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BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Xbox & Game Pass

Consoles, family settings, Game Pass and cloud play — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide for families and grandparents

Take your time — you can't break it

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For Xbox Series X, Series S & Game Pass · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your Xbox and Game Pass manual. Read it in any order and at your own pace — there is no test, and you can't fall behind. Whether you're choosing an Xbox as a gift, setting limits for a grandchild, trying to make sense of the Game Pass plans, or wondering how to play without a console at all, every feature comes with what it actually does *for you* and slow step-by-step directions anyone can follow. It covers the Xbox Series X and Series S, Xbox Game Pass, the Xbox Family Settings app and Xbox Cloud Gaming. If a screen looks a little different on yours, the idea is still the same.

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PART 1

Getting to Know Xbox

What an Xbox is, which model is which, what they cost today, and the handful of buttons that run everything. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. Maybe an Xbox is on a grandchild's wish list this year. Maybe one is already sitting under the TV and you've been asked about something called "Game Pass." Or maybe you've heard you can play Xbox games on a TV or phone with no console at all, and you'd like to know what that means. Whichever brought you here, this guide is for **you**.

I'm Bill. Helping folks feel at home with their technology is what I do every day, and I wrote this guide the way I'd explain it sitting next to you on the couch: patiently, in plain English, with no gamer slang. If I use a word you don't know, I'll stop and explain it right then.

You truly can't break it by exploring

An Xbox looks complicated, but it's really a small computer built to be used by children. It's sturdy and forgiving, and it asks "are you sure?" before anything important happens. Pressing the wrong button won't delete anyone's game or spend money by itself. And there's always one button that brings you back to safe ground — the glowing **Xbox button** in the middle of the controller, which you'll meet in Chapter 3.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this matters

When you understand the accounts, the family settings and the Game Pass plans, you can say "yes" to playing together, set sensible limits from your own phone, and stop worrying about surprise charges or strangers online.

What this guide covers

- Telling the **Xbox Series X** and **Series S** models apart, with honest prices as of November 2026.
- Setting up the console with the **Xbox app** on your phone and connecting it to the TV.
- **Microsoft accounts** and the **family group** — the grown-up side that keeps kids safe.
- The free **Xbox Family Settings** app: screen time, content filters, friends and spending.
- **Xbox Game Pass**: what Essential, Premium, Ultimate and PC Game Pass include, and how to cancel.
- **Cloud gaming**: playing on a TV, phone or computer without a console.
- Sharing with the family, controllers for every hand, storage, scams and simple fixes.

And I'm only a phone call away

This guide will carry you a long way on your own. But if you ever get stuck — say, the family app won't show the child's account, or a charge appears you don't recognize — call me at **(330) 200-8042**. No question is too small, and there's no such thing as a silly one.

So find a comfortable chair, and let's get to know this thing together.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

Which Xbox Is Which (and What They Cost)

Today's Xbox consoles are called the **Xbox Series X** and the **Xbox Series S**. They came out in 2020 and have been joined by a few new versions since. They all play the same games; the differences are picture quality, storage space and whether there's a slot for discs.

The current models, side by side

Model	What it is	Plays discs?	U.S. list price (Nov. 2026)
Xbox Series S – 512 GB	The small white console. Least storage.	**No**	$499.99
Xbox Series S – 1 TB	The small console in black, with twice the storage.	**No**	$599.99
Xbox Series X Digital	The tall, most powerful console, without a disc drive.	**No**	$749.99
Xbox Series X	The tall, most powerful console, with a disc drive.	Yes	$799.99

These are Microsoft's suggested U.S. prices as of November 2026. Prices went up in 2025 and again on **August 1, 2026** — by $100 on the 512 GB models and $150 on the 1 TB models — and Microsoft said rising memory costs could push them higher again. The 2 TB "Galaxy Black" Series X was discontinued. Stores sometimes still have older stock at older prices, so compare before you buy.

HEADS UP

"Digital" means no discs

The Series S and the Series X Digital have no disc slot. Every game has to be downloaded or played through Game Pass. If someone in the family has a stack of Xbox game discs, or likes buying used games, only the regular **Series X** will play them.

Series X or Series S — the plain difference

- **Series X:** the most powerful. Sharpest picture on a 4K TV, more storage, and (on the disc model) plays discs and movie Blu-rays.

- **Series S:** smaller, quieter and less expensive. Plays the same new games at a somewhat lower picture quality — hard to notice on most living-room TVs, and a fine choice for a child's room.
- Both play most older Xbox One games, too.

