BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Staying in Touch

Video calls, photos, and messages with the people you love — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide to staying close across the miles

The technology is easy — the connection is the point

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Covers FaceTime, video calls, photos & messaging · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your staying-in-touch manual. Read it in any order and at your own pace. It gathers every easy way to see and hear the people you love — video calls, sharing photos, group messages, and more — and explains each one slowly, for whatever kind of phone, tablet, or computer you and your family happen to have.

Part 1 — Getting Started

1 A Note from Bill
2 Why Staying Connected Matters
3 The Golden Rule: Use What They Use
4 Getting Set Up (with a Little Help)

Part 2 — Seeing Their Faces: Video Calls

5 Which Video-Call App to Use
6 Making a Video Call
7 Making Video Calls Lovely
8 Calling the Whole Family at Once
9 When a Video Call Won't Connect

Part 3 — Photos & Little Moments

10 Receiving Photos of the Grandchildren
11 Shared Albums: Photos That Arrive on Their Own
12 Sending Your Own Photos Back
13 Apps Made Just for Family Photos

Part 4 — Messages & Everyday Chatter

14 Texting: The Everyday Thread
15 The Family Group Chat
16 Voice Messages: Speak Instead of Type
17 Warm Little Touches
18 Following the Family on Facebook

Part 5 — Doing Things Together, Apart

19 Reading a Bedtime Story Together
20 Playing Games Together
21 Little Video Moments (Marco Polo)
22 Watching & Celebrating Together
23 Building a Simple Weekly Rhythm

Part 6 — Connecting at Every Age

24 Babies & Toddlers

25 Young Children
26 Tweens & Teenagers

Part 7 — Keeping It Safe, Warm & Lasting

27 Staying Safe & Respecting the Parents
28 Blending the Digital with the Old-Fashioned
29 Your Everyday Cheat-Sheet & Glossary
30 When to Call Bill

PART 1

Getting Started

Why staying connected matters, the one golden rule that makes it all easier, and how to get set up with a little help from the family. The gentle beginning.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. If the miles between you and your grandchildren feel a little too wide — and you'd love to see their faces, hear about their days, and be part of their lives even from far away — this book is for **you**. There's no sweeter use of all this technology, and I'm so glad to help you with it.

I'm Bill. Helping folks feel at home with their technology is what I do every day, and I wrote this book the way I'd talk it through at your kitchen table: warmly, in plain English, with no rushing. The technology here is genuinely easy — and the connection it brings is priceless.

This isn't really about technology

Let's be honest about what this book is *for*. It's not about apps and gadgets for their own sake — it's about being there for a bedtime story, seeing the first lost tooth, hearing "I love you, Grandma" on an ordinary Tuesday. The technology is just the bridge. We'll keep it simple so the bridge stays out of the way and the *connection* shines through.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this book gives you

Ways to see their faces whenever you like, to share photos and little moments both directions, to chat through the day, and even to read a book or play a game together across any distance. Whatever phone, tablet, or computer you and your family happen to have, there's an easy way — and this book shows you each one.

You don't have to learn it all

You needn't master everything here. Pick the one or two things that fit your family best — maybe just video calls and shared photos — and those alone will transform how close you feel. And if you ever get stuck, you're never stuck alone. Call me at **(330) 200-8042** and we'll sort it out together.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

Why Staying Connected Matters

You already know in your heart why this matters, but it's worth saying plainly, because it's the fuel that makes learning a little technology more than worth it.

For the grandchildren

Children who stay close to their grandparents gain something researchers and families alike have long understood: a deeper sense of belonging, a living link to their history, and the steady love of someone who simply delights in them. Your regular presence — even through a screen — tells a child they are treasured. That's a gift that shapes a whole life.

For you

And it flows both ways. Staying woven into your grandchildren's lives keeps your own days bright, your heart full, and your mind engaged. The little updates, the giggles, the drawings held up to the camera — these are the joys that make the years rich. Distance no longer has to mean missing out.

GOOD TO KNOW

Little and often beats rare and grand

Here's a lovely truth about staying connected: it's the *small, frequent* touches that build closeness, not the occasional big event. A two-minute video call to say goodnight, a photo of the garden, a quick "thinking of you" — these ordinary moments, repeated, are what make a grandchild feel you're truly part of their world. You don't need grand gestures; you need presence, and technology makes presence easy.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Distance stops being separation

The whole promise of this book is that living far apart no longer has to mean growing apart. With a few easy tools, you can be a daily, loving presence in your grandchildren's lives — seeing them grow, sharing their moments, and giving them the irreplaceable gift of a grandparent who's always near, even from miles away.

CHAPTER 3

The Golden Rule: Use What They Use

Before we look at any particular app, here's the single most important piece of advice in the whole book — the one that saves the most frustration. If you remember nothing else, remember this.

Meet your family where they already are

Use whatever your family already uses. If your daughter's family does everything through FaceTime, learn FaceTime. If they live on WhatsApp, learn WhatsApp. If the whole clan has a group chat going, join that one. Don't ask everyone to switch to a new app for you — instead, step into the one they're already in. It's far easier for you to learn one tool than for a busy family to change their habits.

How to find out what they use

Simply ask. A phone call to your son or daughter: "I want to be able to video-call the kids and see photos easily — what do you all use for that?" They'll tell you in a moment, and they'll likely be delighted you asked. Then you learn *that* one thing, and you're in their world.

TIP

One well-chosen app beats five half-learned ones

You do not need to learn every app in this book — please don't try. Find the one or two your family actually uses, learn those well, and ignore the rest until you have reason to care. A single app you're comfortable with, shared with your family, is worth more than a dozen you half-remember.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

The easy path to being included

Stepping into the app your family already lives in means you're instantly part of the conversation — the group chats, the shared photos, the quick video calls — without anyone having to change a thing for you. It's the shortest, gentlest road to feeling truly connected, and it starts with one simple question to your family.

