BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

A Kid's First Phone or Watch

Gabb, Bark, Pinwheel, Apple Watch and more —
what each one allows, what it costs, and how to set it up

A plain-English guide for parents and grandparents

Take your time — there's no wrong first step

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

For families choosing a first device · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to a child's first phone or watch. Read it in any order and at your own pace — there is no test, and you can't fall behind. If you're still deciding, start with Part 1 and the comparison in Part 4. If the gift is already bought, jump to Part 5 for the setup steps. Every option comes with what it actually allows, what it really costs as of November 2026, and slow step-by-step directions anyone can follow. Prices and plans change often, so always confirm on the company's own website before you buy.

Part 1 — Before You Buy

1 A Note from Bill
2 Is This Child Ready? Questions to Ask First
3 Watch, Kids' Phone, or Regular Phone?
4 Words You'll Hear in the Store

Part 2 — The Kids' Watches

5 Gabb Watch 3e
6 Bark Watch
7 Pinwheel Watch & Verizon Gizmo Watch 4
8 Apple Watch For Your Kids
9 Galaxy Watch for Kids (Samsung)

Part 3 — The Kids' Phones

10 Gabb Phone 4
11 Bark Phone & Bark Phone Pro
12 Pinwheel Phones
13 Troomi & Other Kids' Phones
14 A Regular iPhone or Android, with Built-in Controls

Part 4 — Comparing & Paying

15 Side by Side: What Each One Allows
16 What It Really Costs
17 Giving One as a Gift: Who Pays, Who Manages

Part 5 — Setting It Up

18 Before the Big Day: A Setup Checklist
19 Setting Up an Apple Watch for Your Child
20 Setting Up Screen Time on a Child's iPhone
21 Setting Up Family Link on a Child's Android Phone
22 Setting Up a Gabb, Bark or Pinwheel Device

Part 6 — Living With It

23 A Family Agreement Everyone Signs
24 Location Sharing, Done Kindly
25 Scams & Dangers Aimed at Kids
26 Lost, Broken or Dead: What to Do

Part 7 — When to Call Bill & Your Cheat-Sheet

27 When to Call Bill
28 Your First Phone or Watch Cheat-Sheet

PART 1

Before You Buy

Is this child ready, and for what? A calm way to decide between a watch, a phone, or waiting a little longer — and the handful of words you'll hear in every store.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. If you're reading this, someone you love is asking for a phone or a watch — or you're thinking about giving one as a gift. Maybe you're a parent weighing it up, or a grandparent who wants to get it right and not step on any toes. Either way, you've come to the right place.

I'm Bill. Helping families feel at home with their technology is what I do every day, and I wrote this guide the same way I'd talk it through with you at your kitchen table: patiently, in plain English, and without any sales pitch. I don't get paid by any of the companies in these pages. My only goal is to help you choose well and set it up with confidence.

There is no single right answer

Some families start with a simple watch at seven or eight. Others wait until middle school and go straight to a phone with strong controls. Some hand down a parent's old iPhone and turn on Apple's built-in limits. All of these can work. What matters most is that the device fits **this** child, that the grown-ups agree on the rules, and that the controls are actually switched on.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this guide does for you

It turns a confusing shopping decision into a short list of clear choices. You'll know what each option allows a child to do, what it costs every month (not just at the register), and exactly how to set it up so it's safe from the first day.

A word to grandparents

A phone or watch is a wonderful gift — and also a monthly bill and a set of house rules. Before you buy, have a quick chat with the child's parents about which device, who pays the monthly plan, and who will manage the controls. It saves hurt feelings on the big day, and it means the gift gets used the way everyone hoped. Chapter 17 walks through exactly that conversation.

And I'm only a phone call away

This guide will carry you a long way on your own. But if you get stuck choosing, or you'd rather someone set up the controls with you, call me at **(330) 200-8042**. No question is too small, and there's no such thing as a silly one.

So take a breath, and let's figure out what's right for your family.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

Is This Child Ready? Questions to Ask First

There's no magic age for a first phone or watch. Experts and families disagree, and every child is different. Instead of a number, it helps to ask a few honest questions. The answers usually point you toward the right kind of device — or tell you that waiting a bit is fine.

Start with the reason

Ask yourself, and the child, *why* they need it right now. The most common reasons are:

- **Getting in touch** — walking home from school, after-school activities, time at a friend's house, or splitting time between two homes.
- **Knowing where they are** — peace of mind when they're out on their own.
- **Keeping up with friends** — group chats, photos and games.
- **Schoolwork** — though most schoolwork happens on a school laptop or tablet, not a phone.

The first two reasons — calls and location — can be met by a simple kids' watch or a locked-down kids' phone. The third reason is where a full smartphone comes in, and it's where most of the worries (social media, strangers, late-night scrolling) live. Being clear about the reason keeps you from buying more device than the child needs.

Questions that help you decide

1. Does the child keep track of their things — a jacket, a lunchbox, a library book?
2. Do they follow house rules when no one is watching, most of the time?
3. Will they tell you when something online upsets or confuses them?
4. Can they handle a charger every night without reminders?
5. Are both parents (or all the grown-ups in charge) on the same page about rules?
6. Is there a real need today — or is it mostly that friends have one?

A child doesn't need a perfect score. But if most answers are "not yet," a watch or a very limited phone is a gentle first step, and you can add more freedom later. Several of the kids' phones in this guide are built exactly for that: start with calls and texts, then open things up as the child shows they're ready.

TIP

Talk it over with the child

Kids are far more likely to follow rules they helped make. Ask them what they want the device for, what worries *them* about being online, and what they think fair rules would be. You'll turn those answers into a family agreement in Chapter 23.

GOOD TO KNOW

Waiting is a real option

If you're not sure, it's perfectly fine to wait. A child can borrow a parent's phone to call from practice, and some families use a home phone for younger kids. Pinwheel, for example, now sells a screen-free Wi-Fi home phone for kids. A later start is not falling behind.

CHAPTER 3

Watch, Kids' Phone, or Regular Phone?

Nearly every choice in this guide falls into one of three groups. Once you know which group fits, the decision gets much smaller.

1. A kids' smartwatch

A watch with its own phone number. The child can call and text a short list of people you approve, and you can see where the watch is on a map. There's no web browser, no social media and usually no app store. Watches are hard to lose (they're on the wrist) and they're a natural fit for younger children.

- **Good for:** roughly early grade school through the tween years, first steps of independence.
- **Examples:** Gabb Watch 3e, Bark Watch, Pinwheel Watch, Verizon Gizmo Watch 4, an Apple Watch set up with Apple Watch For Your Kids, or a Galaxy Watch with Galaxy Watch for Kids.
- **Trade-offs:** small screen, short typed messages, and a battery that needs charging every night or two.

2. A kids' phone

A real smartphone (often a Samsung or Motorola inside) that comes with parental controls built in and locked so the child can't remove them. You decide which contacts, apps and features are allowed, and you can loosen the rules as the child grows — usually without buying a new phone.