A newer option: handheld Xbox PCs

In 2025, ASUS and Microsoft released the **ROG Xbox Ally** handhelds — portable gaming computers shaped like a big controller with a screen in the middle. They run Windows with an Xbox-style screen and play PC games, including PC Game Pass. The top model, the **ROG Xbox Ally X**, has held at about $1,000 in the U.S. They're a different kind of device from a console and suit a teen or adult who already plays PC games more than a young child.

FROM BILL

Buying one as a gift?

Ask the parents three quick questions first: Does the child already have Xbox games on disc? Is the TV a 4K TV? And will Game Pass be part of the gift? Those answers point to the right model. Buy from a store you know — not a too-good-to-be-true website or social-media ad (more on that in Chapter 23).

TIP

Not sure which one you have?

Press the **Xbox button** on the controller, go to **Profile & system** > **Settings** > **System** and look for the console information. A tall black tower is a Series X; a small flat box with a round black vent is a Series S.

CHAPTER 3

The Controller & the Buttons That Matter

Let's take a slow tour of the controller. Once you know these few buttons, the rest of the Xbox makes sense.

The buttons, one at a time

Button	What it does
Xbox button (the glowing logo)	Turns the console on. Once it's on, press it any time to open the **guide** — a menu on the left with your games, settings and Home. Hold it for a few seconds for power options. This is your "take me home" button.
A and B	**A** (green) chooses or confirms. **B** (red) goes back one step.
Left stick and D-pad	Move around menus. The D-pad is the plus-shaped pad on the left.
View button	Two small overlapping squares, left of center. Shows more details in many menus.
Menu button	Three short lines, right of center. Opens options, or pauses most games.
Share button	The small button in the middle with an arrow. Takes a picture of the screen.
Pair button	A tiny button on the top edge, next to the charging port. Used to connect the controller.

TIP

The Xbox button is your front porch

If you press something and land on a screen you don't recognize, press the **Xbox button** and choose **Home**. The game waits in the background, and nothing is lost.

Batteries

The standard Xbox Wireless Controller runs on two **AA batteries**, which come in the box. Rechargeable packs are sold separately. A low-battery icon appears in the corner of the screen when it's time to swap them. The controller can also be plugged into the console with a USB-C cable.

GOOD TO KNOW

"Console" just means the game machine

You'll hear people say "console" a lot. It simply means the Xbox box itself, as opposed to the controller or the TV.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

With just the Xbox button, A and B, you can get anywhere on the console. Everything else is a shortcut you can learn later — or never.

PART 2

Setting Up Your Xbox

Connecting the console to the TV, setting it up with the Xbox app on your phone, and getting it on Wi-Fi and up to date.

CHAPTER 4

Connecting the Xbox to the TV

Before anything else, the console needs power, a picture and — ideally — a good spot to breathe. This takes about ten minutes.

What's in the box

Piece	What it does
The console	The Xbox itself. Everything — games, saves, settings — lives here.
Wireless controller	One controller with two AA batteries.
Power cord	Plugs straight into the back of the console; there's no separate power brick.
HDMI cable	Carries picture and sound from the Xbox to the TV.

Hooking it up

1. Set the console on a flat, open shelf with space around it. Don't close it inside a cabinet — it needs air.
2. Plug one end of the HDMI cable into the port marked **HDMI out** on the back of the Xbox.
3. Plug the other end into a free HDMI port on your TV. Note its number (HDMI 1, HDMI 2 and so on).
4. Plug in the power cord, first to the Xbox and then to the wall or a surge protector.
5. Turn on the TV and use the TV remote's **Input** or **Source** button to choose that HDMI number.
6. Put the batteries in the controller and press the **Xbox button**. The console turns on and setup begins.

> TIP
>
> **No picture?**
>
> Nine times out of ten the TV is simply on the wrong input. Press **Input** or **Source** on the TV remote and step through the choices slowly. If that doesn't do it, check that the HDMI cable is pushed all the way in at both ends — Chapter 24 has more.

GOOD TO KNOW

Use the cable in the box

The HDMI cable that comes with the Xbox is made for it. An older cable from a drawer may work, but if the picture flickers or won't show 4K, try the one from the box first.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Once it's connected and you've written the HDMI number on the cheat-sheet in Chapter 26, getting the picture back is a single press of the TV remote — for you and for every visiting grandchild.

