BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

AN EXTENDED GUIDE · NO. 2099

Updated November 2026

My Screen Is Black but the Light Is On

The power's clearly on, but the screen shows nothing — here's how to tell what's really wrong

Plain-English tech help from:

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Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

A black screen with the power light on is usually a sleep, brightness, cable, or input problem — not a dead screen. Wake it and turn the brightness up, then try a force restart in case it is frozen. On a TV, press Input or Source and cycle through the HDMI options, and make sure the cable box or streaming stick is on.

On a laptop, tap the Windows key plus P to bring the picture back from an external screen. A deeply drained device needs twenty minutes on the charger before it will light up. To tell a dead screen from a dead backlight, shine a flashlight across it in the dark — a faint image means the screen works and it is repairable.

1 The Short Version

A black screen while the power light is on almost always means one of a few harmless things: the display went to sleep and won't wake, the brightness got turned all the way down, a cable worked loose, or the screen is showing the wrong "input." A truly broken screen is actually one of the rarer causes.

Because there are only a handful of likely culprits, you can work through them quickly and calmly. Most black screens come back within a few minutes once you find the one that applies to you.

- Power light on + black screen usually means a sleep, brightness, cable, or input issue — not a dead screen.
- Start by waking it and checking brightness, then cables, then the input setting.
- A force restart clears many black screens caused by a frozen device.
- If you ever see a very faint image in the dark, the screen works — it's the backlight, and that's a repair question.

> **TIP**
> Shine a flashlight at an angle across a black screen in a dark room. If you can faintly make out the picture underneath, the screen itself is fine — the light behind it has failed. That one test tells a repair person almost everything they need to know.

2 Which Device Are We Talking About?

Black screens happen on everything, and the fixes differ a little by device. It helps to know which path to follow, because a TV's "input" problem and a laptop's "sleep" problem have different cures.

- Phone or tablet: most often frozen or brightness — a force restart and a brightness check fix the majority.
- Laptop: often asleep, dimmed, or set to show on an external screen that isn't there.
- Desktop computer with a separate monitor: usually a cable or the monitor's own input/power.
- TV: almost always the wrong input or a source device (cable box, streaming stick) that is off or asleep.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Knowing the device narrows things down fast. The rest of this guide is grouped so you can jump to the fixes for your kind of device and skip the rest — though the early steps help no matter what you have.

3 Step One: Wake It and Check Brightness

Before anything else, make sure the device isn't simply asleep or dimmed to nothing. This sounds obvious, but a screen turned all the way down looks exactly like a broken one, and it is a very common cause.

1. Tap the screen, press a key, or move the mouse — a sleeping device may just need a nudge to wake.

2. Press the power or side button once (not a long hold yet) to wake the display.
3. Find the brightness control and turn it up: on a phone, swipe to the control panel; on a laptop, the sun-symbol keys near the top; on a monitor, the physical buttons on its edge.
4. On a laptop, make sure you didn't accidentally lower brightness to zero with those keys.
5. Give it a few seconds to respond before moving on.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Some laptops have a key that turns the screen off entirely, or switches the picture to an external monitor. If tapping brightness does nothing, look for a key with a little monitor symbol and press it a few times — you may have switched the picture somewhere that isn't there.

4 Step Two: The Force Restart

If the screen stays black and the device seems otherwise on, it may be frozen with the display off. A force restart — a firmer off-and-on that works even through a black screen — clears a great many of these.

1. Phone/tablet: use your device's force-restart combination (for an iPhone, quick Volume Up, quick Volume Down, then hold the side button to the Apple logo).
2. Laptop or computer: hold the power button about ten seconds until it fully powers off, then press it once to turn back on.
3. Wait for the maker's logo to appear — that tells you the screen is alive and the device is starting fresh.
4. If the logo appears, the problem was a freeze, and you are already fixed.

> **TIP**
> If a logo appears during the force restart but the screen goes black again afterward, that is still useful — it tells you the screen hardware works, and the trouble is in the software or a setting, which is far easier to sort out than a broken screen.

5 For a TV: Check the Input First

On a TV, a black screen with the power on is, nine times out of ten, the "input" set to the wrong place — the TV is faithfully showing a socket that has nothing plugged in or switched on. This is the single most common TV black-screen cause.