- **Good for:** tweens and young teens who need more than a watch but aren't ready for an open phone.
- **Examples:** Gabb Phone 4, Bark Phone, Pinwheel phones, Troomi.
- **Trade-offs:** a monthly plan with a specific company, and some apps friends use may not be available.

3. A regular iPhone or Android phone, with built-in controls

A standard phone — often a hand-me-down — with Apple's Screen Time or Google's Family Link switched on. These tools are free and quite powerful in 2026, but they start out open, and it's up to you to set them up carefully. Older kids sometimes find ways around settings that weren't locked down.

- **Good for:** older kids, families already on iPhone or Android, and saving money with a spare phone.
- **Examples:** any recent iPhone with Screen Time; an Android phone with Family Link.
- **Trade-offs:** more freedom from day one, so more setup and more conversations.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this matters

Picking the group first stops you from comparing apples to oranges. A $129 watch and a $600 phone aren't really competitors — they're for different stages. Decide the stage, then compare the options within it.

	Kids' watch	Kids' phone	Regular phone + controls
Calls & texts	Approved contacts only	Approved contacts (adjustable)	Anyone, unless you limit it
Web browser	No	Off at first; can be added on some	Yes, with filters you set
Social media	No	Off at first; some allow later	Possible; you decide
Location for parents	Yes	Yes	Yes (Find My or Family Link)
Monthly plan	Watch plan or watch line	Kids' company plan (some allow any carrier)	Any carrier line

CHAPTER 4

Words You'll Hear in the Store

Phone shopping comes with its own vocabulary. Here are the terms that come up again and again, in plain English.

Word	What it means
Carrier	The company that provides the cell service — Verizon, AT&T, T-Mobile, or a smaller company like Gabb or Bark that runs its own service on one of the big networks.
Line	One phone number on a plan. Adding a child's watch or phone to your plan means adding a line, which has its own monthly charge.
Plan	What you pay each month for calls, texts and data. Kids' companies have their own plans.
Contract	A promise to keep service for one or two years in exchange for a lower monthly price. Leaving early can mean a fee.
Activation fee	A one-time charge to turn on a new line. Gabb, for example, lists a $30 activation fee.
Data	Internet use over the cell network. A watch or a locked-down phone may need very little.
Wi-Fi	Your home internet. Many kids' devices can use Wi-Fi for updates and some features.
GPS / location	How the device figures out where it is, so a parent can see it on a map.
Safe zone / geofence	A place you mark on the map, like home or school. You get an alert when the child arrives or leaves.
Safelist / approved contacts	The only people allowed to call or text the child.
Parental controls	Settings that limit apps, contacts, websites and screen time.
Monitoring	Software that reads messages or content and alerts a parent to possible problems. Bark is best known for this.
Parent app / portal	The app or website you use on your own phone to manage the child's device — MyGabb, the Bark app, Pinwheel's Caregiver Portal, Apple's Settings, or Google's Family Link.
Number porting	Moving an existing phone number from one company to another.

HEADS UP

"Free phone" rarely means free

Store signs often promise a free device. Usually that means the price is paid back as monthly credits over two or three years — and only if you keep the line that whole time. Before you agree, ask: "What will I pay each month, for how long, and what happens if I cancel early?"

PART 2

The Kids' Watches

Five ways to put calling, texting and location on a child's wrist — what each one allows, what it doesn't, and what it costs as of November 2026.

CHAPTER 5

Gabb Watch 3e

Gabb Wireless makes phones and watches only for kids, and its whole idea is "tech in steps": start small and add more as the child grows. The **Gabb Watch 3e** is its watch, which Gabb suggests for ages 5 to 12.

What it allows

- Unlimited calls and texts to a contact list that **you** manage — up to 100 contacts.
- Preset text messages, a small keyboard, and speech-to-text, so kids can say what they want to send.
- GPS location and Safe Zones you can see in the **MyGabb** app on your phone. Gabb says the location updates about every 15 minutes, and can vary with signal and battery.
- An **SOS button** that calls a parent contact you choose.
- A step counter, a virtual pet called Gabb Go, and quiet-time schedules for school and bedtime.
- It works on its own, with its own phone number — the child doesn't need a phone.

What it doesn't do

- No web browser, no social media and no third-party apps.
- No music on the watch at this time.
- Its SOS button calls the parent contact you set — **not 911**.

STAY SAFE

Teach the difference: SOS is not 911

On the Gabb Watch, the SOS button reaches a parent, not emergency services. Make sure the child knows this. Before you hand it over, ask Gabb support how the watch handles a call to 911, and talk with the child about when to press SOS (to reach you) and when to call for emergency help.

What it costs (as of November 2026)

Item	Cost
Watch price at gabb.com	$229.99 (other stores may sell it for a different price — check before you buy)
Monthly plan	$12.99 with a two-year contract, $14.99 with one year, or $17.99 with no contract
Activation fee	$30, one time
Family Rate	With 2 to 5 Gabb lines, the extra lines pay the lowest monthly rate (watches pay the two-year price)
Returns	Within 15 calendar days of receiving it, with conditions

GOOD TO KNOW

When the contract ends

Gabb's contracts don't renew for another term by themselves. When one ends, the service carries on month to month at the no-contract price, which is higher. Put a reminder on your calendar for the end date so the bill doesn't quietly go up.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why families choose it

It's about as simple and locked-down as a connected device gets. For a young child walking to a friend's house or waiting at practice, it does the two things that matter — call home and show where they are — and very little else.

CHAPTER 6

Bark Watch

Bark is best known for monitoring software that scans a child's messages and alerts parents to signs of bullying, predators or self-harm. The **Bark Watch** puts that monitoring on a kids' watch. In 2026 it's built on a **Samsung Galaxy Watch8**, managed entirely through the Bark parent app.

What it allows

- Its own phone number, with calls and texts over the cell network — no phone needed.
- Contacts you add; you choose whether new contacts need your approval.
- GPS location you can check from the Bark app.
- Bark's monitoring of texts, photos and videos sent or received, with alerts to you.
- Group texting and speech-to-text.
- Step and activity tracking through Samsung Health.
- An SOS feature: holding the top right button brings up an emergency call option to reach **911**.

What it doesn't do

- No browser, no games, no social media.
- No camera — the child can't take photos or video with it.
- It can't be paired with a phone, including a Bark Phone; each has its own number and plan.
- Available in the U.S. only.

What it costs (as of November 2026)

Item	Cost
Watch price	$288 (one-time; pay-over-time options through Affirm or Klarna)
Monthly plan	$15 a month — includes cell service and a Bark app subscription for the whole family
Device protection (optional)	About four dollars a month through AKKO
Returns	60-day money-back on the device price; monthly service isn't refundable

GOOD TO KNOW

The family subscription is a real bonus

Bark's watch plan includes the Bark app for every child and device in the family, which normally costs $14 a month on its own. If an older sibling has a regular phone or a tablet, the same subscription can cover it — though Bark can't do as much on other devices as on its own.

HEADS UP

Prices changed on November 3, 2026

Bark moved to one-time device prices for devices bought on or after November 3, 2026. If you see older articles quoting a monthly device payment, they're describing the earlier pricing.