CHAPTER 5

Setting Up with the Xbox App

The easiest way to set up a new Xbox is with the free **Xbox** app on your phone. The console shows a code on the TV, you type it into the app, and the app walks you through the rest — far easier than typing passwords with a controller.

Before you start

- Your Wi-Fi name and password.
- The email and password for your **Microsoft account** (Chapter 7). If you have Outlook, Hotmail, OneDrive or a Windows computer, you probably have one already.
- Your phone, with the free **Xbox** app installed from the App Store or Google Play.

The setup, step by step

1. Turn on the Xbox. Pick your language and region with the controller.
2. When the TV shows a setup code, open the **Xbox** app on your phone and sign in with your Microsoft account.
3. In the app, look for the option to **set up a console**, and type the code from the TV.
4. Follow the app's screens: connect to Wi-Fi, choose a power mode, and let the console download its updates.
5. Sign the console in to your account. The app may ask to make this console your **Home Xbox** (see Chapter 20).
6. When the Home screen appears on the TV, you're done. Updates may keep downloading in the background.

> **TIP**
>
> **No phone? That's fine**
>
> You can also set up entirely with the controller: choose the option to set up on the console instead of with the app, and type your Wi-Fi password and account details on the on-screen keyboard. It just takes longer.

HEADS UP

Set it up as the grown-up

If the Xbox is a gift for a child, set the console up under **your** adult account first, then add the child's account to your family group (Chapter 8). Setting it up under the child's account makes the parental controls harder to get right.

FROM BILL

Doing this before the big day

A new console often needs a large update the first time it's turned on. If it's a holiday gift, set it up a few days early, let the updates finish, then box it back up. Christmas morning becomes "unwrap and play" instead of "unwrap and wait."

CHAPTER 6

Wi-Fi, Updates & Power Settings

An Xbox works best connected to the internet. That's how it gets updates, downloads games, checks the family settings you set from your phone, and lets Game Pass work.

Connecting to Wi-Fi or a cable

1. Press the **Xbox button**, then go to **Profile & system** > **Settings**.
2. Choose **General** > **Network settings**.
3. Choose **Set up wireless network**, pick your Wi-Fi name and type the password.
4. Choose **Test network connection** to make sure it works.

TIP

A cable is even better

If your internet router is near the TV, an ordinary network (Ethernet) cable from the router to the back of the Xbox gives the steadiest connection — especially for cloud gaming and big downloads.

Keeping it up to date

The Xbox normally updates itself overnight. To check by hand, open **Settings** > **System** > **Updates**. Updates fix problems and keep the console secure, so it's best to leave automatic updates turned on.

Power options

In **Settings** > **General** > **Power options** you'll see choices about what the Xbox does when it's "off." One setting lets it start faster and update overnight; the other saves electricity by shutting down fully. Either is fine — the energy-saving choice uses less power, and the console simply takes a little longer to start.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A connected, updated Xbox means fewer error messages, the newest safety fixes, and family settings that take effect right away when you change them from your phone.

PART 3

Accounts & the Family Group

The Microsoft account behind every Xbox, gamertags, and the family group that lets a grown-up watch over a child's account.

CHAPTER 7

Your Microsoft Account & Gamertag

Every Xbox player signs in with a **Microsoft account** — the same kind of account used for Outlook email, OneDrive and Windows. It holds purchases, Game Pass, saved games and settings. If you already use any Microsoft service, you can use that same account on the Xbox.

Words you'll see

Term	What it means
Microsoft account	Your sign-in: an email address and password (or a passkey or the Microsoft Authenticator app). It's the key to everything, including the payment card.
Gamertag	The nickname other players see online. It doesn't need to be your real name — and for a child, it shouldn't be.
Profile	Each person's spot on the console, with their own games, saves and settings.
Family group	A set of Microsoft accounts linked together so a parent or grandparent can manage a child's settings (Chapter 8).

Protect the grown-up account

Your account may have a credit card attached, so it's worth guarding. Our companion guide, **Your Microsoft Account**, covers this in depth. The short version:

- Turn on **two-step verification** at **account.microsoft.com** > **Security**, so a stolen password alone can't get in.
- Use a password you don't use anywhere else.
- Never share a sign-in code that arrives by text or email — not even with someone claiming to be from Microsoft.