1. Find the button on the remote labeled Input, Source, or a little rectangle with an arrow going in.
2. Press it and cycle through the options (HDMI 1, HDMI 2, TV, and so on), pausing a few seconds on each.
3. Watch for your picture to appear on one of them — that is the right input.
4. Make sure the device you want to watch (cable box, streaming stick) is actually powered on first.

GOOD TO KNOW

A TV often jumps to the wrong input after a power cut, a toddler with the remote, or a new device being plugged in. It is not broken — it is just looking at the wrong socket. Cycling through the inputs is the whole fix in most cases.

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6 For a TV: Check the Source Device and Cables

If the right input still shows black, the trouble may be the device feeding the TV — the cable box or streaming stick — or the cable between them. These come loose more easily than you would think.

1. Make sure the cable box or streaming stick is powered on and not just asleep; wake it or restart it.

2. Press the HDMI cable firmly into both the TV and the source device — a half-seated cable gives a black screen.
3. Try a different HDMI socket on the TV, then switch the input to match that socket.
4. If you have a spare HDMI cable, swap it in; cables do fail, and a bad one looks exactly like a bad TV.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Unplug and firmly reseat HDMI cables gently and straight — don't wiggle them side to side, which can loosen the socket over time. A cable should click or seat snugly; if it falls out at a touch, that socket or cable is the likely culprit.

7 For a Desktop Monitor: Cables and Its Own Power

A separate monitor has its own power and its own input, independent of the computer. A black monitor while the computer hums along is usually a cable, the monitor's input, or the monitor's own power-saving.

1. Check the monitor has its own power light; if it is off or orange, press the monitor's power button.
2. Make sure the video cable is firmly seated at both the monitor and the computer.
3. If the monitor has more than one input, use its menu buttons to select the one your cable uses.
4. Confirm the computer itself is truly on and not asleep — tap a key or move the mouse.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> An orange or amber power light on a monitor usually means "I have power but I'm not receiving a picture" — which points straight at the cable or the computer being asleep, not at a broken monitor.

8 For a Laptop: Is It Showing on the Wrong Screen?

Laptops have a quiet trick that fools many people: they can send their picture to an external monitor or TV that was once plugged in, leaving their own screen black even though everything works. This is common after connecting to a TV or a meeting-room screen.

1. On Windows, hold the Windows key and tap the letter P a few times — this cycles the picture between the laptop's own screen and any external one.
2. On a Mac, the picture usually returns on its own, but closing and reopening the lid, or restarting, resets it.
3. Unplug any HDMI or display cable that might be sending the picture elsewhere.
4. Restart the laptop if the picture still won't come home.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> If you recently plugged the laptop into a TV or projector, this is very likely your answer. The laptop simply never switched the picture back. The Windows-key-plus-P tap brings it home in seconds.

9 Let the Battery Recover

A completely drained phone, tablet, or laptop can show a black screen even when plugged in, because it has to charge a little before it has the energy to light up. People often give up in the first minute, when patience is the fix.

1. Plug the device into a known-good charger and wall outlet (not a weak USB port).
2. Leave it completely alone for fifteen to twenty minutes — resist pressing buttons.
3. Watch for a charging symbol or a low-battery icon to appear on the screen.
4. Once it has a little charge, try waking it or doing a force restart.

GOOD TO KNOW

A deeply drained battery needs a few minutes of charging before the screen will even show a charging icon. A black screen on a dead device is often just an empty battery being patient with you — give it twenty minutes before worrying.

10 The Flashlight Test: Is the Screen Alive?

If nothing so far has worked, one clever test separates a dead screen from a dead backlight — and it changes everything about whether a repair is worth it. The picture and the light behind it are two different parts.

1. Take the device somewhere dark.
2. Turn on a flashlight (your phone's flashlight is perfect) and shine it at a steep angle across the black screen.
3. Look closely for a very faint image — menus, icons, anything — ghosting under the light.
4. If you can see a faint picture, the screen works and only the backlight has failed.

WATCH OUT

If the flashlight reveals a faint image, that is genuinely good news — the expensive part works, and it is usually the backlight, a repairable fault. Knowing this before you shop for a replacement can save you from throwing out a device that is worth mending.