CHAPTER 7

Pinwheel Watch & Verizon Gizmo Watch 4

Two more watches round out the field: one from Pinwheel, a company that makes kids' phones, and one sold only by Verizon.

Pinwheel Watch

A standalone kids' watch (no phone needed) managed through Pinwheel's **Caregiver Portal**, the same system that runs Pinwheel's phones.

- Calls and texts only with numbers on your **safelist**; strangers and spam can't get through.
- You can read the child's texts and call history from your own device.
- Location on the Caregiver Portal map.
- Focus times for school and bedtime, when it acts as just a watch — emergency contacts still work.
- Front and rear cameras, which you can turn off.
- Optional games, and an optional kid-safe question-and-answer app called PinwheelAsk whose questions and answers you can review.

Item	Cost (as of November 2026)
Watch price	$129
Monthly plan	$14.99 a month, $42.99 a quarter, or $164.99 a year — unlimited calls and texts and 2 GB of data
Discount	15% off the subscription with multiple devices
Returns	30-day money-back guarantee
Coverage note	Pinwheel says the watch isn't yet available in Alaska

Verizon Gizmo Watch 4

Verizon launched the **Gizmo Watch 4** in July 2026. It needs its own Verizon watch line and is managed in the **Verizon Family** app, alongside any other Verizon Family features you use.

- Up to 40 trusted contacts, so strangers can't reach the child.
- Real-time location, custom safe zones, and an alert if the watch is taken off.
- A school mode that cuts distractions during class.

- Video calling, a 1.6-inch scratch-resistant screen, water resistance, and a battery Verizon rates at up to three days.
- Step counter, to-do lists and kid-friendly tools.

GOOD TO KNOW

Check today's Verizon price in the store or app

At launch, Verizon offered the watch free with promotional credits over 36 months on a new watch line ($10 a month plus taxes and fees). That promotion ran July 9 through September 3, 2026. Holiday offers change often, so ask for the current device price and the monthly line charge in writing.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Which families these suit

If you're already a Verizon customer, the Gizmo Watch keeps everything on one bill. If you're on another carrier, or you want to read the child's texts, the Pinwheel Watch is the one in this chapter that allows it.

CHAPTER 8

Apple Watch For Your Kids

If the parents use an iPhone, an Apple Watch can be set up for a child who doesn't have an iPhone of their own. Apple used to call this **Family Setup**; it's now called **Apple Watch For Your Kids**. The parent's iPhone does the setup and keeps managing the watch afterward.

What it allows

- Phone calls and messages with contacts you share from your own Contacts.
- Sharing the child's location with you in the Find My app.
- **Schooltime**, which limits the watch during school hours.
- Screen Time limits and contact controls managed from your iPhone.
- Activity rings with kid-friendly goals (children under 13 can use move minutes instead of calories).
- Emergency Contacts and Medical ID.
- Apple Cash Family, so a child under 18 can make purchases and send money in Messages with Apple Pay (United States only).

What it doesn't do

- Some features are age-limited: Fall Detection is for users 18 and older, and high and low heart rate notifications are for 13 and older.
- Apple Pay with a regular credit or debit card isn't available.
- Several apps and features aren't available on a watch set up this way, including Sleep, ECG, Blood Oxygen, Audiobooks, News and international roaming.

What you need

- An Apple Watch with **cellular**: an Apple Watch Series 4 or later with cellular, or an Apple Watch SE or later with cellular. (A cellular plan isn't needed to set it up, but calls and location away from Wi-Fi need one.)
- Your own iPhone. Apple lists an iPhone 6s or later with iOS 14 or later for the setup, but the newest watches — Series 11, SE 3 and later — need an iPhone 11 or later on iOS 26 or later.
- An Apple Account for you (with two-factor authentication on) and one for the child.

- A Family Sharing group that includes the child, with you as the organizer or a parent/guardian.
- A cellular plan from a carrier that supports Apple Watch For Your Kids. Some corporate cell plans don't.

HEADS UP

It's the priciest watch here

Between the cellular Apple Watch itself and a monthly watch line from your carrier, this is usually the most expensive route. Ask your carrier what a watch line costs on your plan before you buy. It shines for families already on iPhone who want the watch to grow up with the child.

TIP

Already have an older Apple Watch in a drawer?

A parent's old cellular Apple Watch can sometimes be reused, as long as it's on Apple's list and can run a current version of watchOS. Erase it first (Apple requires this), then follow the steps in Chapter 19.

Setup is step by step in Chapter 19.

CHAPTER 9

Galaxy Watch for Kids (Samsung)

Samsung's answer to Apple's kids' watch is **Galaxy Watch for Kids**. It turns a Galaxy Watch with LTE into a kid-friendly watch that a parent manages with Google's **Family Link**.

What it allows

- Calls and texts with a contact list you choose.
- Location sharing, with alerts when the child leaves or arrives at places like home or school.
- School time: Do Not Disturb hours you schedule from your phone.
- Activity tracking powered by Samsung Health.
- Kid-friendly apps and watch faces from Google Play that you approve.

What you need

- A Galaxy Watch8 LTE, Galaxy Watch7 LTE or Galaxy Watch6 LTE.
- A compatible Samsung smartphone for the first pairing.
- A Samsung Account and a Google Account with Family Link for both parent and child; parental consent is required for children under 13.
- An LTE watch plan from a carrier that supports it. Samsung lists Verizon, AT&T and T-Mobile, and notes that some carriers may not support stand-alone calling everywhere.

GOOD TO KNOW

The contact limits have a gap

Samsung notes that the approved-contacts feature applies to Google Messages, Phone by Google and Samsung Phone. It doesn't restrict other communication apps — so only approve apps you're comfortable with. Emergency services and emergency contacts are always reachable.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Which families this suits

Android families with a Samsung phone. It's a full smartwatch that can grow with the child, managed with the same Family Link tools you'd use on a child's Android phone later (Chapter 21).

PART 3

The Kids' Phones

Real smartphones with the controls built in and locked — plus the option of a regular iPhone or Android with the free tools Apple and Google provide.

CHAPTER 10

Gabb Phone 4

The **Gabb Phone 4** is Gabb's phone, aimed at ages 9 to 14. It looks like an ordinary smartphone, but it has no web browser, no social media and no open app store. A **Gabb Phone 4 Pro** is also offered on the same plans.

What it allows

- Unlimited calls and texts, and **Gabb Messenger**, Gabb's messaging app, which uses AI filtering to screen content. Gabb notes that no filter is 100% effective.
- Group and picture messaging on the Standard and Advanced plans.
- **Gabb Music**, a filtered, radio-style music service (Music+ on Advanced lets kids search and make playlists).
- A set of essential apps, plus optional parent-approved third-party apps on the Advanced plan.
- Location, messaging and device settings in the **MyGabb** app on your phone.

HEADS UP

Contacts start out child-managed

Gabb says contacts on the Gabb Phone 4 are child-managed by default, with a parent-managed mode available in settings. If you want to approve every contact, switch that mode on during setup.

