link the child's account, turn on the controls that fit your family, and show the parents how to manage it all from their phones.

Remote help is a flat $49 and works well for setting up controls or fixing a Family Link or Microsoft Family problem. For a brand-new computer, an in-home visit in Portage County is $99 flat, and I'll set it up on your kitchen table so it's ready to go. If it's a holiday gift, call early, since December fills up.

- You're not sure which computer to buy for your child's age and school.
- The child account won't link, or the controls aren't working.
- Your child has found a way around the limits.
- You'd like the computer completely set up before it's wrapped.
- A hand-me-down computer needs to be wiped and made safe for a child.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. Child account, parent as administrator, then turn on the controls.

I want to...	Do this...
Pick a first computer	Most kids 8-12: a Chromebook. Specific programs: Windows. All-Apple family: Mac or iPad
Set up a Chromebook	Parent signs in first; add the child's Family Link account; turn off guest mode
Set up Windows	Settings › Accounts › Family; manage at account.microsoft.com/family
Set up a Mac or iPad	Family Sharing child account; standard user; Screen Time from the parent's device
Control time and content	Daily limit, bedtime, website filter, app and purchase approval
Keep it safe day to day	Shared room, charge outside the bedroom, a written family agreement
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

WORDS TO KNOW

Plain-English Word List

Child account — An account for a child that's linked to a parent's account, so the parent can set rules and approve requests.

Administrator — The account that can install software and change settings. The parent should have this one.

Standard account — An everyday account that can't change important settings or remove controls. The child should have this one.

Family Link — Google's free parental-control system for Chromebooks and Android.

Microsoft Family — Microsoft's free parental controls for Windows and Xbox, managed online or from a phone app.

Screen Time — Apple's built-in controls for time limits, content, and purchases on Macs, iPads, and iPhones.

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

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

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.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

Call or text (330) 200-8042 · 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.