Require a passkey or PIN to sign in on the console

On a shared family console, anyone can pick any profile unless you lock it. In **Settings** > **Account** > **Sign-in, security & passkey**, you can set the console to ask for a passkey (a six-digit code you choose) before your profile can be used or before anything is bought. That keeps little hands off the grown-up profile and its card.

HEADS UP

Lock the profile that has the card

If your profile has a payment card on file and doesn't ask for a passkey, a child who picks your profile can buy things with it. A six-digit passkey on your profile closes that door.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

One protected grown-up account, with each child on their own profile, means purchases, saves and settings stay where they belong — and nobody spends on your card by accident.

CHAPTER 8

The Family Group & Child Accounts

A **Microsoft family group** links a grown-up's account to a child's account. Once a child is in your family group as a member, you — the organizer — can set screen time, content filters, friends and spending, from your phone or a computer. This is the foundation for every setting in Part 4.

Creating a family group and adding a child

1. On a computer or phone browser, go to **family.microsoft.com** and sign in with your own adult Microsoft account. (You can also do this from the Xbox Family Settings app — Chapter 9.)
2. Choose the option to add a family member. If this is your first one, a family group is created for you.
3. Choose **Member** for a child (organizers are the grown-ups who manage settings).
4. If the child already has a Microsoft account, enter its email. If not, choose to create one, and pick an email name and password for the child.
5. Follow the prompts to give parental consent and enter the child's birth date. Use the real birth date — the age-based settings depend on it.
6. On the Xbox, add the child's profile: press the **Xbox button**, go to **Profile & system** > **Add or switch** > **Add new**, and sign in with the child's account.

TIP

Grandparents can be organizers, too

A family group can have more than one organizer. If the grandchildren spend weekends with you, the parents can add you as an organizer so you can grant extra time or approve a friend request from your own phone.

GOOD TO KNOW

Children's settings start on the safe side

When you create an account for a young child, Microsoft starts its settings on the cautious side. You can loosen them as the child grows, which is easier than tightening them later.

HEADS UP

Every child needs their own account

The family settings only work if the child signs in to the Xbox with their own account. If a child plays on a grown-up's profile, none of the limits apply. Remind everyone to sign in as themselves.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Ten minutes setting up the family group is what makes everything else in this guide possible: limits, filters and spending controls you can manage from anywhere.

PART 4

Family Settings & Parental Controls

Screen time, age-appropriate games, safe friends and chat, and no surprise charges — all from the free Xbox Family Settings app on your phone.

CHAPTER 9

The Xbox Family Settings App

Microsoft offers a free phone app called **Xbox Family Settings**. Once your child is in your family group, the app lets you set screen time, filter content, approve friends and manage spending on the Xbox — from your own phone, even when you're not in the house.

What the app can do

Area	What you control
Screen time	A daily schedule of how long the child can play on the Xbox, with different amounts for different days. Add time or pause play right from your phone (Chapter 10).
Content restrictions	Filter games and apps by age rating (Chapter 11).
Friends and chat	Let the child "ask a parent" before adding a friend, and decide who they can talk with (Chapter 12).
Spending	Add money to the child's account, approve purchase requests and see what was bought (Chapter 13).

Getting started

1. On your phone, download **Xbox Family Settings** from the App Store or Google Play. It's free.
2. Open it and sign in with **your** adult Microsoft account — the organizer of the family group.
3. If you don't have a family group yet, the app offers to create one and add a child. If you do, your children appear in the app.
4. Tap a child's name to see and change their settings.

GOOD TO KNOW

This app is just for Xbox

Microsoft's help pages note that the Xbox Family Settings app sets screen time for the **Xbox** only. Limits for a Windows computer are managed separately, through Microsoft's family settings on the web at **family.microsoft.com**.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You don't have to stand over anyone's shoulder. The app enforces the rules you picked and lets you check in from anywhere — so screen-time conversations can be calm and based on facts, not guesses.

CHAPTER 10

Setting Screen Time Limits

This is the feature most families want first: a limit on how long the Xbox can be played each day, with the option to give more time on weekends.

Turning on screen time

1. Open the **Xbox Family Settings** app.
2. Tap the name of the child you're setting limits for.
3. In the **Screen time** card, tap **Settings**, then turn the toggle on.
4. Set how much time is allowed for each day of the week, and the hours of the day when play is allowed.
5. Save. The Xbox picks up the change over the internet.

Changing it on the fly

Once limits are set, come back to the same **Screen time** card any time to **Add time now** — say, to finish a game with Grandpa — or **Pause now** when it's time for dinner.

