BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Parental Controls on Wi-Fi

Bedtimes, filters and pause buttons for every device — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide for parents and grandparents

Take your time — you can't break it

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

For eero, Google, TP-Link, Netgear, Spectrum & more · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to setting family rules on your home Wi-Fi: a bedtime for the tablets, a pause button for dinner, and a filter for grown-up websites. Read it in any order and at your own pace — there is no test, and you can't fall behind. Every setting comes with what it actually does *for you*, and slow, step-by-step directions. Router apps change their menus often, so when a button has moved, look for the same words nearby.

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PART 1

Getting Started

What Wi-Fi parental controls really are, what they can and can't do, and the handful of words you'll see in every router app. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. If you've ever wished there were one switch that said "Wi-Fi off for the kids at nine o'clock" — one rule for the tablet, the game console, the laptop and the TV all at once — this guide is for **you**. That switch exists, and it's probably already built into the Wi-Fi box in your home.

I'm Bill. I've spent more than 30 years working with technology, and these days I help families here in Portage County feel at home with theirs. Plenty of the folks I help are grandparents with grandkids staying over, and parents who just want a calmer bedtime. I wrote this guide the way I'd explain it at your kitchen table: patiently, in plain English, and without trying to sell you anything.

What this guide will do for you

- Explain, in plain words, what your Wi-Fi router can control — and what it can't.
- Help you figure out which Wi-Fi box you have and which app runs it.
- Walk you step by step through bedtimes, pause buttons and website filters on the most common systems: eero, Google, TP-Link Deco, Netgear, Spectrum and Xfinity.
- Show you the free family filters you can turn on for the whole house.
- Give you an honest look at paid helpers like Bark, Aura and Qustodio.
- Point out the gaps — cell data, VPNs and private addresses — so you aren't caught by surprise.

The big promise: you can't break anything

Every setting in this guide can be switched back off. If you pause the wrong device, you unpause it. If a schedule is too strict, you change the time. The worst that usually happens is somebody's tablet can't get online for a few minutes — and they'll certainly let you know.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this matters

Rules set on the Wi-Fi itself cover every device that connects to it, including the ones that have no parental controls of their own, like many smart TVs and older game consoles. One set of rules, in one app, for the whole house. That means fewer arguments and less checking up.

GOOD TO KNOW

Tools, not a substitute for talking

No filter is perfect, and a determined teenager can often find a way around one. The families who get the most from these tools use them alongside plain conversation about what's okay online. Chapter 6 has some easy ways to start that conversation.

And I'm only a phone call away

If anything here leaves you unsure, call me at **(330) 200-8042**. There's no such thing as a silly question.

Let's start with what Wi-Fi parental controls actually do.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

What Wi-Fi Parental Controls Can & Can't Do

Your home internet comes in through one box — usually a **router**, sometimes combined with the modem in a single **gateway**. Every phone, tablet, TV and console in the house talks to the internet through that box. So the box is a natural place to set the rules.

What the router can usually do

- **Pause** the internet for one device, or for all of one person's devices, with a tap.
- **Schedule** a pause, such as 9 p.m. to 7 a.m. on school nights.
- **Filter** categories of websites, such as adult content — on many systems, and sometimes only with a paid add-on.
- **Show** you which devices are connected right now.
- On some systems, **block specific apps** or set a daily time allowance.

What the router can't do

- It can't control a phone that's using **cell data** instead of your Wi-Fi. Once a phone leaves the house — or simply turns Wi-Fi off — your router's rules don't apply.
- It can't see *inside* apps. It can block a whole app or website, but it can't read messages or tell a funny video from a bad one on the same site.
- It can be bypassed by some tricks, such as VPN apps and private DNS settings. Chapter 21 explains these in plain words.
- It can't tell people apart. It knows *devices*. If two children share one tablet, they share one set of rules.

TIP

Two layers work best

Think of Wi-Fi controls as the fence around the yard, and the controls on each phone or tablet (Apple Screen Time, Google Family Link) as the seat belt. The fence covers everything at home; the seat belt goes along when the phone leaves the house. Chapter 20 shows how the two fit together.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing the limits up front saves frustration. You'll know when a router setting is the right tool, and when you need a setting on the child's own phone instead.

CHAPTER 3

Three Ways to Set Family Rules

When people say "parental controls," they can mean three quite different things. Here's how to tell them apart.

1. Controls on the Wi-Fi router

Set once in your router's app. They cover every device on your home Wi-Fi, including TVs and game consoles. They stop at the front door: a phone on cell data isn't covered.

2. Controls on each device

Built into iPhones and iPads (**Screen Time**), Android phones and Chromebooks (**Google Family Link**), game consoles, and many TVs. They travel with the device everywhere and can be much more detailed — app-by-app limits, approving downloads, and so on. You set them up on each device.

3. Add-on services

Paid services such as **Bark**, **Aura** and **Qustodio**. Some plug a small box into your router; others install an app on each child's device; several do both. They add reports, alerts and extra filtering, for a monthly or yearly fee.

	Router controls	Device controls	Add-on services
Covers TVs & consoles	Yes	Only if the device has its own	Some do
Works away from home	No	Yes	Usually, on phones
Cost	Often free; filters may cost extra	Free	Monthly or yearly fee
Set up	Once, in the router app	On every device	Account, plus app or box

TIP

Where to begin

For most families, start with what you already own: the router's free pause and schedule features. Add the free controls on the children's own phones next. Only then think about whether a paid service is worth it to you.