CHAPTER 4

Getting Set Up (with a Little Help)

The very first setup — installing an app, signing in, making sure it works — is the one part where a helping hand makes everything smoother. The good news: the people most able to help are the very ones you want to connect with. Let's make that first step easy.

Enlist the family for setup

Your children (and even older grandchildren) can set you up in minutes — and they'll be glad to, because they want to hear from you too. Ask them to help you:

- **Install the right app** on your phone or tablet, from the official app store.
- **Sign in or create an account**, and save the password somewhere safe.
- **Add the family** as your contacts, so they're ready to reach with a tap.
- **Do a practice call or message** together, so you've done it once with them right there.

If the family is far away too

If no one's nearby to help in person, they can often walk you through it over the phone, or even connect to help remotely. And of course, that's exactly what I'm here for — I can get you set up and comfortable, and make sure that first call to the grandchildren goes off without a hitch.

TIP

Do a trial run before the real thing

Before your first "real" video call with the grandchildren, do a quick practice call with your son or daughter, with no little ones watching. Get comfortable with the buttons, the camera, the sound — so when the grandkids pop up on screen, you can relax and just enjoy them. A five-minute rehearsal takes all the nerves out of it.

FROM BILL

I'll get you set up and confident

Setting up your family-connection apps and doing a practice run together is one of my favorite things to help with — because I know what's waiting on the other side of it. In one friendly visit or call, we'll get everything installed, the family added, and your nerves settled, so you can get straight to the good part: seeing those faces. Call me at **(330) 200-8042**.

PART 2

Seeing Their Faces: Video Calls

The heart of long-distance grandparenting — the video-call apps, how to make a call, the little habits that make it lovely, and calling the whole family at once.

CHAPTER 5

Which Video-Call App to Use

A **video call** — a phone call where you can see each other — is the crown jewel of staying close. Nothing else lets you watch a grandchild's face light up in real time. There are several apps that do it, all free, and (remember the golden rule) the right one is whichever your family uses.

The main video-call apps

App	Best for
FaceTime	Apple's built-in app. Lovely and simple — but works only between Apple devices (iPhone, iPad, Mac). Perfect if everyone has an iPhone. (It can now invite others by link, too.)
WhatsApp	Free, works across BOTH iPhone and Android, handles video calls, texts, and photos. A superb choice when the family is a mix of phone types.
Facebook Messenger	Free video calls for anyone with a Facebook account — which many families already have.
Zoom	Great for group calls and the whole family at once; works on everything. Often used for bigger gatherings.
Google Meet / Duo	Google's free option, works across devices, good if the family uses Google.

They all do the same lovely thing — let you see and hear each other. Pick the one your family already uses, learn it, and you're set. If your family is all-Apple, FaceTime is the easiest. If it's a mix, WhatsApp is a wonderful common ground.

GOOD TO KNOW

Why the "which app" question matters here

Video apps are the one place where phone type genuinely matters: FaceTime won't call an Android phone, for instance. That's exactly why we ask the family what *they* use. Once you're both in the same app, the differences vanish and it just works. So before anything else, find out the family's app — then this whole part is easy.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

The next best thing to being in the room

A video call turns "how are you?" into really *seeing* how they are — the new haircut, the wobbly first steps, the proud show-and-tell. Across any distance, it puts you in the same room for a while. Of everything in this book, this is the tool that most melts the miles away.

CHAPTER 6

Making a Video Call

The steps are much the same in every app, so once you've done it in one, you can do it in any. Let's walk through it gently. We'll use the general pattern; your family's app will look a little different, but the idea is identical.

Starting a call

1. Open the app your family uses (FaceTime, WhatsApp, and so on).
2. Find the person or family you want to call — in your contacts or recent chats.
3. Tap the **video camera** icon to start a video call (a plain phone icon is a voice-only call).
4. It rings on their end. When they answer, there they are! A small picture of yourself usually sits in a corner, so you can see what they see.
5. To hang up, tap the red button.

Answering a call

When a grandchild (or their parent) calls you, your screen lights up and rings. Tap the green **Accept** button (or slide it, if your phone is locked) to answer, or the red one to decline. That's all there is to it — and oh, the joy on the other end when you pick up.

TIP

Prop the phone up so your hands are free

Holding the phone through a whole call gets tiring and makes the picture wobble. Lean it against a stack of books, or use a small stand, so it sits steady at about eye level. Then your hands are free to wave, clap, hold up a drawing, or just relax — and the grandchildren see a steady, smiling you.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

A two-minute call can make a child's whole day

You don't need a long or scheduled call for it to matter. A quick "just wanted to see your face" call at bedtime, or to hear about a good day at school, tells a grandchild they're on your mind. Those little, frequent calls are the threads that weave a close bond, and now they're a tap away.

CHAPTER 7

Making Video Calls Lovely

A few gentle habits turn a video call from a shaky, awkward few minutes into something that feels warm and natural — especially with little ones, who can be a handful on camera. None of this is fussy; it's just what makes a call feel good.

Little things that make a big difference

- **Light on your face, not behind you.** Sit facing a window or lamp so the grandchildren can see you clearly. A bright window *behind* you turns you into a shadow.
- **Look at the camera now and then**, not just the screen. To them, looking at the little camera dot feels like you're meeting their eyes.
- **Get the phone steady** (propped up) so the picture doesn't lurch about.
- **Be somewhere quiet-ish** so they can hear you — turn down the TV.
- **Be patient with wiggly little ones.** They may wander off, show you a toy, or go shy. That's normal — let the call be loose and playful, not a performance.

Give little ones something to DO

Young children do far better on a call when there's an *activity*, not just talking. Read them a story, sing a song, show them your pet, play peekaboo, give them a "tour" of your garden, or ask to see *their* favorite toy. Doing something together holds their attention far better than "so how was your day?" — and it's more fun for everyone.