When time runs out

- The child sees a notice on the screen. They can send you a request for more time.
- The request arrives on your phone. You can grant extra time or say no.
- If no extra time is given, the child is signed out until the next allowed time.

HEADS UP

The clock runs while they're signed in

Microsoft counts screen time while the child is **signed in** to the Xbox — even if they've wandered off. Teach children to sign out when they're done, or their time can drain away with nobody playing.

TIP

Give a warning week

Some games only save at certain moments. Start with a generous limit for the first week so children learn to wrap up when the notice appears, then tighten it if needed.

FROM BILL

Agree on the rules together

Limits work best when the child helps set them. Sit down together, open the app, and agree on a daily time everyone can live with. The app becomes the referee, not the bad guy.

CHAPTER 11

Content Filters & Age Ratings

Every game sold in the U.S. carries an **ESRB rating** — a letter on the box and in the store that tells you what age it's meant for. The family settings can block games and apps above the right age.

The ratings you'll see

Rating	What it means
E — Everyone	Suitable for all ages.
E10+ — Everyone 10+	May have more cartoon action or mild language.
T — Teen	Generally for ages 13 and up.
M — Mature 17+	Intended for adults.

Turning on the filter

1. In the **Xbox Family Settings** app, tap the child's name.
2. Open **Content restrictions**.
3. Make sure **Filter inappropriate content** is turned on.
4. Choose the age the filter should allow. Games and apps rated above that age will be blocked.

TIP

Asking for an exception

If a child wants a game that's above their filter, they can ask, and the request comes to you. You can say yes to that one game without loosening the whole filter.

GOOD TO KNOW

Ratings aren't the whole story

Ratings describe what's in the game, not what other players might say online. That's why the friends and chat settings in Chapter 12 matter just as much.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Set the filter once and the Xbox quietly keeps grown-up games out of reach — no need to inspect every box.

PART 5

Friends, Spending & Game Pass

Safe friends and chat, no surprise charges, and a plain explanation of the Xbox Game Pass plans — including how to cancel.

CHAPTER 12

Friends, Chat & Online Safety

Many Xbox games let players talk to each other by voice or text. That can be a lovely way for a grandparent in another state to play with a grandchild — and it's also where a child could meet a stranger. The family settings let you decide who gets in.

"Ask a parent" for new friends

In the Xbox Family Settings app you can let a child **ask a parent** before adding a friend. When they send a friend request, it comes to your phone first, and you approve or decline it.

Who can talk to them

In the app, open the child's settings and look for the privacy and communication options. For each kind of contact — voice chat, messages, and joining multiplayer games — you can generally choose **Everybody**, **Friends** only, or **Blocked**. For younger children, "friends only" (with you approving each friend) is a sensible place to start.

STAY SAFE

Friends only, and people they know

Online, a "friend" is just someone who accepted a request. Talk with children about only adding people they know in real life — classmates, cousins, Grandma. Each request landing on your phone gives you a natural moment to ask "who's this?"

If someone is unkind or inappropriate

1. Press the **Xbox button** and find the player in the list of recent players, a party or the friends list.
2. Select the player's gamertag to open their profile.
3. Choose **Block** to stop them contacting the child, and **Report** to tell Microsoft.
4. Talk with the child: they did the right thing by telling you.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Approving friends and limiting chat lets children enjoy playing with the people who matter, while keeping strangers on the other side of the door.

CHAPTER 13

No Surprise Charges: Spending & Ask to Buy

Xbox games often sell extras — new characters, outfits, game money. The family settings make sure a child can't charge them to the family card without a grown-up saying yes.

How Ask to Buy works

- When a child tries to buy a game, app or in-game item they don't have money for, you get a **notification** in the Xbox Family Settings app.
- You can approve it — adding the money needed — or decline it.
- In the app you can also see the child's **account balance** and their **recent spending history**.

Giving an allowance instead

Some families prefer a fixed amount. From the app you can **add money** to a child's Microsoft account. The child can spend that balance on games, in-game purchases and apps — and when it's gone, they have to ask. The benefits walkthrough at the start of this guide shows how.

HEADS UP

Don't leave a card on the child's account

If a payment card is saved on the child's own Microsoft account, purchases may not need your approval. Keep cards on the grown-up account only, and protect that profile with a passkey (Chapter 7).