CHAPTER 4

The Words You'll See

Router apps use a handful of words over and over. Here they are in plain English. You don't have to memorize them — come back here whenever one puzzles you.

Word	What it means
Router	The box that makes your Wi-Fi. Sometimes several matching boxes around the house work as one (a **mesh** system).
Gateway	A modem and router in one box, often supplied by your internet company.
Profile / Person / Group	A name you create, such as "Emma," holding all of one person's devices so you can set rules for them together. Each brand uses a different word.
Pause	Stop a device's internet right now. It stays connected to Wi-Fi but can't get online until you unpause it.
Schedule / Downtime / Bedtime	A pause that happens automatically at set times.
Content filter	A list of website categories (adult, gambling, violence and so on) that gets blocked.
SafeSearch	A setting that hides explicit results in Google, Bing and other search engines.
DNS	The internet's phone book. Your devices look up a website's address here first. Family DNS services simply refuse to look up grown-up sites.
MAC address	A device's ID tag on your Wi-Fi. Routers use it to tell devices apart.
Private address	A disguised MAC address phones use for privacy. It can confuse parental controls (Chapter 22).
VPN	An app that tunnels a device's traffic around your router's rules. Useful for privacy; also a common way around filters.

GOOD TO KNOW

Same idea, different names

eero says **Profiles**. Google says **Family Wi-Fi groups**. Xfinity says **People**. TP-Link says **Family** or **Profiles**. They all mean the same thing: one person's devices, bundled together.

PART 2

Before You Start

Three easy jobs that make everything else simple: find out which Wi-Fi box you have, talk with the family, and give every device a name you'll recognize.

CHAPTER 5

Which Wi-Fi Box Do You Have?

Every brand of router has its own app, and the parental controls live in that app. So the first job is a little detective work: which box makes your Wi-Fi, and who controls it?

Look at the box itself

1. Find the box (or boxes) with the blinking lights — often near the TV, in a home office or in the basement where the internet cable comes in.
2. Look for a brand name on the front or top: **eero**, **Google** or **Nest**, **TP-Link** or **Deco**, **Netgear**, **Orbi** or **Nighthawk**, **Spectrum**, **Xfinity**, **Linksys**, **ASUS** and so on.
3. Turn it over gently and read the sticker on the bottom. It usually lists the model and often the name of the app to download.
4. Write the brand and model on the cheat-sheet in Chapter 26.

Who controls it?

- **You bought it yourself** — you use the maker's app (eero, Google Home, Deco, Orbi and so on).
- **Your internet company supplied it** — you usually use the internet company's app instead, such as the **My Spectrum** app or the **Xfinity** app. Some companies hand out eero or other brands but still manage them through their own app.
- **You have both** — a company gateway *and* your own router plugged into it. Set your rules on the box your family's devices actually connect to: the one whose Wi-Fi name shows on their phones.

TIP

Not sure which Wi-Fi a device is on?

On a phone or tablet, open **Settings** and tap **Wi-Fi**. The network with the check mark is the one it's using. If you see two networks from your home with different names, you may have two routers — set controls on the one the children use.

HEADS UP

Very old routers

Routers more than about seven or eight years old often have weak parental controls, or none, and may no longer get security updates. If yours has no app and you'd have to type numbers into a web page to change anything, it may be time to ask your internet company about newer equipment.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Five minutes of detective work means you'll download the right app the first time, instead of fighting with one that can't see your router.

CHAPTER 6

Talking with the Family First

This is the one chapter with no buttons in it, and it may be the most useful. Rules that children understand are rules they're less likely to fight — or work around.

A few ideas that tend to help

- **Explain the why.** "The Wi-Fi goes to sleep at nine so everyone gets a good night's rest" lands better than a rule that just appears.
- **Be honest that there are controls.** Older children usually find out anyway, and trust matters more than any filter.
- **Match the rule to the age.** A seven-year-old and a sixteen-year-old need very different settings. Most systems let each child have their own profile.
- **Agree on a way to ask.** If a homework site is blocked by mistake, the child should know to come and tell you, not to hunt for a way around it.
- **Grandparents: check with the parents.** If grandchildren stay with you, ask their parents what rules they use at home, so you're on the same page.

GOOD TO KNOW

Write it down

Some families write a short "family tech agreement" — bedtime for devices, where phones charge at night, what to do if something online feels wrong. Stick it on the fridge. It needn't be fancy.

STAY SAFE

If something worrying turns up

If you ever find that a child is being threatened, bullied or approached by an adult online, keep the messages (take a screenshot), don't confront the other person, and talk with the child calmly. If a child is in danger, call 911. You can also report online exploitation to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's CyberTipline.

CHAPTER 7

Naming Devices & Building Profiles

Your router keeps a list of every device it has ever seen. Unfortunately, it often shows them with names like "Galaxy-Tab-A7" or a string of letters and numbers. Before you can set rules for Emma's devices, you need to know which ones are Emma's.

Step 1: Match devices to people

1. Open your router's app and find the list of **Devices** or **Connected devices**.
2. Ask everyone to bring their phones, tablets and laptops to the kitchen table, with Wi-Fi on.
3. One at a time, turn a device's Wi-Fi off, wait a minute, then turn it back on. Watch the list: the device that drops off and comes back is the one in your hand.
4. Tap that entry in the app and look for **Rename** or the pencil icon. Give it a plain name like "Emma iPad."
5. Do the same for the TV, the game console and anything else the children use.