TIP

Shorter and happier beats long and restless

With young children especially, a joyful ten-minute call beats a draggy half-hour. End while it's still fun, on a high note, and they'll look forward to the next one. There's no prize for length — the goal is that both of you come away smiling and wanting more.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Calls they actually look forward to

A little light, a steady phone, and a song or story make your calls something the grandchildren *ask* for, not sit through. You become "the grandma who reads me a story" or "the grandpa who shows me the birds" — a warm, regular joy in their week, however far away you are.

CHAPTER 8

Calling the Whole Family at Once

Sometimes you want *everyone* — both families, all the grandchildren, the whole clan on screen together for a birthday, a holiday, or just a Sunday catch-up. A **group video call** makes that possible, and it's grand fun.

How group video calls work

A group call simply has more than two people on it at once, each in their own little box on the screen. Most apps do it, and **Zoom** is especially popular for bigger gatherings because it handles lots of people smoothly.

1. Usually, one person **starts** the group call and invites the others — often a younger family member who's handy with it.
2. You'll get a notification or a **link** to join. Tap it, and you're in with everyone.
3. Each person appears in their own square. Whoever's talking is often highlighted.
4. Settle in and enjoy — it's the closest thing to a family gathering across the miles.

TIP

Let a younger relative "host"

Group calls are easiest when one tech-comfortable family member sets them up and sends everyone the link — you just tap to join. Don't feel you need to organize it yourself. Your job is simply to show up and be your lovely self; let a grandchild or grown child handle the buttons.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

The whole family together, any distance

Group video calls bring back something precious that distance had taken: everyone in one "room" at once, laughing over each other, opening presents, singing happy birthday. For holidays and milestones when you can't all be together in person, it's the next best thing — and a tradition many families now treasure.

CHAPTER 9

When a Video Call Won't Connect

Now and then a video call misbehaves — frozen picture, no sound, or it just won't connect. Don't let it rattle you; it's almost always a small, quick fix. Here's your first-aid guide so a hiccup never spoils the moment.

The common troubles and their fixes

If this happens…	…try this
They can't hear you	Check you're not muted — look for a microphone button with a line through it and tap it to unmute. Turn your volume up too.
You can't see them (or they you)	Make sure the camera is on (a camera button, not crossed out). Check nothing is covering the lens.
The picture freezes or is choppy	A weak internet moment. Move closer to your Wi-Fi router, or hang up and call back.
The call won't connect at all	Check you're online (Wi-Fi or signal at the top of the screen). Make sure you're both using the same app.
Everything's acting up	Close the app fully and reopen it, or restart the phone. Fixes most things.

The two-step reset

When in doubt: first, **hang up and call again** — a fresh call clears most glitches. If that fails, **restart your phone** (off and on) and try once more. Between those two, you'll solve the great majority of call troubles, and neither can harm anything.

TIP

Muted is the number-one culprit — check it first

If the grandchildren are waving and talking but you hear nothing, or they say they can't hear you, the cause is almost always a **mute button** or the **volume turned down**. Everyone does it — look for the microphone button and make sure it isn't crossed out, and turn the volume up. Nine times in ten, that's the whole fix.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

A hiccup, not a heartbreak

Knowing the few simple fixes means a glitchy call never has to end the visit in frustration. Unmute, turn up the volume, or hang up and call back — and you're face to face again in seconds. The confidence that you can handle the little bumps is what lets you relax and just enjoy the call.

PART 3

Photos & Little Moments

Receiving the photos you long to see, shared albums that fill up on their own, sending your own pictures back, and the apps made just for sharing family photos.

CHAPTER 10

Receiving Photos of the Grandchildren

After seeing their faces live, the next great joy is **photos** — the everyday snapshots of the grandchildren that let you watch them grow. Getting these flowing to you is one of the simplest and most rewarding things in this whole book.

The ways photos arrive

Family will send you photos in one of a few ways, and all are easy to view:

- **In a text message** — the simplest. A photo pops up in your Messages; tap it to see it large, and press-and-hold (or tap the share button) to save it.
- **In a chat app** — WhatsApp, Messenger, and the like show photos right in the conversation, same as texts.
- **In a shared album** — a special shared folder that new photos drop into automatically (we'll set this up next — it's wonderful).
- **By email** — photos attached to an email; tap to view and save.

Saving a photo to keep

When a photo arrives that you want to keep, save it to your own **Photos** app so it's always there. Usually you press and hold the photo, or tap a share/save button, and choose **Save** (or "Save Image" / "Add to Photos"). Now it lives in your own collection, to enjoy or print whenever you like.

TIP

Ask for photos — parents love to share

Don't be shy about asking your children to send photos; busy parents often mean to and forget, and they're usually delighted that you want them. A gentle "I'd love to see more pictures of the little ones whenever you snap them" opens the floodgates. Even better, set up a shared album (next chapter) so it happens automatically.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Watch them grow, one photo at a time

A steady stream of everyday photos — the muddy boots, the gap-toothed grin, the first day of school — lets you savor your grandchildren's growing-up in all its small, precious detail. These are the moments that would otherwise slip past unseen across the miles, now landing gently in your pocket.

CHAPTER 11

Shared Albums: Photos That Arrive on Their Own

Here's a bit of quiet magic worth setting up: a **shared album** is a single photo collection that the whole family can add to, so that every time a parent snaps a picture of the grandchildren, it appears in *your* album automatically — no sending, no asking. It's the gift that keeps giving.

How a shared album works

Think of it as a family photo album that lives in the cloud (safely online) and that everyone shares. When your daughter adds photos to it, they show up for everyone invited — including you. You open the album any time to see the latest, and you can comment or add a little heart. The two common ones:

Option	What it is
Apple Shared Albums	Built into the Photos app on iPhone/iPad. Great if the family is on Apple. A parent creates an album and invites you.
Google Photos shared albums	Works across iPhone and Android. A parent shares an album or sets up automatic sharing to you.