Plans and prices (as of November 2026)

Plan	Two-year contract	One-year contract	No contract	What's included
Standard	$29.99/mo	$31.99/mo	$34.99/mo	Unlimited talk & text, Gabb Messenger, group & picture messages, Gabb Music, essential apps, 25 GB Gabb Cloud
Advanced	$34.99/mo	$36.99/mo	$39.99/mo	Everything in Standard, plus Gabb Music+, optional third-party apps, 50 GB Gabb Cloud

Item	Details
Phone price at gabb.com	$249.99 for the Gabb Phone 4 (holiday 2026: $70 off when bought together with a Gabb Watch 3e)
Activation fee	$30

Item	Details
Change plans	Any time from your Gabb account; changing plans doesn't change your contract length
Older Starter plan	No longer offered to new customers; existing Starter customers can keep it

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why families choose it

It's a gentle step up from a watch: a real phone feel, cameras and music, but none of the open internet. Many families start on Standard and move to Advanced later without buying a new phone.

CHAPTER 11

Bark Phone & Bark Phone Pro

The **Bark Phone** is a Samsung Galaxy A16 with Bark's controls and monitoring built in so they can't be deleted. The **Bark Phone Pro** is a Samsung A37 with more memory, a tougher screen and better water resistance. There's no Bark branding on the outside; it looks like any Samsung phone.

What it allows

- On the **Starter** plan: calls and texts with approved contacts, GPS location and Bark's monitoring — no internet, app store or games. It works almost like a basic phone.
- On **Advanced** plans: apps and web browsers that *you* choose, with app-by-app approval, time limits, schedules and website blocking.
- Monitoring of texts, social media and online content, with alerts for possible problems.
- Tamper-proof settings, the option to stop texts from being deleted, a remote lock, and a driving lock that pauses the phone in a moving vehicle.
- Remote alarms you set from your phone for school mornings.

What it costs (as of November 2026)

Item	Cost
Bark Phone	$360 for the device (one-time)
Bark Phone Pro	$600 for the device (one-time)
Starter plan	$29 a month — talk and text, no internet, app store or games
Advanced plans	From $39 a month (Wi-Fi only, no cell data); with cell data, 4 GB costs ten dollars more, 8 GB is $59 and unlimited is $79 (slowed after heavy use)
Included	A Bark Premium subscription covering every child and device in the family
Device protection	Optional, about five dollars a month
Returns	60 days for the device price only; monthly service isn't refundable. U.S. only.

GOOD TO KNOW

You can move between plans without a new phone

Bark lets you switch from Starter to Advanced (or back) from the parent app, and the change takes effect in a few minutes. That makes it easy to begin very locked-down and loosen up gradually.

HEADS UP

Monitoring is a family conversation

Bark's strength is that it reads messages and flags concerns. Many families tell the child openly that the phone is monitored for safety. Kids who know the rules tend to trust them more than rules they discover later.

CHAPTER 12

Pinwheel Phones

Pinwheel sells Android phones from Samsung, Motorola and others with its parent-management system built in. Its unusual strength: you can use **any major carrier**, so a Pinwheel can be added to the family plan you already have.

What it allows

- A **safelist**: only numbers you approve can call or text. You can allow picture messages from some people (Grandma) and not others.
- Reading the child's texts remotely from the Caregiver Portal.
- Apps from Pinwheel's own library, each with a safety rating, and later the Google Play Store if you choose — but no social media or adult apps.
- No web browser by default.
- Schedules that turn the phone into a basic phone during school and overnight, then open apps and contacts during free time.
- Location on a map, with alerts when the child arrives at or leaves a saved place.

The phones (as listed November 2026)

Model	Notes
Genesis 4	"Great starter phone." 6.7-inch screen, 128 GB. Works on T-Mobile and AT&T networks — **not Verizon**, and not 5G.
Slim 6	6.5-inch screen, 64 GB. Works with all major carriers.
Plus 6	6.7-inch Super AMOLED screen, 128 GB, 5G. Works with all major carriers.

Plans (as of November 2026)

Option	Cost
Caregiver Portal only	$17.99 a month or $174.99 a year — the parental controls, and you bring a SIM card and plan from any major carrier
Pinwheel Wireless	$29.99 a month or $284.99 a year — unlimited calls and texts, 5 GB of fast data, and the Caregiver Portal
Multiple devices	Save 15%

TIP

Check the network before you pick a model

If your family is on Verizon and you plan to bring your own service, don't choose the Genesis 4 — Pinwheel lists it as not compatible with Verizon. The Slim 6 or Plus 6 would be the ones to look at.

GOOD TO KNOW

Phone prices change often

Pinwheel's phone prices vary by model and sale. I've left them out here on purpose; check pinwheel.com on the day you buy.

CHAPTER 13

Troomi & Other Kids' Phones

Gabb, Bark and Pinwheel aren't the only kids' phone companies. You'll see others in ads and on store shelves. Here's how to think about them.

Troomi

Troomi sells kids' phones and watches with a parent portal. Its phone plans are called **Do**, **Dream** and **Discover**, each adding more features than the last. Troomi raised the price of all three phone plans by five dollars a month — for new customers starting November 1, 2025, and for existing customers at their February 2026 billing date. Watch plans weren't affected.

Because I couldn't confirm Troomi's current dollar prices from Troomi itself, I've left them out. Check troomi.com for today's numbers and compare them using the questions below.

Questions to ask any kids' phone company

1. What is the full monthly cost, including taxes and fees, and is there a contract?
2. What is the device price, and is there an activation fee?
3. Which network does it run on, and does it work well at our home and the child's school?
4. Who controls the contact list — parent or child — and can I approve new contacts?
5. Is there a web browser or app store? Can I turn them on later, one app at a time?
6. Can the child call 911? Does an SOS button call me, 911, or both?
7. What happens if I cancel — do I keep the phone, and does it still work?
8. What is the return window?

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why these questions help

Every kids' phone sounds safe in its ads. These eight questions turn the marketing into facts you can line up side by side, the way Chapter 15 does for the companies in this guide.

CHAPTER 14

A Regular iPhone or Android, with Built-in Controls

Plenty of families hand down an older phone, or buy a standard one, and use the free controls from Apple or Google. In 2026 these tools are much stronger than they used to be — but they only help if you switch them on and lock them with a passcode the child doesn't know.

On an iPhone: Screen Time and Family Sharing

Apple's controls live in **Screen Time** and work through **Family Sharing**. The child needs their own Apple Account (a Child Account), not a parent's. With iOS 27, Apple added new parental controls, including:

- **Apps & Websites** — allow or block apps and sites, with **Ask to Buy** and **Ask to Browse** so the child sends you a request first. Ask to Browse is on by default for children under 13, and Limit Adult Websites is on by default for those under 18.
- **Allowed Contacts** — choose who the child can reach in Messages, FaceTime and Phone, and require your approval before they connect with anyone new. A message from someone new stays hidden until a parent approves.
- **Time Allowances** and **Screen Time Schedules** — a daily time budget across categories like games and social media, and different app access before, during and after school.
- **Content & Privacy Restrictions** — age ratings for music, TV and books, and locking settings like Share My Location.
- **Communication Safety** — helps protect a child from sending or receiving nude or violent images, including on live FaceTime calls. Apple doesn't see the photos.