Step 2: Make a profile for each child

1. In the app, look for **Profiles**, **People**, **Family** or **Family Wi-Fi**.
2. Create a new one and give it the child's name.
3. Add that child's devices to it. A device can belong to only one profile at a time.
4. Leave shared devices — the living room TV, the family computer — in their own "Shared" profile, or leave them out entirely.

> **TIP**
>
> **Leave your own phone out**
>
> Don't put your own phone, or the device you use to manage the Wi-Fi, into a child's profile or a group you plan to pause. If that group is paused, your own phone goes offline too — and so might the app you need to unpause it. Google warns about exactly this in its own help pages.

HEADS UP

Devices that keep changing their name

Newer phones and tablets use a **private Wi-Fi address** that can change from time to time. When that happens, the router may think it's a brand-new device that isn't in any profile. Chapter 22 shows how to fix that.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Once every device has a real name and belongs to a person, every other rule in this guide becomes a simple tap: "pause Emma," not "pause device 4C:22:...".

PART 3

Router by Router

Step-by-step directions for the Wi-Fi systems we see most often in Northeast Ohio homes: eero, Google, TP-Link Deco, Netgear, Spectrum and Xfinity. Skip straight to yours.

CHAPTER 8

eero

eero is Amazon's mesh Wi-Fi system: small white boxes run from the **eero** app. Pausing and scheduling are free for every eero owner. Website filters and app blocking come with the paid **eero Plus** subscription. (If you'd like the full eero tour, see the separate eero guide in this series.)

Make a profile

1. Open the **eero** app. On the **Home** tab, scroll to **Profiles**.
2. Tap to add a profile and type the child's name.
3. Choose the devices that belong to them, then save.

Pause a profile right now

1. On the **Home** tab, tap the child's profile.
2. Tap **Pause profile**. "Paused" shows under the name, and their devices lose the internet.
3. To give it back, tap the profile again and choose to resume.

Set a bedtime schedule

1. Tap the child's profile.
2. Choose the option to add a **scheduled pause**. The **Edit Schedule** screen opens.
3. Give the schedule a name ("School nights"), set the start and end times, and pick the days.
4. Tap **Save** in the top-right corner. The schedule is now active.

> **TIP**
> **A little extra time tonight**
>
> If a profile is paused by a schedule and you want to make an exception, choose **Resume profile**. The internet comes back until the *next* scheduled pause starts. Nothing about the schedule itself changes.

Website filters and app blocking (eero Plus)

With eero Plus, each profile can have **Content Filters** — categories such as adult content, violence and illegal activity — and **Block Apps**, which blocks particular apps by name or a whole category such as streaming. The filters apply to every device in that profile. Put them together with a schedule and you can, for example, block streaming apps during homework hours only.

1. Tap the child's profile.
2. Look for **Content Filters** (or **Block Apps**). If you don't have eero Plus, the app will offer it to you here.
3. Turn on the categories you want blocked for this child, and save.

GOOD TO KNOW

What eero Plus costs

As of November 2026, eero Plus is **$9.99 a month** (with a one-month free trial) or **$99.99 a year** (with a two-month free trial). It also includes other security features. If your eero came from your internet company, eero Plus may be offered differently or not at all; ask them.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

One tap at the dinner table pauses every one of a child's devices at once — tablet, laptop and console — and a schedule means you never have to remember to do it at bedtime.

CHAPTER 9

Google Nest Wifi & Google Wifi

If your Wi-Fi points are Google Nest Wifi Pro, Nest Wifi or the older Google Wifi, your controls are called **Family Wi-Fi**, and they live in the free **Google Home** app. Family Wi-Fi is included at no extra charge.

Make a Family Wi-Fi group

1. Open the **Google Home** app on your phone.
2. Find your Wi-Fi settings (look for **Wifi** on the home screen or in your devices), then tap **Family Wi-Fi**.
3. Tap **Get started** (or the plus sign to add another group).
4. Name the group — the child's name works well.
5. Select the devices that belong in the group, then tap **Next**.
6. You'll be offered a schedule next. You can set one now or skip it and come back.

Pause and unpause

1. In **Family Wi-Fi**, find the group.
2. Tap **Pause**. The group's devices lose the internet until you tap **Unpause** (or the play button).
3. You can also pause a single device from the device list.

Schedules: bedtime and dinner

A **scheduled pause** turns the internet off for a group automatically — for bedtime or family dinner, for instance. When a schedule is about to start, you can **delay it by 30 minutes** or **skip** the next one, without changing the schedule itself.

Blocking adult websites

Family Wi-Fi includes a free filter that uses Google **SafeSearch** technology to block millions of adult websites for a group. Set it up per group: open the group's settings in Family Wi-Fi and turn on the site-blocking filter. Google is honest that no filter is perfect; it helps avoid most adult websites, and it doesn't stop those sites from appearing as results in Google Search itself.

HEADS UP

Private addresses and Family Wi-Fi

Google says Family Wi-Fi features don't work on devices that use a private (randomized) address. If a child's phone ignores the group's rules, see Chapter 22.

TIP

Pause by voice

With Nest Wifi, you can say "Hey Google, pause Wi-Fi for" and the group's name — for example, "Hey Google, pause Wi-Fi for Emma." Say "unpause" to turn it back on.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Free, built-in controls with a simple bedtime switch, plus a basic adult-site filter, all from an app many families already use for their speakers and thermostat.

CHAPTER 10

TP-Link Deco & Archer

TP-Link's Deco mesh systems use the **Deco** app; many TP-Link Archer routers use the **Tether** app. Their parental controls and security features are grouped under the name **HomeShield**.