Getting into one

1. Ask a parent to **create a shared album** for the grandchildren and **invite you** (they'll send an invitation you tap to accept).
2. Once you're in, it appears in your Photos app (Apple) or Google Photos app.
3. Open it any time to see every new photo they've added — it fills up on its own.
4. Tap a photo to enjoy it large; save any favorites to your own collection.

TIP

This is the one to ask for

If you set up just one photo-sharing thing, make it a shared album. Because photos flow into it automatically, it removes the only hard part — remembering to send — and turns it into a living, ever-growing family album you can open any time. Ask your children to set one up and invite you; it's a small task for them and a lasting joy for you.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

A family album that fills itself

No more waiting and hoping for photos. A shared album means the grandchildren's latest moments are always there, gathering on their own, ready whenever you fancy a look. It's like having a window into their everyday lives that never closes — and it asks nothing of you but to open it and smile.

CHAPTER 12

Sending Your Own Photos Back

Connection flows both ways, and the grandchildren love seeing *your* world too — your garden, your pets, your baking, your face. Sending a photo is just as easy as receiving one, and it keeps you present in their day.

Sending a photo you've taken

1. Open your **Photos** app and find the picture.
2. Tap the **Share** button (a square with an arrow pointing up, or a share symbol).
3. Choose how to send it — Messages, WhatsApp, or your shared album — and pick the person or family.
4. Add a little note if you like ("The tomatoes are finally ripe!"), and send.

What the grandchildren love to see

- **You, simply being you** — a selfie with your morning coffee, a wave hello.
- **Your pets** — children adore grandma's dog or grandpa's cat.
- **What you're doing** — baking, gardening, a walk, a project.
- **Little surprises** — a funny sign, a pretty sunset, the first snow.
- **Memories** — an old photo of their parent as a child always delights.

GOOD TO KNOW

Old photos are treasure

Here's a lovely idea: snap a picture of an old printed photograph — their mom or dad as a little one, your wedding day, the family farm — and send it. Children are fascinated to see where they came from, and it opens wonderful conversations. Your drawer of old prints is a goldmine for connection; a photo of a photo brings it to life.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Stay present in their everyday world

Sending your own little moments keeps you from being just a face that appears now and then — it makes you a living presence woven through their week. They come to know your dog, your garden, your kitchen, your smile. Connection isn't only hearing about their lives; it's sharing yours right back.

CHAPTER 13

Apps Made Just for Family Photos

Beyond texts and shared albums, there are apps built specifically to help families — and grandparents especially — share photos of the little ones safely and simply. If your family uses one, they're lovely; here's what to know.

The family-photo apps

App	What it does
FamilyAlbum	Parents upload photos and videos of the grandchildren; you get notified and can view and comment. Private, no strangers, no social-media feed. Very popular with grandparents.
Tinybeans	Similar — a private journal of the children's photos and milestones that family can follow.
Google / Apple shared albums	The built-in options we covered, which do much of the same at no extra app.

These apps shine because they're **private and simple** — made for family, with no strangers and no clutter. Parents add photos; you simply enjoy them. If your children already use one, ask them to invite you — you'll have the grandchildren's moments arriving in a tidy, safe little stream.

GOOD TO KNOW

Let the parents lead on these

These apps are usually driven by the parents, who do the uploading — so the easiest path is to ask your son or daughter whether they use one, and to be invited in. You don't set it up yourself; you just accept the invitation and enjoy. If they don't use one, a simple shared album does nearly the same job.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

A safe, tidy stream of their moments

Family-photo apps gather the grandchildren's pictures and milestones into one private, peaceful place — no social-media noise, no strangers, just your family's moments, arriving gently for you to savor. For many grandparents, opening the app to see "3 new photos" is a small, daily delight.

PART 4

Messages & Everyday Chatter

The little texts and notes that keep you woven into daily life, the family group chat, voice messages for when typing is a bother, and the warm touches that make them special.

CHAPTER 14

Texting: The Everyday Thread

Between calls and photos, it's the small written notes — **text messages** — that keep you present in the ordinary flow of family life. A quick "good luck at your game today!" or "thinking of you" costs nothing and means the world, especially to older grandchildren.

Sending a text to a grandchild or family

1. Open your **Messages** app (or WhatsApp, whatever the family uses).
2. Tap the **new message** button and pick the person from your contacts.
3. Tap the box at the bottom, type your note, and tap **send**.
4. Their reply appears right below, and the whole back-and-forth stays together for next time.

Easy texting habits

- **Keep it short and warm** — a sentence is plenty. "Saw a robin and thought of you!"
- **You don't need perfect spelling or punctuation** — texts are casual. Don't fuss.
- **Reply when you can**, not instantly — there's no rush; it's not a phone call.
- **Use the microphone to speak your text** if typing is slow (more on this soon).

GOOD TO KNOW

For teenagers, texting may be the main door in

Here's a useful truth about older grandchildren: teens often *prefer* texting to calling — it's how their whole generation communicates. A short, no-pressure text is far more likely to get a reply from a teenager than a phone call, which can feel like a lot to them. Meeting them in their comfortable medium is how you stay close as they grow.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

A thread that runs through daily life

Little texts weave you into the fabric of ordinary days — the good-luck note before a test, the "well done!" after, the random joke. They ask almost nothing of you and keep the connection humming between the bigger moments. For staying casually, continually close, nothing beats them.

CHAPTER 15

The Family Group Chat

Many families have a **group chat** — one conversation with everyone in it, where news, photos, and chatter fly back and forth. Joining it is like pulling up a chair at the family table that's always set. It might be the single best way to feel part of things day to day.

What a group chat is

A group chat is simply a text conversation with several people — the whole family, say. When anyone sends a message or photo, *everyone* in the group sees it and can reply. It becomes a running family conversation: "Jimmy lost a tooth!" "Here's the birthday cake" "Who's coming Sunday?" You read it when you like and chime in when you have something to add.