GOOD TO KNOW

Every device in the family needs updating

Apple says the new iOS 27 controls sync properly only when the devices in your Family Sharing group are updated to the latest software. If a parent's older phone can't update, the previous version of Screen Time still works.

On an Android phone: Google Family Link

Google's free **Family Link** app lets a parent supervise a child's Google Account on an Android phone. You can:

- Approve or block apps from Google Play, and approve purchases.
- Set a daily screen time limit and a schedule, and give bonus time when it's earned.
- Lock the phone remotely. A locked phone can still answer calls and make emergency calls.
- See the phone's location.
- Restrict mature content on Google Play.

You can run the Family Link app on your own Android phone (6.0 or later) or on an iPhone or iPad (iOS 16 or later). The child's device must be an Android phone, a Chromebook or a compatible Fitbit — Family Link can't supervise an iPhone or iPad.

HEADS UP

A hand-me-down needs a fresh start

Before giving a child an old phone, back up anything you want to keep, then erase it completely and set it up new under the child's own account. Otherwise your email, photos, saved passwords and payment cards can go along with it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this can be the smart choice

No new company, no extra subscription, and you may already own the phone. For an older child, or a family already comfortable with iPhone or Android, the built-in tools can be all you need. Setup is in Chapter 20 (iPhone) and Chapter 21 (Android).

PART 4

Comparing & Paying

Everything side by side, what each choice really costs over a year or two, and how to handle the money and the rules when the device is a gift.

CHAPTER 15

Side by Side: What Each One Allows

Here are the options from Parts 2 and 3 in one place. Prices are what each company listed in November 2026, before taxes, fees and holiday sales. Use this to narrow the field to two or three, then read their chapters again.

The watches

Watch	Device	Monthly	Who can contact the child	Location	Emergency button
Gabb Watch 3e	$229.99	$12.99–$17.99	Parent-managed list	Yes (about every 15 min)	SOS calls a parent, not 911
Bark Watch	$288	$15	Contacts you add; approval optional	Yes	Hold a button for 911
Pinwheel Watch	$129	$14.99	Safelist only	Yes	Emergency contacts always on
Gizmo Watch 4	Ask Verizon	Verizon watch line	Up to 40 trusted contacts	Yes	Check with Verizon
Apple Watch For Your Kids	Cellular Apple Watch	Carrier watch line	Contacts you share	Yes, in Find My	Emergency SOS
Galaxy Watch for Kids	Galaxy Watch LTE	Carrier watch line	Contacts you choose	Yes	Emergency contacts always on

The phones

Phone	Device	Monthly	Browser / apps	Reads messages?	Bring your own carrier?
Gabb Phone 4	$249.99	$29.99–$39.99	No browser; approved apps on Advanced	Filters Gabb Messenger	No
Bark Phone	$360 ($600 Pro)	$29–$79	None on Starter; your choice on Advanced	Yes, with alerts	No
Pinwheel	Varies by model	$17.99 (own carrier) or $29.99	No browser by default; rated app library	Yes, you can read texts	Yes
Troomi	Check troomi.com	Do / Dream / Discover	Depends on plan	Check with Troomi	Check with Troomi
iPhone + Screen Time	Any recent iPhone	Any carrier line	Yes, with Ask to Browse	No (Communication Safety screens images)	Yes
Android + Family Link	Any recent Android	Any carrier line	Yes, with Google Play approval	No	Yes

TIP

Narrow it down in one minute

Younger child, just needs to call home: a watch. Pick Pinwheel or Gabb for simplicity, Bark if you want message alerts, Apple or Samsung if the parents' phones match. Tween who needs a phone: Gabb or Bark Starter if you want it locked down, Pinwheel if you want to stay on your current carrier. Older child, family already on iPhone or Android: the built-in controls.

GOOD TO KNOW

Coverage matters more than features

A watch that can't get a signal at school or at the ball field is no help. Kids' companies run on the big networks, so ask which one, and check coverage at the places the child actually goes.

CHAPTER 16

What It Really Costs

The price on the box is the smaller number. The monthly plan is what adds up. A simple way to compare is to work out the cost of the **first two years**: device price, plus activation, plus 24 months of service.

Two-year cost examples (November 2026 list prices, before tax)

Choice	Device + fees	24 months of service	About two-year total
Pinwheel Watch, monthly plan	$129	24 × $14.99 = $359.76	$489
Gabb Watch 3e, two-year contract	$229.99 + $30	24 × $12.99 = $311.76	$572
Bark Watch	$288	24 × $15 = $360	$648
Gabb Phone 4, Standard, two-year contract	$249.99 + $30	24 × $29.99 = $719.76	$1,000
Bark Phone, Starter plan	$360	24 × $29 = $696	$1,056
Pinwheel phone on your own carrier	Phone price varies	24 × $17.99 = $431.76, plus your carrier's line	Depends on your carrier

These are rough, rounded figures to help you compare — they leave out taxes, fees, discounts and sales. Yearly plans (Pinwheel) and family rates (Gabb) can lower them.

Costs people forget

- **Activation fees** — Gabb lists $30.
- **Contract endings** — Gabb's two-year price rises to the no-contract price when the contract ends, unless you sign a new one.
- **Device protection** — optional plans run a few dollars a month (Bark's is about four dollars for the watch and five for the phone).
- **A case and screen protector** — worth it for any child.
- **Replacement if lost** — kids lose things. Know what a replacement costs before it happens.
- **Taxes and fees** — they vary by state and company.

SCAM ALERT

"Your child's line will be cut off" calls and texts

Scammers pose as phone companies and say a bill is overdue or a line will be shut off unless you pay right now — often by gift card or a payment app. Real carriers don't demand gift cards. Hang up or don't reply, and check your account in the company's own app or by calling the number on your bill.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why the two-year view helps

A $129 watch with a $15 plan and a $360 phone with a $29 plan feel very different at checkout. Over two years, the gap is hundreds of dollars. Seeing the full number makes it easier to choose the device the child actually needs.

CHAPTER 17

Giving One as a Gift: Who Pays, Who Manages

A first phone or watch is a lovely present, and it comes with a few practical questions that are much easier to settle *before* the wrapping paper comes off. This chapter is especially for grandparents, aunts, uncles and family friends.

Have the quick conversation first

1. **Ask the parents if they're ready.** Some families have firm plans about age and type of device. A gift that doesn't fit those plans puts everyone in an awkward spot.
2. **Agree on the type.** Watch, kids' phone, or regular phone with controls? Use Chapter 15 together.
3. **Decide who pays the monthly plan.** The gift-giver, the parents, or a split. Be clear about how long — the first year, or until the contract ends.
4. **Decide who manages the controls.** Almost always the parents. The parent app should be on *their* phone.
5. **Decide whose account it's on.** See below.

Whose account should the line be on?