Free versus HomeShield Pro

HomeShield comes with a basic set of features on most recent Deco systems and TP-Link routers. The stronger parental controls — such as daily **time limits**, offtime and bedtime — need a paid plan. New users can usually start with a one-month free trial.

Plan (U.S., as of 2026)	Starting price
Advanced Parental Controls	$2.99 a month or $17.99 a year
Security+	$4.99 a month or $35.99 a year
Total Security Package	$69.99 the first year, $129.99 to renew

HEADS UP

Plans renew automatically

TP-Link subscriptions renew until you cancel them. If you take the free trial just to try things, set a reminder on your calendar a few days before it ends. Prices vary by region, so check the **HomeShield** screen in your app for what you'll actually pay.

Make a profile and set limits

1. Open the **Deco** app (or **Tether**) and sign in with your TP-Link ID.
2. Tap **HomeShield**, then **Parental Controls**.
3. Tap the plus sign to add a family member. Type a name and choose the devices that belong to them.
4. Choose a filter level or the categories to block, and the times you want the internet available.
5. Save. You can come back to pause a profile at any time from the same screen.

GOOD TO KNOW

The menus vary by model

TP-Link makes dozens of models, and the app shows only what yours supports. If you don't see a setting described here, your router may not offer it, or it may be part of the paid plan.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

An inexpensive way to get time limits and bedtimes for every child, if you already own TP-Link equipment.

CHAPTER 11

Netgear Orbi & Nighthawk

Netgear's mesh systems are called **Orbi** (run from the **Orbi** app) and its single routers are mostly **Nighthawk** (run from the **Nighthawk** app). Pausing a device is built in. Netgear's fuller parental controls are a paid service called **Smart Parental Controls**.

Pause a device

1. Open the **Orbi** or **Nighthawk** app.
2. Tap **Devices** (or **Connected devices**).
3. Tap the device you want to pause, then choose **Pause** (on some versions, a switch labeled **Internet access**).
4. Tap it again to resume.

Smart Parental Controls

Smart Parental Controls adds profiles, time limits, bedtimes, filters and usage reports. It's a subscription with a free trial; the app shows the current price for your router when you open **Parental Controls**. Netgear's separate security subscription, **Armor**, protects against malware and is not a parental control.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you used Circle on Netgear

Older Netgear routers offered parental controls through a service called Circle. Netgear has since moved to its own Smart Parental Controls, and some owners report that Circle stopped working on their Orbi. If your old Circle rules seem to do nothing, that's likely why.

TIP

Armor's price, so you're not surprised

As of November 2026, Netgear lists Armor at $99.99 a year and Armor Plus at $149.99 a year in the U.S. Neither one is needed for pausing devices.

CHAPTER 12

Spectrum WiFi & the My Spectrum App

Many homes in Portage County get their internet from Spectrum. If you rent your Wi-Fi router from Spectrum and have **Advanced WiFi** (or the newer **Invincible WiFi**), you can manage it from the free **My Spectrum** app — including pausing devices and setting schedules.

What the My Spectrum app can do

- Show every device connected to your Spectrum Wi-Fi.
- **Pause and unpause** a device's internet, right now or on a schedule.
- Set parental controls for your home network.
- Show **Security Shield**, Spectrum's included protection that blocks known threats on Advanced WiFi and Invincible WiFi.

Pause a device

1. Open the **My Spectrum** app and sign in.
2. Tap **Services**, then your **Internet** service.
3. Look for your **WiFi** network and its list of connected devices.
4. Tap the device, then **Pause**. Tap **Unpause** to give the internet back.
5. To set a schedule, look for **Schedule** or a similar option on the same screen.

GOOD TO KNOW

The menu names move around

Spectrum updates its app often, and the exact labels depend on your router. If you can't find devices under **Services**, look for **Internet** or **WiFi** on the app's main screen.

HEADS UP

Your own router? Use its app

If you've plugged your own router (an eero, Deco or Orbi, for example) into Spectrum's modem, the My Spectrum app can't see your devices. Use your own router's app and chapter instead.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

If Spectrum supplies your Wi-Fi, you already have a pause button and schedules in your pocket, with nothing to buy.

CHAPTER 13

Xfinity & Other Internet Companies

Most internet companies now give you an app that manages the Wi-Fi gateway they rent you. If your family members use Xfinity in other parts of the country, here's how theirs works; other companies follow much the same pattern.

Xfinity

- In the **Xfinity** app, you create **People** and assign each device to a person.
- **Downtime** sets scheduled pauses for a person. Each person can have up to 30 schedules, customized by day and time.
- **Parental Controls** are turned on per person, at an age-based level. Blocked sites show a block page; secure sites and apps may simply not load.
- To block a specific website by its address, Xfinity points you to the gateway's own settings page (the **Admin Tool**) rather than the app.

GOOD TO KNOW

Two Xfinity quirks worth knowing

Content a device already visited may stay viewable on that device for up to 24 hours. And if Apple's **iCloud Private Relay** is turned on, Xfinity says its filtering may not work (more in Chapter 21).

Any other company

1. Search your app store for your internet company's name.
2. Download their official app — check that the publisher is the company itself.
3. Sign in with your account, then look for **WiFi**, **Devices**, **People** or **Parental controls**.
4. If you can't find any controls, call the company's number from your bill and ask whether your equipment supports them.

SCAM ALERT

Only call the number on your bill

Searching the web for "Spectrum support" or "router help" can turn up fake support numbers that lead to scammers. Use the number printed on your bill or inside the company's official app.