Joining and taking part

- Ask a family member to **add you** to the family group chat — it's a two-tap job for them.
- Once in, you'll see the ongoing conversation. **Read along** and reply whenever you like.
- **Don't feel you must respond to everything** — a heart or a "love this!" now and then is plenty.
- **Share your own bits** too — a photo, a question, a word of encouragement.

TIP

A heart or thumbs-up is a perfectly good reply

You don't have to type a full message every time. Most chat apps let you press and hold someone's message to add a little **heart, thumbs-up, or smile** — a quick way to say "I saw this and I love it" without typing a word. For a busy group chat, these little reactions keep you present with almost no effort.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

A seat at the family table, always

The group chat means you're never out of the loop — the small daily news, the photos, the plans all flow past your eyes, and you can join in whenever the spirit moves you. It's the closest thing to being in the kitchen while the family bustles around, catching up on everyone's day. For feeling truly *included*, it's hard to beat.

CHAPTER 16

Voice Messages: Speak Instead of Type

If typing on the little keys is slow or fiddly — and for many of us it is — here's a wonderful alternative: the **voice message**. You simply speak, and your actual voice is sent. It's easier than typing *and* warmer, because they hear *you*.

Sending a voice message

1. In a text or chat conversation, look for a small **microphone** icon near the typing box.
2. **Press and hold** it (or tap it) and simply talk — "Hello sweetheart, just wanted to say I'm so proud of you."
3. Let go (or tap stop) when you're done, then tap **send**.
4. They receive a little recording they can play whenever they like, and hear your voice.

Why grandchildren love them

A voice message carries something a typed text can't: your warmth, your tone, your laugh. For a young child who can't read yet, a voice message from grandma is something they can play over and over. And for you, it's far easier than thumbing out letters — just speak from the heart and send.

TIP

Dictation is another way to skip typing

There's also **dictation**: tap the little microphone on the *keyboard* (not the message one) and speak, and your words appear as *typed text* you can send normally. Use a voice message when you want them to hear your actual voice; use keyboard dictation when you want a regular text but don't want to type. Both save your fingers.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Your voice, the easy way

Voice messages give you the ease of speaking and the warmth of being heard — no squinting at tiny keys, no typos, just your own loving voice sent in a moment. For a child, a saved "I love you" from grandma or grandpa, in your real voice, is a treasure they can return to any time.

CHAPTER 17

Warm Little Touches

The apps offer small, cheerful ways to add warmth to your messages — little pictures, stickers, and reactions. They may seem silly at first, but to grandchildren they're a friendly, playful language, and joining in delights them.

The playful extras

- **Emoji** — the little pictures: a heart, a smiley, a birthday cake, a thumbs-up. Tap the smiley-face key on the keyboard to find them. A heart after "goodnight" warms it right up.
- **Stickers and GIFs** — bigger, often funny or animated pictures. Children adore them; don't be surprised to get a dancing cat or a cartoon "I love you."
- **Reactions** — pressing and holding a message to add a quick heart or laugh (covered earlier), a lovely low-effort way to respond.
- **Photos and voice messages** — the warmest touches of all, already covered.

GOOD TO KNOW

It's fine — good, even — to be playful

You might feel these little pictures aren't "for" someone your age. But using them, even clumsily, sends a lovely message to a grandchild: that you're meeting them in their world and having fun doing it. A grandma who sends a silly sticker back is a grandma who feels close and current. Don't be afraid to be a little playful — they'll love you for it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Speak their playful language

A heart, a cheeky sticker, a thumbs-up — these small touches add warmth and fun to your messages and show the grandchildren you're happy to play in their world. They turn plain notes into something that feels alive and affectionate, and they're wonderfully easy once you've tried them once or twice.

CHAPTER 18

Following the Family on Facebook

Many families share their news, photos, and everyday moments on **Facebook** — so it can be a lovely window into your grandchildren's lives, if you use it gently. You needn't become a heavy user; just enough to see what the family shares and cheer them on.

What Facebook is good for here

- **Seeing what the family posts** — photos, school news, milestones, everyday updates, all in one place.
- **Showing you care** — a "like" (a thumbs-up) or a warm comment on a grandchild's photo tells them you saw it and loved it.
- **Keeping up with the wider family** — cousins, in-laws, old friends, all in one spot.

A few gentle cautions

- **Ask before posting photos** of the grandchildren yourself — many parents prefer to keep their children off public view. Respect their wishes.
- **Keep your account private** — set it so only friends see your posts (ask me or family to help with the privacy settings).
- **Watch for scams and fakes** — ignore odd friend requests, prize claims, and messages asking for money, even if they seem to come from someone you know.
- **Don't let it pull you in too deep** — use it to connect, not to fret over the wider world's arguments.

SCAM ALERT

Be wary of a "friend" suddenly asking for money

A common Facebook trick: a message that looks like it's from a friend or relative, saying they're in trouble or have a great money opportunity, asking you to send cash or gift cards or click a link. Their account may have been taken over by a crook. **Don't act on it.** Contact that person another way — a phone call — to check. When unsure, call me first.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

A gentle window into their world

Used lightly and safely, Facebook lets you keep up with your grandchildren's and the whole family's everyday moments, and to show your love with a like or a kind word. It's one more thread connecting you to their lives — just keep it private, stay scam-aware, and let it serve the connection rather than swallow your time.

PART 5

Doing Things Together, Apart

The real magic — not just talking, but sharing an activity across the miles: reading a bedtime story, playing a game, sending little video moments, and watching together.

CHAPTER 19

Reading a Bedtime Story Together

Of all the ways to bond with a grandchild over a screen, reading a story together may be the sweetest. It recreates one of childhood's most comforting rituals — a loved one's voice and a good book at bedtime — across any distance.

