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The New Call-Screening & Spam Tools in iOS 26

Make unknown callers say who they are before your phone rings — and let the spam filter itself out

Plain-English iPhone help from:

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

iOS 26 can make callers who aren't in your Contacts state their name and reason before your phone rings, showing you their answer as text so you decide whether to pick up — and since robocalls rarely respond, they filter themselves out. Turn it on under Settings, Apps, Phone, in the 'Screen Unknown Callers' section, and choose a level: 'Ask Reason for Calling' is the balanced choice for most people, while 'Silence Unknown Callers' is the firmest.

The key is a current Contacts list, because saved numbers are never screened — add family, your doctor, pharmacy, and bank so they always ring through. Block specific repeat offenders from Recents. And remember no feature catches a scammer who fools you after you answer: hang up on anyone demanding money or gift cards and call the real number yourself.

1 The Short Version

Spam calls are relentless, and iOS 26 gives you a genuinely new weapon against them. Your iPhone can now answer calls from unknown numbers on your behalf and politely ask the caller who they are and why they are calling — and show you what they say in writing — before your phone ever rings. Scammers and robocallers almost never bother to answer, so they simply fall away, while real callers state their business and get through.

This guide walks you through turning it on, choosing the right level for you, and using the other spam tools iOS 26 offers. We will keep it calm and clear, because the whole point is a quieter, safer phone that still lets the important calls through.

- iOS 26 can make unknown callers state their name and reason before your phone rings.
- You see their answer as text and decide whether to pick up — scammers rarely bother to answer at all.

- People already in your Contacts are never screened, so family and friends ring through normally.
- There are gentler and firmer settings; you choose the one that fits how you live.

> **TIP**
> The single most important companion to this feature is a well-kept Contacts list. Any number saved in your Contacts rings straight through without screening — so add your family, doctor, pharmacy, and regular callers, and the feature only ever challenges strangers.

2 What Call Screening Actually Does

When a call comes in from a number that is not in your Contacts, your iPhone can quietly intercept it before it rings. It asks the caller to say their name and why they are calling. As they speak, the phone turns their words into text on your screen, so you can read who it is and decide — pick up, or let it go — without ever having answered a stranger.

This works so well against spam for a simple reason: robocalls and scam dialers are automated and almost never respond to the prompt, so they hang up and vanish. A real person with a real reason will answer, and then you see their message and choose. It builds on an earlier feature called Live Voicemail, taking it a step further.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> You read a transcript of what the caller says rather than hearing their voice live. That is by design — it lets you judge a stranger's reason quietly and safely, without putting you on the spot or on the line with them.

3 Turn On Call Screening

The setting lives in the Phone app's options, and switching it on takes under a minute. You will choose how the phone handles unknown callers from a short list.

1. Open Settings and scroll to Apps, then tap Phone (on some versions, look for 'Screen Unknown Callers' directly under Phone's settings).
2. Find the section for screening or unknown callers.
3. Choose the option you want — the choices are explained in the next chapter.
4. That is it; the feature is now active for calls from numbers not in your Contacts.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Call Screening is usually switched off until you turn it on, though your phone may also offer to enable it the first time an unknown number calls after you update. Either way, you are in control of whether it is on and how strict it is.

4 Choose the Right Level for You

iOS 26 gives you a few ways to handle unknown callers, from gentle to firm. There is no single right answer — it depends on how many legitimate strangers call you and how much spam you get.

Setting	What it does	Good for
Never	Unknown calls ring normally	People expecting lots of new callers
Ask Reason for Calling	Phone asks who they are first; you read it and decide	Most people — the balanced choice
Silence Unknown Callers	Unknown calls go straight to voicemail, no ring	Those overwhelmed by spam

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> For most people, 'Ask Reason for Calling' is the sweet spot. It stops the robocalls cold while still letting a real stranger — a new doctor's office, a delivery driver, a returned call — reach you by simply stating their business.

5 What You'll See When It Works

It helps to know what to expect the first few times, so the experience feels familiar rather than startling.

- An unknown number calls, but your phone does not ring in the usual way.
- You see a screen showing the caller is being asked to identify themselves.
- Their spoken reason appears as text as they talk.
- You can tap to answer if it is someone you want, or ignore it and let it go to voicemail.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> If the caller says nothing and hangs up — which is exactly what a robocaller does — you simply never hear from them, and it lands in your recent calls as a screened, unanswered call. No decision needed; the spam filtered itself.

6 Keep Your Contacts List Up to Date

This feature is only as good as your Contacts, because saved numbers are never screened. A few minutes keeping that list current means the people you care about always ring straight through while strangers get challenged.

1. Open the Phone app and tap Recents.
2. For any important number not yet saved, tap the little 'i' beside it and choose 'Create New Contact' or 'Add to Existing Contact.'
3. Make sure your family, doctor, pharmacy, bank, and any regular services are all saved.

4. Save them with clear names so you recognize them instantly when they call.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Think through who calls you that you would never want screened — the pharmacy about a prescription, a doctor's office, a family member from a new number — and make sure each is in your Contacts. That one habit makes the whole feature feel effortless.

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 Silence Junk the Firmer Way

If spam is overwhelming and you rarely get legitimate calls from strangers, the firmer 'Silence Unknown Callers' setting sends every unknown number straight to voicemail without a peep. You lose nothing important if your Contacts are complete, and you get genuine peace.