PART 4

Schedules & Filters

The two rules most families want: a bedtime for the internet, and a filter for grown-up websites — including the free family filters that work with almost any router.

CHAPTER 14

Bedtimes, Homework & Dinner Schedules

A schedule is the single most useful parental control there is. It does the remembering for you, and children tend to argue less with a clock than with a parent.

Good schedules to start with

Schedule	Typical times	Who
School-night bedtime	9 p.m. to 7 a.m., Sunday to Thursday	Younger children; adjust for teens
Weekend bedtime	10 or 11 p.m. to 8 a.m., Friday and Saturday	Same profiles, later time
Family dinner	6 to 6:45 p.m., every day	Everyone, maybe even the adults
Homework	4 to 6 p.m. on school days	Only if homework doesn't need the internet

Setting one up, on any brand

1. Open your router's app and go to the child's profile, group or person.
2. Look for **Schedule**, **Scheduled pause**, **Downtime**, **Bedtime** or **Offtime**.
3. Name the schedule, pick the start and end times, and choose the days.
4. Save it.
5. Test it: set a schedule that starts two minutes from now, watch the child's device lose the internet, then delete or correct the test.

TIP

Homework often needs the internet

Many schools hand out assignments online. If you block everything during homework time, you may block the homework too. Some systems (eero Plus, for example) let you block just the *categories* that distract — streaming and games — during those hours, instead of the whole internet.

HEADS UP

Overnight schedules that cross midnight

Most apps handle a 9 p.m. to 7 a.m. schedule fine. A few older apps make you split it into two pieces: 9 p.m. to midnight, and midnight to 7 a.m. If your bedtime schedule seems to end at midnight, that's the reason.

GOOD TO KNOW

Schedules follow the router's clock

If a schedule starts at the wrong time, check that your router's time zone is set to Eastern time in its settings. This is rare, but it happens after a reset.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A calmer evening, without the nightly "five more minutes" negotiation — and better sleep for everyone, because the tablets go quiet on their own.

CHAPTER 15

Filtering Grown-Up Websites

A content filter keeps a list of websites sorted into categories — adult content, gambling, violence, weapons, drugs and so on — and refuses to load the categories you choose. Here are the honest facts about how well they work.

Where you'll find a filter

Your system	Filter	Cost
eero	Content Filters in eero Plus	Included with eero Plus
Google Nest Wifi / Google Wifi	SafeSearch site blocking in Family Wi-Fi	Free
TP-Link Deco	HomeShield parental controls	Basic free; more with a paid plan
Netgear Orbi / Nighthawk	Smart Parental Controls	Subscription
Xfinity	Parental Controls per person	Included with the gateway
Any router	A free family DNS service (Chapter 16)	Free

Picking a level

- **Young children**: block adult content, violence, gambling, and anything the system calls "mature." Consider also blocking social media and chat.
- **Pre-teens**: block adult content and gambling; decide about social media together.
- **Older teens**: block adult content at most, and rely more on conversation.

GOOD TO KNOW

What a filter can't see

Filters work on whole websites. A huge site like YouTube, Reddit or a social network mixes harmless and grown-up material under one address, so a filter usually has to block all of it or none of it. Use the site's own safety settings, or the controls on the child's device, for those.

HEADS UP

Blocked by mistake

Every filter sometimes blocks a perfectly good site — a health class page, a museum, a news story. Most apps let you **allow** a specific site. Tell your children to come to you when that happens, rather than looking for a way around it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A filter catches the accidental click — the mistyped address or the bad search result — which is how most young children stumble onto things they shouldn't see.

CHAPTER 16

Free Family Filters for the Whole House

If your router has no filter of its own, or you don't want to pay for one, there's a well-known free option: a **family DNS service**. Remember DNS from Chapter 4 — the internet's phone book. A family DNS service is a phone book that simply has no listings for adult websites. Change one setting on your router and every device in the house uses it.

Two free choices

Service	What it does
OpenDNS FamilyShield	Run by Cisco. Comes pre-set to block adult content and known dangerous sites. Addresses: **208.67.222.123** and **208.67.220.123**.
CleanBrowsing Family Filter	Blocks adult content, known dangerous sites, and VPN and proxy sites that children use to get around filters. It also turns on safe mode for YouTube and blocks some mixed-content sites such as Reddit. Addresses: **185.228.168.168** and **185.228.169.168**.

HEADS UP

Use the Family addresses

CleanBrowsing also has an **Adult** filter at 185.228.168.10, which is much less strict. For children, make sure the numbers end in **.168**.

How to set it up

This is the most technical job in this guide. It's perfectly safe — you can change it back any time — but take it slowly, and write down what was there before you start.

1. Open your router's app (or its settings page) and look for **Advanced**, **Network** or **Internet** settings.
2. Find **DNS**. It's often set to **Automatic** or shows your internet company's numbers. Write down exactly what it says now.
3. Change it to **Manual** or **Custom**, and type the two addresses of the service you chose.
4. Save. Some routers restart, which takes a minute or two.
5. Test it: on a child's device, try a site the filter should block. You should see a block page or an error.

GOOD TO KNOW

Not every router allows it

Some internet-company gateways don't let you change DNS at all. Some mesh systems put it in an "advanced" menu. If you can't find it, that's a sign it may not be offered on your equipment.

HEADS UP

Easy to get around

A family DNS filter is a good first layer, but a child who knows how can change the DNS on their own device, or use cell data or a VPN. Pair it with the controls on their devices (Chapter 20).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A whole-house adult-site filter for every device, including the TV and game console, at no cost, with no app to install and no account to create.