The simplest way: just read over a video call

You don't need any special app. On an ordinary video call, simply hold up a book and read it aloud, showing the pictures to the camera. Keep your own copy of the grandchild's favorite books, and read a chapter or a picture book each night or each week. The familiar rhythm of your voice is the whole gift.

Apps made for reading together

If you'd like something fancier, a few apps let you share a book on screen together:

Option	What it does
Caribu (in Mastermind / others)	Combines a video call with a shared book or activity on screen, so you both see the same page.
Readeo (BookChat)	Grandparent and grandchild share a screen while reading the same digital book together.
A video call + your own books	The no-app way — just read aloud and show the pictures. Honestly lovely and the easiest.

TIP

Keep matching books for extra magic

Here's a charming trick: keep a *copy* of the same book the grandchild has at home. Then you can both turn the pages "together" on a video call, each holding your own copy — it feels wonderfully like sitting side by side. A few shared favorite books, kept by your chair, make story time effortless and special.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

A bedtime ritual that crosses any distance

Reading together gives a grandchild the deep comfort of your voice and attention at one of the tenderest times of day — and gives you a cherished, repeating ritual to share. Years from now, "grandma reading me stories on the phone" will be one of the warm memories they carry. Few small things mean so much.

CHAPTER 20

Playing Games Together

Playing a game together is a joyful, low-pressure way to connect — especially with grandchildren who may go shy on a straight video call. The game gives you something to *do* together, and a reason to keep coming back.

Games you can play across the miles

- **Word games** — apps like **Words With Friends** let you play a Scrabble-style game at your own pace, a move whenever you each have a moment. Lovely with older grandchildren.
- **Card and board games** — apps for Uno, checkers, chess (like Chess.com), and more let you play together online.
- **Drawing and guessing games** — silly, giggly fun that little ones love.
- **Simple games over a video call** — I-spy, twenty questions, show-and-tell, or "what am I drawing?" held up to the camera. No app needed at all.

The point isn't winning

With little ones especially, the game is just a happy excuse to spend time together and share some laughs — don't worry about rules or scores. A turn-based word game with a teenager, meanwhile, becomes a gentle ongoing thread between you, a move here and there, that keeps you quietly in touch for weeks.

GOOD TO KNOW

Turn-based games are perfect for busy lives

Games like Words With Friends don't need you both free at the same time — you make a move, they make theirs whenever they can, and the game rolls on for days. This suits mismatched schedules and time zones beautifully, and gives a teenager an easy, no-pressure reason to stay connected with you. A quiet, steady thread of play.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Fun that keeps you coming back

A shared game turns staying in touch into play rather than obligation — something both of you look forward to. It breaks the ice with shy little ones, gives teenagers an easy reason to keep in contact, and fills your days with the simple pleasure of a game shared with someone you love.

CHAPTER 21

Little Video Moments (Marco Polo)

Not every connection has to happen live. Sometimes schedules just don't line up — different time zones, busy days. For that, there's a lovely in-between: short video messages you send back and forth, watched whenever each person has a moment. The best-known app for this is **Marco Polo**.

How it works

Marco Polo lets you record a little video of yourself talking — like leaving a video voicemail — and send it. The grandchild (or their parent) watches it when they can, and sends a video back. You go back and forth over hours or days, each replying at your own convenience. It's like a video conversation stretched comfortably across the day.

Why it's wonderful for families

- **No scheduling needed** — perfect when live calls are hard to arrange.
- **Across time zones** — you record in your morning, they watch in their evening.
- **You can rewatch** — a child can play grandma's message again and again.
- **Low pressure** — no need to be "on" at a set time; just share a moment whenever you have one.

TIP

Great for the little daily moments

Marco Polo shines for the small stuff: "Look at the snow this morning!" "Guess what I'm baking!" "Good night, sleep tight." These little video notes, sent whenever something makes you think of them, keep you present in a grandchild's day without needing to catch them live. It's connection that fits around real life.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Closeness that fits everyone's schedule

Little video messages let you share your face and voice and the moments of your day, even when a live call is impossible. For far-flung families and mismatched schedules, it's a gentle, no-pressure way to stay warmly, continually in touch — a video conversation that simply waits patiently for each of you.

CHAPTER 22

Watching & Celebrating Together

With a little creativity, even bigger shared experiences can cross the miles — watching a show "together," celebrating a birthday, or being "present" at a school event. Here are some ways families make the big moments shared ones.

Watching something together

Line up the same movie or show, start it at the same time, and keep a video call or chat going so you can react together — or simply call each other up afterward to talk about it. Some services even have a "watch together" feature. It gives you and a grandchild a shared experience to giggle over, just like being on the same couch.

Being there for the big days

- **Birthdays** — join the party by video call to watch the candles and sing along; many families now prop a tablet at the table so far-off grandparents are "there."
- **School and sports events** — a parent can video-call you in, or send video afterward, so you don't miss the recital or the big game.
- **Holidays** — a group video call brings the whole family together to open presents and share the day.
- **Milestones** — first steps, lost teeth, graduations — ask the family to capture and share them, or to call you in live.

TIP

Ask to be "propped up" at gatherings

A gentle thing to request: when the family gathers for a birthday or holiday, ask them to set a phone or tablet on the table with you on a video call, so you can be part of the hum and bustle even from afar. Many families do this now, and it means you're *there* for the laughter and the cake, not just hearing about it after.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Share the milestones, not just hear of them

With a little planning, you needn't miss the moments that matter — the birthday candles, the first steps, the holiday morning. Being video-called in, or watching together, lets you truly *share* them, present in the joy as it happens. Distance no longer means being on the outside of your family's biggest days.

CHAPTER 23

Building a Simple Weekly Rhythm

The secret to staying truly close isn't any one clever app — it's **regularity**. A little rhythm the grandchildren can count on does more for your bond than the fanciest technology used now and then. Let's build you a gentle, sustainable routine.