Option	What to know
On the parents' account	Usually best. The parents control the device, get the alerts and handle support calls. A grandparent can still pay by sending money or buying a prepaid year where offered.
On the gift-giver's account	Works, but you'll get the bills and customer-service calls, and you may need to be involved every time a setting changes. Only do this if the parents agree.
Prepaid or yearly plan	Pinwheel offers yearly prices ($164.99 for the watch, $284.99 for Pinwheel Wireless). A paid-up year can make a tidy gift.

Adding a line to an existing family plan

If the parents already have a plan with Verizon, AT&T, T-Mobile or another carrier, adding a watch or phone line there can be simple. Each line has its own monthly charge, so ask the carrier for the exact price of a watch line and a phone line on your plan. Options that work on your own carrier include the Apple Watch, the Galaxy Watch for Kids, Verizon's Gizmo Watch (Verizon only), and Pinwheel phones with the Caregiver-Portal-only option. Gabb, Bark and Pinwheel Wireless provide their own service instead.

TIP

Wrap the box, set it up together

Many families find it works best to give the device in its box and set it up together that day, following Part 5. The child sees the rules being set, and nobody has to undo a setup done the wrong way in advance.

FROM BILL

A gift idea that isn't a gadget

If you're not sure which device the family wants, consider giving the setup instead. I can sit down with the parents and child, help them choose, and set up the controls properly. $49 remote · $99 in your home.

PART 5

Setting It Up

A checklist for the big day, then slow, step-by-step setup for an Apple Watch, an iPhone with Screen Time, an Android phone with Family Link, and the kids' phone companies.

CHAPTER 18

Before the Big Day: A Setup Checklist

A little preparation turns setup from a frustrating hour into a pleasant one. Gather these before you start, ideally a day ahead.

1. **Charge everything** — the new device and the parent's phone.
2. **Update the parent's phone** to the latest software. Apple's newest controls need it (Chapter 14).
3. **Know your Wi-Fi name and password.**
4. **Have the parent's account password handy** — Apple Account, Google Account, or the kids' phone company account.
5. **Decide the child's account details** — the name and birth date to use for their own account. Use the child's real birth date so age-based protections switch on correctly.
6. **Make the contact list** — names and numbers of everyone the child may call or text: parents, grandparents, a neighbor, a best friend's parent.
7. **Choose a passcode for the controls** that the child won't guess, and write it somewhere safe.
8. **Download the parent app** on the parent's phone: MyGabb, Bark, Pinwheel Caregiver, Verizon Family, or Family Link — whichever matches the device.
9. **If you're moving a number**, have the old account number and PIN from the current carrier.

TIP

Set it up with the child, not for them

Let the child sit beside you. Explain each setting as you choose it — "this means only people on this list can text you." It's the start of the family agreement in Chapter 23.

GOOD TO KNOW

Keep the box and receipt

Return windows are short — Gabb lists 15 days, Pinwheel's watch 30 days, Bark 60 days for the device. Keep the packaging until you're sure the device works well at home and at school.

CHAPTER 19

Setting Up an Apple Watch for Your Child

This uses **Apple Watch For Your Kids** (Chapter 8). You'll need your own iPhone, a cellular Apple Watch, the child's Apple Account, and Family Sharing. If you haven't set up Family Sharing yet, do Chapter 20's first section first.

Turn on the watch and start pairing

1. If the watch isn't new, erase it first.
2. Put the watch on the child's wrist (or your own) and press and hold the **side button** until the Apple logo appears.
3. Hold the watch near your iPhone. When **Use your iPhone to set up this Apple Watch** appears, tap **Continue**. If it doesn't appear, open the **Apple Watch** app on your iPhone, tap **All Watches**, then tap **Add Watch**.
4. Tap **Set Up for a Family Member**, then tap **Continue**.
5. Hold your iPhone over the swirling animation on the watch so the watch face is centered in the viewfinder. Wait for the message that the watch is paired. (Can't use the camera? Tap **Pair Apple Watch Manually**.)
6. Tap **Set Up Apple Watch**.

Passcode, family member and Ask to Buy

1. Tap **Agree** on the Terms and Conditions, then choose a text size.
2. Set a passcode for the watch.
3. Choose the child from your family list. If they aren't there, tap **Add Family Member**.
4. Enter the child's Apple Account password, then tap **Next**.
5. Turn on **Ask to Buy** so you approve any downloads or purchases.

Cellular, Wi-Fi and features

1. If your carrier supports Apple Watch For Your Kids, you can add the watch to your plan now. Otherwise tap **Not Now** and contact a supported carrier afterward.
2. Choose whether to share your current Wi-Fi network with the watch.
3. Go through the feature screens. Turn on **Location Services** for Find My so you can see where the watch is, and set up **Emergency Contacts** and **Medical ID**.

Contacts and Schooltime

1. Make sure Contacts are saved to iCloud on your iPhone: open **Settings**, tap your name, tap **iCloud**, tap **Saved to iCloud**, and check that **Contacts** is on.
2. Choose the trusted people from your Contacts to share with the watch.
3. Set a **Screen Time passcode** for the watch — one the child doesn't know.
4. Turn on **Schooltime** and set the school days and hours.
5. Tap **OK**. The watch is ready.

Changing settings later

1. Open the **Apple Watch** app on the iPhone you used for setup.
2. Tap **All Watches**, tap the child's watch under **Family Watches**, then tap **Done**.
3. Choose the setting you want to change.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Once it's set up, the child can call and text the people you chose and you can see where they are — and you change anything later from your own phone, without taking the watch off their wrist.

CHAPTER 20

Setting Up Screen Time on a Child's iPhone

Apple's parental controls work through **Family Sharing**, and the child needs their own Apple Account (a Child Account). Do these steps on the **parent's** iPhone.

Step 1: Set up Family Sharing

1. Open **Settings** and tap your name.
2. Tap **Family**, then tap **Continue**.
3. Follow the onscreen steps to create your family group. Family Sharing can include you and up to five family members.

Step 2: Add the child

1. Open **Settings** and tap **Family**.
2. Tap the **Add Member** button.
3. If the child doesn't have an account yet, tap **Create Child Account** and follow the steps. If they already have a Child Account, tap **Invite Others** and have them enter their password on your phone.
4. Follow the remaining screens to set up parental controls, location sharing and more.

> TIP
>
> **Setting up the child's iPhone itself**
>
> On a new iPhone set up for a child, open **Settings** on the child's phone and tap **Connect to Family**, then follow the steps. Age-appropriate settings switch on automatically.

Step 3: Turn on Screen Time for the child

1. On your iPhone, open **Settings**.
2. Tap **Family**, then tap the child's name.
3. Tap **Screen Time**, then follow the onscreen instructions to set up the controls.
4. When asked, set the child's **Screen Time passcode** on **your** device. Apple says that with Family Sharing, the parent must set it on their own device, not the child's.

Step 4: Settings worth choosing on day one

- **Apps & Websites:** keep **Ask to Buy** and **Ask to Browse** on, so new apps and new websites come to you as a request.
- **Allowed Contacts:** add the family's trusted contacts and require approval for anyone new.
- **Screen Time Schedules:** set school hours and a bedtime so only calls and a few apps work then.
- **Time Allowances:** set a daily budget for games and entertainment.
- **Content & Privacy Restrictions:** set age ratings and lock **Share My Location** on.
- **Communication Safety:** leave it on.