PART 5

Add-On Services & Device Controls

An honest look at Bark, Aura and Qustodio, and how the free controls built into phones and tablets fill the gaps the router leaves.

CHAPTER 17

Bark & Bark Home

Bark is a family safety company with two kinds of products: phone and tablet plans that watch for warning signs, and **Bark Home**, a small box for your Wi-Fi.

Bark Home: the box for the router

Bark Home is a small device that plugs into your existing Wi-Fi router. It applies rules to every device on the network — smart TVs, game consoles (Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo), tablets, computers and phones — whatever web browser they use.

- Different rules for different devices, for different times of day, and for school nights versus weekends.
- Automatic bedtimes, and a button to pause the internet any time.
- Allow or block specific websites, or block whole categories such as streaming, online gaming and sexual content.

GOOD TO KNOW

Some routers have Bark built in

Bark lists certain routers that come with Bark already inside. If you have one of those, you don't need the separate box. Bark says a subscription is not required when you buy Bark Home, and the box comes with a 30-day money-back guarantee.

Bark Jr and Bark Premium: the phone plans

Plan	As of November 2026
Bark Jr	$5 a month or $49.00 a year, plus tax. The lighter plan, focused on screen time and website filtering on the child's devices.
Bark Premium	$14 a month or $99.00 a year, plus tax. Everything in Bark Jr, plus monitoring of messages and apps for signs of trouble such as bullying or predators.
Free trial	7 days on both plans.

TIP

Monitoring is a big step — talk first

Bark Premium reads for warning signs in a child's messages and alerts the parent only when it finds something concerning. Many families find it reassuring; some teens find it intrusive. Decide together with the child's parents, and be honest with the child that it's there.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Bark Home gives you schedules and filters for the whole house even if your router has none, and the phone plans can warn you about trouble you'd never otherwise see.

CHAPTER 18

Aura & Circle

Aura is best known for identity-theft protection, but it also sells parental controls. Those controls come from **Circle**, a parental-control company Aura bought in 2021. If you've heard of the Circle box for the router, this is where it went.

What Aura's parental controls do

- Filter websites and apps for each child.
- Set screen-time limits and schedules.
- Pause the internet.
- Work through an app on the child's devices, so many rules follow the phone away from home.

What it costs

As of November 2026, review sites consistently list Aura's **Kids** plan — parental controls only, for unlimited children and devices — at about **$10 a month** billed yearly (about $120 a year), or about **$13 a month** billed monthly, with a free trial. Aura's family plans that add identity protection cost considerably more. Check aura.com for today's price before you buy.

GOOD TO KNOW

Circle boxes

Circle's own help pages say new Circle device-and-subscription bundles are no longer sold. If you already have a Circle box, check with Aura that it's still supported before renewing.

HEADS UP

Make sure you know what you're paying for

Aura sells several bundles. If what you want is parental controls, make sure the plan in your cart says so — and note when it renews.

CHAPTER 19

Qustodio

Qustodio is a well-known parental-control app. Unlike router controls, it's installed on each child's phone, tablet or computer, so it keeps working away from home and on cell data.

Plans

Plan	Devices	Rough price (Nov. 2026)
Free	1 device	Free, with basic features
Basic	Up to 5 devices	About $55–$60 a year
Complete	Unlimited devices	About $100–$110 a year

GOOD TO KNOW

Prices move around

Qustodio's own pages showed several different prices in 2026, depending on promotions. Check the price at qustodio.com on the day you buy, and look at the renewal price, which can be higher than the first year.

How it fits with your Wi-Fi controls

- Use your router for the things only it can reach: TVs, game consoles and the whole-house bedtime.
- Use Qustodio (or the free device controls in Chapter 20) for each child's own phone and laptop, especially away from home.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Rules that travel with the phone — to school, to a friend's house, and onto cell data — with reports you can read on your own phone.

CHAPTER 20

Teaming Up with Screen Time & Family Link

Every iPhone, iPad, Android phone and Chromebook has free parental controls built in. They cover exactly what the router can't: the phone when it's away from your Wi-Fi.

iPhone and iPad: Screen Time

Apple's **Screen Time**, set up through **Family Sharing**, gives you downtime, app limits, content restrictions and purchase approvals. It has its own complete guide in this series, so here we just say: set it up, and give it a passcode the child doesn't know.

Android and Chromebook: Google Family Link

- Free, from the **Google Family Link** app on the parent's phone.
- **Daily limits**, set separately for each day of the week. The limit applies to each Android device or Chromebook the child uses, not as one total across them.
- **Downtime**: times when the device is off limits.
- **App limits**: time caps on particular apps, or always allow or block them.
- **Bonus time**: extra time for today, added from your phone.
- Family Link's screen-time limits don't work on an iPhone; use Screen Time there.

Who does what

Job	Best tool
Bedtime for the TV and game console	Router schedule
Bedtime for the phone, at home and away	Screen Time or Family Link downtime
Adult-site filter for the whole house	Router filter or family DNS
Adult-site filter on the phone, everywhere	Screen Time or Family Link
Approve app downloads	Screen Time (Ask to Buy) or Family Link
Pause everyone for dinner	Router pause

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

With both layers in place, the rules hold whether the phone is in the bedroom, at a friend's house or on the school bus — and you're not depending on any single setting.

PART 6

When the Rules Don't Stick

The honest gaps in Wi-Fi controls — cell data, VPNs, private relays and private addresses — and what to do when a pause or schedule just isn't working.