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11 When It's Truly the Screen

Sometimes, after all these checks, the screen really has failed — no picture, no faint ghost, no response. That is disappointing but clear, and it turns a mystery into a straightforward decision about repair or replacement.

- On a phone or tablet, a cracked or internally damaged screen may show black while everything else still works.
- A desktop monitor is cheap to replace and the computer itself is usually fine.
- A laptop screen can often be repaired, and an external monitor can be plugged in as a stopgap.
- Your data is almost always safe — a dead screen rarely means lost photos or files.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> A dead screen does not mean a dead device or lost data. On a laptop you can often plug in an external monitor to rescue everything; on a phone, the information can usually be recovered. Don't assume the worst before someone has looked.

12 For a TV: Rule Out the Remote

Before blaming the TV, make sure the remote itself isn't the quiet culprit — a dead remote can leave you unable to wake a TV that's merely asleep, which looks exactly like a black-screen fault.

1. Try the power and input buttons on the TV itself, usually on the back, bottom, or side edge.
2. If the TV responds to its own buttons but not the remote, the remote is the problem — try fresh batteries.
3. Point the remote straight at the TV with nothing blocking it when you press.
4. If the TV won't respond to its own buttons either, it is the TV or its power, not the remote.

> **TIP**
> Finding the TV's own buttons is worth doing once in daylight and remembering, because they let you rule the remote in or out instantly the next time the screen goes dark.

13 Rule Out a Screen Saver or Power Setting

On a computer, a black screen can simply be an aggressive sleep or screen-saver setting kicking in sooner than you expect — not a fault at all. A quick look at the power settings can turn a worry into a two-minute adjustment.

- If the screen goes black after a few minutes of not touching it, that is the display sleeping — normal, and adjustable.
- Move the mouse or press the space bar; if the picture returns, it was only asleep.
- In the computer's power or display settings, you can lengthen how long before the screen sleeps.
- A screen that sleeps the instant you look away usually just has its timer set very short.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Older adults often find the default sleep timer too eager. Setting the screen to wait fifteen or twenty minutes before sleeping removes a lot of "it keeps going black" frustration — and it is a harmless change.

14 Keep a Spare Cable and Know Your Inputs

So many black-screen moments come down to a cable or an input that a little preparation pays off handsomely. Knowing your setup turns a mystery into a checklist.

- Keep one spare HDMI cable in a drawer — they are inexpensive and they do fail.

- Note which input each device uses (for example, "cable box = HDMI 1, Roku = HDMI 2") on a card by the TV.
- Label the cables behind the TV so you can tell at a glance what goes where.
- Know where each device's own power button is, for when the remote won't do.

> **TIP**
>
> I'm happy to label the back of your TV and leave a little card of which input is which. It sounds small, but it turns most future black-screen scares into a five-second fix you can do yourself.

15 When to Call Bill

You can safely work through all of these checks yourself, and most black screens turn out to be a sleep, brightness, input, or cable matter that clears up in minutes. But if the flashlight test shows nothing, if the device won't respond at all, or if you simply aren't sure what you are looking at, there is no need to guess.

I come to you, run the same tests with a practiced eye, and tell you plainly whether it is a two-minute setting, a cheap cable, a repair worth doing, or a time to replace — and I make sure your photos and files are safe either way.

- The flashlight test shows no picture at all and nothing wakes it.
- The screen comes and goes, or flickers, which can point to a cable or a failing part.
- It is a laptop or TV and you want to know if a repair is worth the cost.
- You want to be sure your photos and files are safe before anything else.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Power light on, screen black? Work down this list — a dead screen is actually the rarest cause.

The device is a…	Check this first…
Phone or tablet	Turn brightness up, then force-restart it
TV	Press Input/Source and cycle through HDMI 1, 2, etc.; make sure the source is on
Desktop monitor	Check its power light and that the video cable is firmly seated both ends
Laptop	Tap Windows-key + P to bring the picture back to its own screen
Anything, if drained	Charge 20 minutes before expecting the screen to light
Is the screen alive?	Shine a flashlight across it in the dark — a faint image means it works
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

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.

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