1. In the same Phone settings, choose 'Silence Unknown Callers.'
2. Unknown numbers now go directly to voicemail without ringing.
3. Check your voicemail and your Recents list now and then for anything legitimate that slipped through.

> **WATCH OUT**
> With this firmest setting, a real caller from a number you haven't saved — say, a hospital calling from a main switchboard — will go silently to voicemail. It is the right choice for heavy spam, but only if you are diligent about saving the numbers that matter and checking voicemail.

8 Report and Block the Worst Offenders

Alongside screening, you can block specific nuisance numbers outright, and marking spam helps your phone and carrier recognize it. These work hand in hand with screening.

1. In Recents or a voicemail, tap the 'i' beside a spam number.
2. Scroll down and tap 'Block this Caller' to stop it reaching you again.
3. Where offered, mark a call or message as Junk or Spam to help filtering improve.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Blocking is best for a specific repeat offender, while screening handles the endless parade of new numbers spammers use. Together they cover both the known pests and the ever-changing ones.

9 Let Your Carrier Help Too

Your phone company has its own spam-blocking that works alongside the iPhone's, and turning it on adds a second layer. Most major carriers offer a free app or setting that labels or blocks known spam numbers before they ever reach you.

- Look for your carrier's free call-protection app (names vary by company) in the App Store.
- In it, turn on spam labeling and blocking of known scam numbers.
- Some carriers let you enable this right in your online account without any app.
- This works together with the iPhone's screening — one catches known offenders, the other challenges new unknowns.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Carrier blocking catches numbers already known to be spam across millions of customers, while the iPhone's screening handles the brand-new numbers spammers constantly switch to. Using both gives you the widest net.

10 Silence Spam Texts, Not Just Calls

Spam does not only come as calls — junk texts are just as relentless, and the iPhone has tools for those too. A few settings quiet the flood of unwanted messages.

1. Open Settings, then Apps and Messages, and look for 'Filter Unknown Senders.'
2. Turn it on, and texts from numbers not in your Contacts move to a separate list, out of your main inbox.
3. For a specific junk texter, open the message, tap the sender at the top, and choose to block them.
4. Never tap a link or reply 'STOP' to a clearly fake text — that only confirms your number is live.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Scam texts often pretend to be a delivery company, your bank, or a toll agency, with a link to 'fix' something. Do not tap the link. If you think it might be real, go to the company's own app or website yourself rather than following the message.

11 Watch Out for Scam Tricks the Phone Can't Catch

Screening is powerful, but no feature can protect you from everything, because the most dangerous scams rely on fooling you after you answer. A little awareness closes that gap.

- A caller claiming to be your bank, the government, or Apple, urgently demanding money or gift cards — hang up and call the real number yourself.
- 'Your computer has a virus' calls — real companies never cold-call you about this.
- Anyone pressuring you to act 'right now' or keep it secret — pressure and secrecy are the tells of a scam.
- A number that looks local or familiar — scammers fake the number shown, so it proves nothing.

WATCH OUT

If a call ever makes you uneasy about money, your accounts, or your computer, the safest move is to hang up and talk it over with someone you trust — including me. I would far rather you call and ask than ever feel pressured by a stranger on the phone. There is never any shame in checking.

12 What to Do If a Good Call Got Screened

Now and then a call you actually wanted gets screened or sent to voicemail — a new doctor's office, a contractor returning your call. It is easy to recover, and easy to make sure it does not happen again with that caller.

1. Open the Phone app and tap Recents to see screened and missed calls.
2. Check your voicemail for anything left by a caller who was silenced.
3. If it was someone you want, tap the 'i' beside their number and save them as a contact so they ring straight through next time.
4. Call them back directly if you missed something important.

- Screened calls still show up in your Recents list, so nothing truly vanishes.
- Saving a caller to Contacts is the permanent fix — contacts are never screened.
- If you find the balanced setting screens too many good calls, you can soften it anytime.

GOOD TO KNOW

The system is forgiving: a wanted caller who got screened is still in your Recents and your voicemail, and one tap to save them as a contact means they sail right through forever after. Nothing important is ever lost for good.

13 When to Call Bill

Setting up call screening is quick and makes a real dent in the daily nuisance, and most people get it going from this guide. But if the settings look unfamiliar, you are unsure which level suits you, or you would like help getting your Contacts in order so the right people always get through, I am glad to help.

On a visit I will turn on the level of screening that fits your life, tidy your Contacts so family and your regular callers ring straight through, block the worst repeat offenders, and walk you through what a scam call sounds like so you can hang up with confidence. The goal is simple: a quiet phone that still rings for the people who matter.

- You want help choosing and turning on the right screening level.
- You would like your Contacts organized so important callers never get screened.
- You keep getting spam and want the worst numbers blocked for good.
- A call has made you uneasy about money or your accounts and you want to talk it through.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. Saved contacts always ring through — strangers get screened.

I want to…	Do this…
Turn on screening	Settings Apps Phone the 'Screen Unknown Callers' section
Pick the balanced level	Choose 'Ask Reason for Calling' — stops robocalls, lets real strangers through
Go firmest on spam	Choose 'Silence Unknown Callers' — straight to voicemail (check voicemail!)
Let the right people through	Save family, doctor, pharmacy, bank in Contacts — those bypass screening
Stop a repeat offender	Recents tap 'i' Block this Caller
Handle a scare-call	Hang up; call the real number yourself; never pay by gift card
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.

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

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