Why a rhythm works

Children thrive on knowing what to expect, and "the call with grandma on Sunday" becomes a fixture they look forward to and a relationship they can rely on. A rhythm also takes the effort off *remembering* — it just happens, the same time each week, so connection never slips through the cracks of a busy life.

A sample weekly rhythm

How often	What to do
A weekly video call	Pick a regular day and time ("Sunday after lunch") for a proper face-to-face catch-up or story.
Photos through the week	Enjoy the shared album, and send one or two of your own moments.
A few little texts	A "good luck today!" or "thinking of you" whenever one comes to mind.
A monthly surprise	A card in the mail, a little package, or a special longer call.

That's just an example — shape it to your family. The point is to have a *dependable core* (that weekly call) plus easy little touches in between. Together they keep you continually, comfortably present.

TIP

Set a reminder so it actually happens

Use your phone to set a gentle repeating reminder for your weekly call — "Call the grandchildren, Sunday 1pm." Life is busy, and even the best intentions slip; a reminder makes the rhythm stick until it becomes second nature. You can even ask your voice assistant to set it up for you.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Reliable love they can count on

A simple weekly rhythm turns staying in touch from an occasional effort into a steady, dependable presence in your grandchildren's lives. They grow up knowing grandma or grandpa is always there, every week, like clockwork — and that reliability is one of the most reassuring, loving gifts you can give a child.

PART 6

Connecting at Every Age

A grandchild at two needs something different from a grandchild at fifteen. How to stay close through each stage, meeting them where they are as they grow.

CHAPTER 24

Babies & Toddlers

The littlest grandchildren can't talk with you yet — but connection at this age is still deeply real, and it lays the foundation for a lifelong bond. The trick is that it's mostly about *them seeing and hearing you* regularly, so your face and voice become familiar and dear.

What works with the very young

- **Keep video calls short and lively** — a few minutes of singing, peekaboo, or silly faces. Their attention is brief; that's perfectly normal.
- **Sing the same songs** each time — little ones adore repetition, and "grandma's song" becomes a comfort.
- **Read the same simple books**, showing the pictures.
- **Don't expect conversation** — they may stare, wander off, or show you a toy. That's connection, in toddler form.
- **Let the parent help** — a baby or toddler needs a parent holding the phone and guiding the moment.

TIP

Repetition is the secret with little ones

What feels repetitive to you is *magic* to a toddler. The same song, the same silly greeting, the same book, every call — this is exactly how a young child comes to know and love you. Pick a signature song or game and do it every single time; it becomes "our thing," and they'll light up the moment they see your face.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Becoming a familiar, beloved face

Regular little calls in these early years mean that even a far-away grandchild grows up with your face and voice woven into their world from the start — you're not a stranger they meet at holidays, but a familiar, loving presence. That early, steady connection is a gift that roots a lifelong closeness.

CHAPTER 25

Young Children

Once grandchildren can talk and play, a whole world of connection opens up — and this is often the golden age for grandparent bonds. They're old enough to chat and play, and young enough to be utterly delighted by your attention.

What works at this age

- **Do activities, not just talk** — read stories, play simple games, show-and-tell, draw pictures to show each other.
- **Ask about their world** — their friends, their favorite show, what they did today. Children love a grown-up who's genuinely interested.
- **Share your world** — your pets, your baking, your garden. Give them a "tour."
- **Be reliably there** — a regular call ("Grandma Fridays") they can count on means the world.
- **Send little surprises** — a voice message, a photo, a mailed card between calls.

GOOD TO KNOW

This is the age to build your "things"

Young childhood is when you can establish the little rituals that will define your bond for years: the song you always sing, the game you always play, the joke only you two share, the weekly call. These "our things" give the relationship its own warm character — and they'll become the memories your grandchild treasures most. Invest in them now.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

The grandparent they adore

At this age, a little regular attention makes you a grandchild's favorite person — the one who reads them stories, plays their games, and truly listens. These are the years that build the deep, affectionate bond that carries through all the ones to come. Show up, play, and delight in them, and you'll be adored.

CHAPTER 26

Tweens & Teenagers

As grandchildren become tweens and teens, staying close takes a gentle shift — they're busier, more private, and more wrapped up in their own world and friends. This is normal and healthy, not rejection. A little understanding keeps your bond strong right through these years.

What works with older grandchildren

- **Text more than call.** Teens often find phone calls a lot; a short, warm text is far more their speed and far more likely to get a reply.
- **Take an interest in their interests** — their music, their sport, their hobby, their games. Ask them to teach *you* about something they love.
- **Keep it light and low-pressure** — no guilt about not calling, no "you never write." That pushes them away.
- **Use a turn-based game** or a running joke to keep an easy thread going.
- **Mark their milestones** — a text before a big test or game means a lot, even if the reply is brief.

TIP

Let them be the expert sometimes

A lovely way to connect with a teenager: ask them to show you something they're good at — help you with your phone, explain their favorite game, recommend music. Teens rarely get to be the expert with a grown-up, and they glow when a grandparent genuinely wants to learn from them. It flips the usual script and brings you closer.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Staying close through the pulling-away years

Understanding that teenagers naturally pull toward their own world — and meeting them with light, patient, interested, no-pressure contact — is how you keep the bond alive through these years. Do that, and you'll still be the grandparent they turn to, and come back to, as they grow into adults. Your steady, undemanding love is what they'll remember.

PART 7

Keeping It Safe, Warm & Lasting

A few sensible safety notes, blending the digital with the old-fashioned, your everyday cheat-sheet, a glossary, and my standing offer to help.

CHAPTER 27

Staying Safe & Respecting the Parents

Connecting with grandchildren online is overwhelmingly a joy, and quite safe when you keep a few sensible things in mind. Most of these are about being a thoughtful presence and respecting the parents' wishes — which keeps everyone happy and the doors open.