CHAPTER 21

The Gaps: Cell Data, VPNs & Private DNS

Router controls only see traffic that passes through the router. Anything that goes around it, or hides inside a tunnel, slips past. Here are the common ways that happens, in plain words, with what you can do about each.

1. Cell data

A phone with a data plan doesn't need your Wi-Fi at all. Turn Wi-Fi off, and it's on the cell network, where your router has no say. **What helps:** the controls on the phone itself (Chapter 20), which work on cell data too. You can also ask the phone company about limiting the child's data, or let the phone charge in the kitchen overnight.

2. VPN apps

A **VPN** (virtual private network) wraps everything a device sends in a sealed tunnel to a server somewhere else. Your router sees the tunnel but not what's in it, so filters can't work. Free VPN apps are easy to download. **What helps:** require approval for app downloads on the child's device, and consider a filter that blocks VPN sites — CleanBrowsing's Family Filter does (Chapter 16).

3. iCloud Private Relay

Apple's **iCloud Private Relay**, part of a paid iCloud+ plan, hides an iPhone's web browsing in Safari from the network. Xfinity, for one, warns that its parental controls may not work while Private Relay is on. **What helps:** use Screen Time's content restrictions on the iPhone itself, which don't depend on the router.

4. Private DNS and changed DNS

Remember the internet's phone book? A device can be told to use its *own* phone book instead of the router's. Android phones have a setting called **Private DNS**, and some apps and web browsers have a "secure DNS" option. Either one can go straight around a family DNS filter. **What helps:** on younger children's devices, lock settings changes with Family Link or Screen Time, and use the device's own filters as the main layer.

GOOD TO KNOW

This isn't about being sneaky

Many of these features exist for good reasons — privacy and security for adults. They're on by default on some devices. A child whose filter isn't working may not have done anything at all.

TIP

The neighbor's Wi-Fi and free hotspots

Your controls cover your Wi-Fi only. A friend's house, the library, or a restaurant's free Wi-Fi each has its own rules, or none. Another reason the controls on the phone itself matter.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing the gaps means you won't be blindsided — and you'll put your effort where it actually works, rather than tightening a router setting that the phone is simply going around.

CHAPTER 22

Private Wi-Fi Addresses

Every device has a **MAC address**, an ID tag your router uses to tell it apart. For privacy, iPhones, iPads and Android phones now usually show each Wi-Fi network a **private** (randomized) address instead of the real one. That's good for privacy in coffee shops — but at home, it can make a child's device look like a stranger to your parental controls.

The signs

- A child's phone ignores its schedule or filter.
- You see a "new" unknown device that looks just like one you already named.
- A paused device is suddenly back online without anyone unpausing it.

On an iPhone or iPad

Apple offers three choices for each network: **Off**, **Fixed** and **Rotating**. **Rotating** changes the address about every two weeks, which parental-control and monitoring systems can't keep track of. **Fixed** keeps one private address for your network, which is Apple's default for secured home networks. **Off** uses the real address.

1. On the child's iPhone or iPad, open **Settings** and tap **Wi-Fi**.
2. Tap the **Info** button (the small "i") next to your home network's name.
3. Tap **Private Wi-Fi Address**.
4. Choose **Fixed** — or **Off** if your router's controls still don't recognize the device.
5. Go back to your router's app, find the device (it may show up as new), rename it and add it to the child's profile.

On an Android phone or tablet

1. Open **Settings**, then **Network & internet** (or **Connections** on Samsung), then **Wi-Fi**.
2. Tap the gear or your home network's name.
3. Look for **Privacy** or **MAC address type**.
4. Choose **Use device MAC** (or **Phone MAC**) for your home network only.
5. Add the device to the child's profile in your router's app.

GOOD TO KNOW

Google says the same

Google's own help pages say Family Wi-Fi features don't work on devices using a randomized address, and suggest changing that setting for your home network.

HEADS UP

It may switch back

Some people report that the setting changes back on its own after an update or after the phone has been away from home a long while. If the rules stop working again, check this setting first.

CHAPTER 23

When a Pause or Schedule Isn't Working

Most problems with Wi-Fi controls come down to a handful of causes. Go through these in order — it usually takes ten minutes or less.

"It's paused, but they're still online"

1. Check whether the device is on **cell data**: look for 5G, LTE or bars at the top of the screen, instead of the Wi-Fi fan symbol.
2. Check that the device is in the right profile or group in your router's app.
3. Check for a **new, unknown device** in the list — a private address may have changed (Chapter 22).
4. Check whether a VPN app is installed or a VPN symbol shows at the top of the screen (Chapter 21).
5. Make sure the device is on *your* Wi-Fi, not a second router or a neighbor's open network.

"Everything is paused, including me"

1. Look at which profile or group your own phone or the TV is in. Move your devices out of the child's group.
2. Check your schedules for one that covers "all devices" or the whole network by mistake.
3. If you can't reach the app because your phone is paused, switch your phone to cell data, open the router app and unpause from there.

"A site we need is blocked"

1. Note the exact website address.
2. In your router's app, open the child's filter settings and look for **Allow**, **Allowed sites** or **Exceptions**.
3. Add the site and save. Give it a few minutes; a device may remember the old answer briefly.

"The schedule starts at the wrong time"

- Check the router's time zone (Chapter 14).
- Check the days you ticked — it's easy to miss Sunday.
- Look for an overlapping schedule that starts earlier or ends later.