GOOD TO KNOW

Laws can lock some settings on

Apple notes that rules vary by state. Where legally required, a child under 18 must be in a Family Sharing group, and some settings — like Screen Time and Ask to Buy — can't be turned off.

CHAPTER 21

Setting Up Family Link on a Child's Android Phone

Google's **Family Link** supervises a child's Google Account on an Android phone. The parent must be 18 or older, have a Google Account, and live in the same country as the child. The parent app runs on Android 6.0 or later, or on an iPhone or iPad with iOS 16 or later.

Step 1: Create or supervise the child's account

1. Install the **Family Link** app on your own phone and sign in with your Google Account.
2. Use the app to create a Google Account for a child under 13, or to add supervision to an older child's existing account.
3. On the child's Android phone, sign in with the child's account and follow the steps to link it to you.

Step 2: Set screen time limits

1. Open the **Family Link** app.
2. At the top left, select your child.
3. At the bottom left, tap **Screen time**, then **Time limits**.
4. Turn on **Daily limit**.
5. Tap **Weekly schedule**, select a day, and enter how much screen time is allowed.
6. To use the same limit every day, tap **Apply to all days of the week**, then **Done**.

Step 3: Block or allow apps

1. Open **Family Link** and select your child.
2. Tap **Screen time**, then **Time limits**, then **App limits**.
3. Tap an app, then tap the **Allowed** switch to block it (or **Blocked** to allow it), and tap **Done**. It takes effect in about five minutes, once the phone is online.

Step 4: Turn on location

1. Open **Family Link**.
2. Tap **Location**, then **Set up location**.
3. If you have more than one child, choose which ones.
4. Tap **Next**, then **Turn on**.

GOOD TO KNOW

What a locked phone can still do

When the daily limit runs out or you lock the phone, the child can't open apps, but they can still answer phone calls and tap **Emergency** to make an emergency call.

HEADS UP

Write down the parent access code

Family Link gives parents an access code that can unlock the child's phone even when it's offline. Keep it somewhere safe — not on the child's phone.

CHAPTER 22

Setting Up a Gabb, Bark or Pinwheel Device

Each kids' phone company has its own app and its own screens, and they update them often. The good news is that the steps follow the same pattern. Use this chapter alongside the quick start guide in the box.

The common steps

1. **Activate the line.** Devices ordered directly from Gabb ship already active. Gabb devices bought from a store like Amazon or Walmart are activated at gabb.com/activate. For Bark and Pinwheel, follow the activation steps in the box and in their parent apps.
2. **Install the parent app** on your phone: MyGabb, the Bark app, or Pinwheel Caregiver. Sign in with the account you used to buy the device.
3. **Turn on the child's device**, connect it to Wi-Fi, and let it finish any updates.
4. **Add the contacts** the child may call and text. On a Gabb Phone 4, switch on parent-managed contacts if you want to approve every one.
5. **Set the schedules** — school hours and bedtime.
6. **Choose apps** if your plan allows them. Start with very few.
7. **Turn on location** and add safe places like home and school.
8. **Test it together:** have the child call you, text you, and check that you can see them on the map.

Where to find each company's help

Company	Help
Gabb	gabb.com/support, and the MyGabb app
Bark	bark.us and the Bark parent app; Bark says setup takes minutes and every rule is changed from your own phone
Pinwheel	support.pinwheel.com; live care daily 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Central, call or text (888) 903-7977

TIP

Moving an old number to the new device

If the child already has a number on another line, ask the new company about number transfer (porting) during checkout. Bark says it transfers numbers at no extra cost. Have the old account number and PIN ready.

PART 6

Living With It

House rules everyone agrees on, location sharing done kindly, the scams and dangers aimed at kids, and what to do when the device is lost, broken or dead.

CHAPTER 23

A Family Agreement Everyone Signs

Settings do part of the job. The rest is a clear, friendly agreement about how the device is used. Writing it down — and having the child help write it — turns rules into a shared plan instead of a list of punishments.

What to include

- **Where it sleeps:** many families charge devices overnight in a kitchen or hallway, not the bedroom.
- **When it's off:** meals, homework time, and bedtime.
- **Who they can talk to:** only people on the approved list. New contacts get added together.
- **What they'll tell you:** anything that makes them uncomfortable, scared or confused — with a promise that telling you won't get them in trouble.
- **Photos:** never share photos of themselves or friends without asking, and never send a photo they wouldn't want a grandparent to see.
- **Money:** no purchases, gift cards or codes without asking first.
- **Location:** location sharing stays on, and why (Chapter 24).
- **What the parents will do:** check in kindly, explain any monitoring, and review the rules every few months.
- **How freedom grows:** what the child can earn next — a new app, a later bedtime, more contacts.

A simple agreement to copy

Who	Promise
I will	Keep my device charged and bring it home every day.
I will	Only call and text people on my list, and ask before adding anyone new.
I will	Tell a grown-up right away if anything online makes me feel bad or scared.
I will	Never send money, gift cards, codes or photos to anyone who asks online.
I will	Put my device on the charger in the kitchen at ____ p.m.
My parents will	Listen without getting angry when I tell them about a problem.
My parents will	Look at the rules with me again on _____ and see what I've earned.
Signed	Child: _____ Parent: _____ Date: _____

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this works

When something goes wrong — and something small usually does — you both have a calm place to start: "Let's look at our agreement." It keeps the focus on the plan rather than on blame.

TIP

Grandparents: you're part of it too

If the child spends time at your house, ask for a copy of the agreement and follow the same rules there. Consistency between homes makes the rules much easier for a child to keep.

CHAPTER 24

Location Sharing, Done Kindly

Nearly every device in this guide lets a parent see where the child is. Used well, it's a quiet safety net. Used badly, it can feel like being watched every minute. A few habits keep it on the right side of that line.

Where you'll see the location

Device	Where parents look
Gabb	The MyGabb app. On the Gabb Watch 3e, location updates about every 15 minutes.
Bark	The Bark parent app.
Pinwheel	The Caregiver Portal dashboard, with alerts for saved places.
Verizon Gizmo Watch 4	The Verizon Family app, with safe zones.
Apple Watch or iPhone	The Find My app on the parent's iPhone, once location sharing is on during setup.
Galaxy Watch for Kids or Android	Google Family Link (Location, then Set up location).

Good habits

- **Tell the child it's on, and why.** "So I can find you if you need me" lands better than a secret.
- **Use safe-zone alerts instead of constant checking.** An alert when they reach school or home is often all you need.
- **Don't use it to catch them out.** If the map surprises you, ask a calm question first.
- **Agree on what happens as they grow.** Teens may earn less frequent checking.

GOOD TO KNOW

Location isn't perfect

Location depends on the device being on, charged and connected. Samsung, for example, notes that location sharing may not be reliable in an emergency and that Airplane Mode turns it off. Treat the map as helpful, not as a guarantee.