Follow the parents' lead

- **Respect their rules.** Parents set the terms — which apps, how much screen time, what's shared. Follow their lead graciously; it keeps the welcome warm.
- **Ask before posting photos** of the grandchildren anywhere public, like Facebook. Many parents prefer their children's pictures stay private. When in doubt, don't.
- **Go through the parents** for younger children — little ones connect with you *via* their mom or dad, not on their own devices.

Simple safety sense

- **Keep the family's details private** — don't share grandchildren's photos, schools, or whereabouts publicly.
- **Watch for scams that target grandparents.** Be wary of any call or message claiming a grandchild is in trouble and needs money urgently — that's a known, cruel scam. Hang up and call the family directly to check.
- **Keep your own accounts secure** with good passwords, so no one can impersonate you to the family.

SCAM ALERT

The "grandchild in trouble" scam — know it cold

One scam deliberately preys on loving grandparents: a call or message, sometimes sounding just like your grandchild, claiming they're in trouble (an accident, jail, stranded) and need money *right now* — and please don't tell their parents. **It is almost always a fake.** Hang up, and call your grandchild or their parents directly on a number you know. Never send money or gift cards on such a call. If you're ever unsure, call me first — that's exactly what I'm here for.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Safe, welcome, and trusted

Respecting the parents' wishes and keeping a little safety sense means you stay a trusted, welcome presence in the grandchildren's lives — and that the family is always glad to include you. A thoughtful grandparent gets more access, not less, because everyone feels at ease. Safety and warmth go hand in hand.

CHAPTER 28

Blending the Digital with the Old-Fashioned

For all the wonder of video calls and shared photos, don't forget the timeless ways of staying close — they still matter enormously, and they blend beautifully with the digital. The best connection uses both.

The old ways still work wonders

- **A handwritten card or letter** — a child who gets real mail addressed to them feels like royalty. A card "just because" is treasured.
- **A little care package** — a small surprise in the mail, a drawing, a sticker, a treat.
- **Printed photos** — a physical picture of the two of you for their room or the fridge.
- **Visits** — nothing replaces a real hug; the digital tools make the time between visits close, not the visits unnecessary.

Blending the two

The magic is in combining them. Read a book on a video call, then mail them that same book. Play a game online, then send a little prize by post. Take a photo together on a call, print it, and send it for their wall. The digital keeps you close day to day; the physical gives them something to hold. Together, they're unbeatable.

TIP

A card in the mail is pure magic to a child

In a world of screens, a real envelope with a child's name on it is a genuine thrill. Pop a card in the mail now and then — no occasion needed, just "thinking of you." It costs a stamp and means the world, and it's a wonderful complement to all the digital connection. Some of the warmest grandparent bonds run on both.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

The best of both worlds

The screen brings you their faces and voices every day; the mailbox brings them something to hold and treasure. Weaving the two together — and looking forward to real visits — gives your grandchildren a connection that's both wonderfully present and warmly tangible. Technology deepens the bond; it never has to replace the human touch.

CHAPTER 29

Your Everyday Cheat-Sheet & Glossary

Here's your quick reference and a plain-English glossary — keep it handy as you build your own happy habits of staying in touch.

The quick reference

To do this…	…do this
See their faces	A video call — FaceTime, WhatsApp, Zoom (whatever the family uses)
Get photos automatically	Ask to be added to a shared album (Apple or Google Photos)
Send a quick note	A text, or a message in the family's chat app
Skip typing	Send a voice message, or tap the keyboard microphone to dictate
Connect on different schedules	Marco Polo — little video messages back and forth
Do something together	Read a book, play a word game, or watch a show at the same time
Add warmth	A heart, a sticker, a photo, or a card in the mail

A plain-English glossary

Term	In plain English
Video call	A call where you can see each other — FaceTime, WhatsApp, Zoom, and others.
FaceTime	Apple's built-in video-call app (Apple devices only).
WhatsApp	A free app for video calls, texts, and photos that works across iPhone and Android.
Zoom	A video-call app good for the whole family at once.
Group chat	One text conversation with several people — the family's running conversation.
Shared album	A photo collection the family all adds to; new photos appear for you automatically.
Voice message	A short recording of your voice sent in a chat, instead of typing.
Dictation	Speaking to the keyboard's microphone so your words become typed text.
Marco Polo	An app for sending little video messages back and forth, watched any time.
Emoji / sticker	Little pictures you add to messages for warmth and fun.
Casting	Sending a video from your phone up to the TV.

CHAPTER 30

When to Call Bill

You've reached the end — and I hope you're feeling that staying close to your grandchildren is far more within reach than you'd feared. A few parting words, and my standing offer.

A few parting words

Here's the truth to carry away: **your grandchildren want to hear from you — exactly as you are.** You don't have to be a technology whiz. You just have to show up, with your love and your patience, through whatever simple tool fits your family. The little effort to learn it is repaid a thousand times over in giggles, "I love you"s, and a bond that distance can't dim.

Don't try to do everything in this book. Pick one thing — a weekly video call, or a shared photo album — and start there. Once it feels easy, add another if you like. Little by little, you'll weave yourself right into the heart of your grandchildren's lives.

And if any of it ever feels daunting, or a call won't connect, or you just want a hand getting started — that's exactly what I'm here for. No question is too small.

How I can help

I'm Bill, and helping folks feel at home with their technology is what I've done for more than 30 years. I serve **Portage County, Ohio**, in plain English, at a pace that suits you — whether that's setting up your first video call, getting a shared photo album going, or doing a practice run so your first call with the grandchildren is pure joy. There's never any rush, and you can book a visit any time at **billshometech.com/book**.

FROM BILL

My standing offer

If staying in touch with your grandchildren — or any of these tools — ever puzzles you, pick up the phone. Helping a grandparent see those little faces for the first time on a screen is one of the most joyful parts of my work, and I'd be honored to help you do it. No question too small, no rush, ever.

— Bill · Bill's Home Tech · (330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com/book