TIP

The universal fix

When a control behaves strangely, restart the child's device, then try again. If that doesn't do it, remove the device from its profile and add it back. For a stubborn group, deleting it and creating it again often helps.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A short, calm checklist instead of a frustrating evening — and most of the time, the answer is in the first three steps.

PART 7

Staying Safe, Getting Help & Your Cheat-Sheet

The scams that borrow the name of parental controls, an honest word about when a hand is worth it, and a one-page summary to keep near the router.

CHAPTER 24

Scams & Safety Around Parental Controls

Worried parents and grandparents are a favorite target for scammers. Here are the tricks that show up around Wi-Fi and parental controls, and how to spot them.

SCAM ALERT

"Your router has been hacked — call now"

A pop-up, email or phone call claims your Wi-Fi or router is infected and gives you a number to call. Real router companies and internet providers don't contact you this way. Close the pop-up, hang up, and if you're worried, call the number on your bill.

SCAM ALERT

Fake subscription renewals

An email says your eero Plus, HomeShield, Bark or Aura subscription "failed to renew" and asks you to click a link to update your card. Don't click. Open the app yourself, or type the company's address into your browser, and check there.

SCAM ALERT

Fake support numbers in search results

Searching for "router parental controls help" can turn up ads for "support" lines that charge for useless repairs or ask to take control of your computer. Use only the help pages inside the official app or the company's own website.

SCAM ALERT

"Remote access" requests

Nobody needs remote control of your computer to set up parental controls on your router. If a caller asks you to install a program so they can "fix your Wi-Fi," hang up.

Using monitoring tools the right way

Monitoring apps are meant for parents supervising their own minor children. Installing one secretly on another adult's phone — a spouse, a partner, an older relative — is a serious invasion of privacy and may be against the law. Keep these tools for the children in your care, and be open with them that the tools are there.

STAY SAFE

Keep your router's own password safe

Your parental controls are only as strong as the password on your router's app account. Use a strong, unique password, turn on two-step verification if the app offers it, and don't share the login with the children. If a child knows it, they can turn the rules off.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A few simple habits — use the official app, never call a number from a pop-up — keep your family safe from the people who prey on worried parents.

CHAPTER 25

When to Call Bill

Most of what's in this guide you can do yourself, at your own pace. But part of being helpful is being honest about when a hand saves you time and worry. Here's my straight advice, with no pressure.

Times it's well worth a call

- **You're not sure which box runs your Wi-Fi**, or you have two routers and don't know which one the children use.
- **Setting it all up in one visit** — naming every device, building a profile for each child, setting bedtimes and turning on a filter, then testing it with you.
- **Changing your router's DNS** to a free family filter, safely, with the old settings written down.
- **The rules aren't sticking** — private addresses, a phone that keeps escaping its schedule, or a filter that blocks homework.
- **Grandkids are coming to stay** and you'd like sensible rules ready before they arrive.
- **Deciding whether a paid service is worth it** for your family, with no sales pitch.

What working with me is like

I work at your pace, explain what I'm doing in plain words, and never talk down to anyone. I'll tell you honestly when something isn't worth your money, and I don't sell subscriptions. I've been doing this kind of work for more than 30 years, and I serve Portage County, Ohio, in person, and folks farther away by remote help.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call **(330) 200-8042** or book a time at **billshometech.com/book**. My help is **$49 remote · $99 in your home**. This guide is yours to keep for free; if you'd like a hand, I'm only a phone call away.

GOOD TO KNOW

You may meet Sophie first

When you call or visit billshometech.com, you might be greeted by **Sophie**, my AI receptionist. She can answer quick questions and help you book a time. A real person — me — does the actual help.

Thank you for taking the time to look after the young people in your life. Take it one step at a time, and remember: the best parental control is still a good conversation.

— Bill

CHAPTER 26

Your Wi-Fi Parental Controls Cheat-Sheet

Keep this near the router or on the fridge. The whole guide, boiled down.

The essentials

Topic	Remember
eero	eero app > Home > Profiles. Pause and schedules free; filters with eero Plus.
Google Nest Wifi / Google Wifi	Google Home app > Wifi > Family Wi-Fi. Groups, schedules and adult-site blocking, free.
TP-Link Deco	Deco app > HomeShield. Time limits need a paid plan.
Netgear Orbi / Nighthawk	Orbi or Nighthawk app. Pause free; Smart Parental Controls paid.
Spectrum WiFi	My Spectrum app. Pause and schedule devices.
Free family DNS	OpenDNS FamilyShield 208.67.222.123 / 208.67.220.123. CleanBrowsing Family 185.228.168.168 / 185.228.169.168.
Away from home	Use Screen Time (Apple) or Family Link (Android) on the phone itself.
Rules ignored?	Check cell data, private Wi-Fi address, VPN.

Write it down once

Keep handy	
My router brand & model	_____
The app that runs it	_____
Account email for the app	_____
Children's profiles & their devices	_____
Bedtime schedule (days & times)	_____
Original DNS setting (before any change)	_____
Paid plans & renewal dates	_____
Internet company support number (from the bill)	_____

When something's wrong, in order

1. Is the device on cell data instead of Wi-Fi?
2. Is it in the right profile or group?
3. Has it shown up as a new device with a private address?
4. Is a VPN app installed?
5. Restart the device and try again.
6. Remove the device from its profile and add it back.
7. Still stuck? Call Bill at (330) 200-8042.

> **STAY SAFE**
>
> **If a child may be in danger**
>
> Keep any messages, don't confront the other person, and call 911 if a child is at risk.