STAY SAFE

Lock location sharing so it stays on

On a child's iPhone, use **Content & Privacy Restrictions** in Screen Time to stop changes to **Share My Location**. On kids' phones, location settings are controlled from the parent app.

CHAPTER 25

Scams & Dangers Aimed at Kids

Kids are targeted online just like adults, but the bait is different. The best protection isn't any app — it's a child who recognizes the tricks and knows they can tell you anything.

The tricks to teach

SCAM ALERT

"Free" game money, skins and prizes

Messages and videos promise free in-game currency, rare items or prizes if the child signs in on a website, shares a code, or downloads something. These are used to steal accounts and passwords. Rule of thumb for kids: real games never give free currency through a link from a stranger.

SCAM ALERT

"Buy me a gift card" requests

Someone a child met online — or someone pretending to be a friend or family member — asks for a gift card or the numbers on the back. Gift cards are a favorite way for scammers to take money. Teach the child: never buy or share gift card codes for anyone online, and always ask a grown-up first.

SCAM ALERT

"Let's talk somewhere else"

A stranger who is friendly in a game chat and then asks to move to a private app, asks the child's age or school, or says "don't tell your parents" is a serious warning sign. The child should stop replying and show you right away.

Sextortion: the one every family should discuss

In sextortion, someone tricks or pressures a young person into sending a private photo, then threatens to share it unless they pay or send more. The child often feels ashamed and afraid to tell anyone. Say plainly, ahead of time: **if this ever happens, you will not be in trouble. Come to us, and we'll handle it together.**

- Don't pay, and don't send anything more.

- Stop replying, but don't delete the account or messages — they may be needed as evidence.
- Report it to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's **CyberTipline** (missingkids.org/cybertipline).
- Use NCMEC's free **Take It Down** service (takeitdown.ncmec.org) to help remove or stop the sharing of explicit images taken before age 18. The image never leaves the child's device — only a digital fingerprint is sent, and the child can stay anonymous.

GOOD TO KNOW

Built-in protection helps, too

On an iPhone, Apple's **Communication Safety** helps protect a child from sending or receiving nude images, including on live FaceTime calls. On Bark devices, monitoring alerts parents to concerning messages. Neither replaces the conversation, but both are worth turning on.

Scams aimed at the grown-ups

SCAM ALERT

Fake "kids' phone" deals and support

Around the holidays, look out for ads and websites offering kids' phones or watches at prices far below the company's own, and for calls or texts claiming to be the company's support team asking for your password or a payment. Buy from the company's real website or a well-known store, and contact support only through the company's own app or website.

CHAPTER 26

Lost, Broken or Dead: What to Do

Kids and devices have adventures. Here's what to do in the most common situations.

If it's lost

1. Check the location in the parent app (Chapter 24). Often it's at school, in a car or at a friend's house.
2. Call the device. A ring from a backpack solves many mysteries.
3. If it's an Apple device, use **Find My**. If it's Android with Family Link, check the location there.
4. If it's truly gone, contact the company to suspend the line so no one can use it, and ask about a replacement and any protection plan you bought.

If it's broken

- Check the warranty and any device protection plan (Bark offers one through AKKO; Gabb has its own warranty page; Pinwheel has a protection plan).
- For water, power it off, dry the outside, and contact support before charging it.
- Look up the return window if it failed in the first days or weeks.

If the battery keeps dying

- Make charging part of the bedtime routine, in the same spot every night.
- Watches usually need charging every night or two.
- Turn down screen brightness and remove apps or games that aren't needed.
- If a new device can't last a school day, contact support while it's under warranty.

TIP

Write the support numbers down now

When something goes wrong is the worst time to hunt for a phone number. Fill in the company's support contact on the cheat-sheet in Chapter 28 today.

PART 7

When to Call Bill & Your Cheat-Sheet

An honest word about when a hand is worth it, and a one-page summary to keep with the parent app.

CHAPTER 27

When to Call Bill

I've written this guide so you can choose and set up a child's first device on your own. But part of being truly helpful is being honest about when a hand saves you time and worry — so here's my straight advice, with no pressure.

Times it's well worth a call

- **You can't decide.** I'll go through your family's needs and budget and give you an honest opinion, including "wait another year" if that's what I'd do.
- **Setting up Family Sharing or Family Link** with the right accounts, birth dates and passcodes — the part that's hardest to undo if it's done wrong.
- **Turning on the controls properly** — contacts, schedules, app approvals, location — and showing the parents how to change them later.
- **Preparing a hand-me-down phone**: backing it up, erasing it safely and setting it up fresh for the child.
- **Grandparents giving a gift** who'd like the setup handled with the family, so it's ready to go on the day.
- **Something feels wrong** — a strange contact, a scary message, or a setting that won't stay put.

What working with me is like

I work at your pace — no rushing, no talking down, and no selling you a gadget you don't need. I don't earn anything from any of the companies in this guide. I serve families here in Portage County, Ohio, in their homes and by remote help, and I bring more than 30 years of professional experience to every visit.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call **(330) 200-8042**, or book a time at **billshometech.com/book**. Help is $49 remote · $99 in your home. No question is too small.

GOOD TO KNOW

You may meet Sophie first

When you call or visit billshometech.com, you may be greeted by **Sophie**, my AI receptionist. She can answer quick questions and book a time with me. The actual help always comes from me.

Thank you for taking such care with a child's first step into the connected world. Take your time, set the rules together, and remember I'm only a phone call away.

— Bill

CHAPTER 28

Your First Phone or Watch Cheat-Sheet

Print this and keep it with the box. The whole guide, boiled down.

Choosing in a nutshell

Situation	Good fit
Young child, needs to call home	A kids' watch: Pinwheel Watch, Gabb Watch 3e, Bark Watch, or an Apple or Galaxy watch if the parents' phones match.
Tween, needs a phone	A kids' phone: Gabb Phone 4, Bark Phone (Starter), or Pinwheel to stay on your carrier.
Older child, family on iPhone or Android	A regular phone with Screen Time or Family Link, locked with a passcode.
Not sure	Waiting is fine. Talk it over and revisit in a few months.

Before you buy, ask

- What's the full monthly cost, and is there a contract or activation fee?
- Which network does it use, and does it work at home and school?
- Who controls contacts, and can the child reach 911?
- What's the return window?

Write it down once

Keep handy	
Device and company	_____
Child's phone number	_____
Parent app and sign-in email	_____
Controls passcode (keep private)	_____
Company support contact	_____
Contract end date	_____
Return window ends	_____
Agreement review date	_____

When something's wrong, in order

1. Can't reach the child? Check the location in the parent app, then call the device.
2. Device won't work? Charge it, then restart it.
3. Setting not sticking? Check it in the parent app, and make sure the parent's phone is up to date.
4. Lost for good? Contact the company to suspend the line.
5. Something scary online? Stay calm, keep the messages, and see Chapter 25.
6. Still stuck? Call Bill at (330) 200-8042.

Habits that keep it working

- Charge it in the same place every night.
- Add new contacts together.
- Review the family agreement every few months.
- Loosen the rules a step at a time as the child earns it.