TIP

Gift cards from a store you trust

Xbox gift cards from a real store are a tidy way to give a set amount for a birthday. Redeem them on the child's account. Just remember: gift cards are for gifts, never for paying a bill or a "support" person (Chapter 23).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

With Ask to Buy, you can hand over the controller without wondering what the next credit card statement will say.

CHAPTER 14

Xbox Game Pass: The Plans & Prices

Xbox Game Pass is a monthly membership — think "Netflix for games." Instead of buying each game, you pay a monthly fee and can play any game in the Game Pass library while you're a member. Microsoft reorganized the plans in October 2025 and lowered the top plan's price in April 2026.

The four plans in the U.S. (November 2026)

Plan	Price a month	What it includes
Essential	$9.99	50+ games on Xbox, PC and supported devices, plus **online multiplayer** on the console. No brand-new games on day one.
Premium	$14.99	A larger library of 200+ games, online console multiplayer, and the ability to stream games in the cloud.
Ultimate	$22.99	The biggest library (hundreds of games), many **new games on day one**, **EA Play**, online multiplayer, and the best-quality cloud streaming.
PC Game Pass	$13.99	For Windows computers only. A large PC library with new games on day one and EA Play. Does **not** include Xbox console games or cloud gaming.

- Before October 2025 the plans were called **Core** (now Essential) and **Standard** (now Premium).
- On April 21, 2026, Ultimate dropped from $29.99 to $22.99 a month, and PC Game Pass from $16.49 to $13.99.
- As part of that change, future **Call of Duty** games no longer join Game Pass on launch day; Microsoft says they'll be added about a year after release.
- Starting in November 2026, cloud play on every plan has a monthly hour allowance (Chapter 19).

GOOD TO KNOW

Games come and go

Game Pass is a rotating library. Most games stay a long time, but some leave. If a child loves one particular game, buying it outright means it stays theirs.

HEADS UP

It renews every month

Game Pass renews automatically and charges the card on file until it's canceled. Note the renewal date on the cheat-sheet in Chapter 26, and see Chapter 16 for how to turn renewal off.

PART 6

Choosing, Canceling & Playing Anywhere

Which Game Pass plan fits, how to cancel or stop the renewal, buying games, and cloud gaming on a TV, phone or computer with no console.

CHAPTER 15

Which Game Pass Plan Fits Your Family

There's no single right answer, and you don't need Game Pass at all to enjoy an Xbox. Here's how I'd think it through, in plain terms.

If the player...	Consider
Just wants to play online with friends	**Essential** ($9.99) — online multiplayer on the console plus a small library.
Likes to try lots of different games	**Premium** ($14.99) — a much bigger library.
Wants the newest games the day they come out, or plays EA sports games	**Ultimate** ($22.99).
Plays on a Windows gaming computer, not an Xbox	**PC Game Pass** ($13.99).
Plays one or two favorite games and nothing else	Maybe no membership — buying those games may cost less over a year.

Do the math for a year

Monthly prices add up. At November 2026 prices, a year of Essential is about $120, Premium about $180, and Ultimate about $276. Compare that with the price of the games the child actually wants: if they play only one or two games all year, buying them outright may be cheaper; if they bounce between many, Game Pass usually wins.

TIP

Try a month, then decide

Start with one month of the plan you think fits, watch how much it's used, and adjust. You can move between plans, and you can turn off renewal the same day you sign up so it doesn't continue by surprise.

GOOD TO KNOW

Online play needs a plan

Most free-to-play games (like Fortnite) can be played online without a membership, but most paid games need at least **Essential** for online multiplayer on the console. Playing alone, offline, never needs a membership.

FROM BILL

An honest word

I'll never tell you a membership is a must. For a lot of grandparents' homes, an Xbox with two or three well-chosen games is plenty. Game Pass makes sense when a child genuinely enjoys trying new things.

CHAPTER 16

Canceling Game Pass or Turning Off Recurring Billing

Game Pass, like most Microsoft subscriptions, renews automatically. You can cancel it — or simply turn off **recurring billing** so it ends at the close of the time you've paid for — from a computer or phone.

Canceling on the web

1. In a browser, go to **account.microsoft.com/services** and sign in with the Microsoft account that pays for Game Pass.
2. Find the Game Pass subscription in the list and choose **Manage**.
3. Choose the option to **cancel** the subscription or **turn off recurring billing**.
4. Follow the prompts. You'll see the date the membership will end.
5. Check your email for the confirmation, and keep it.

GOOD TO KNOW

Usually you keep it until the end date

Turning off recurring billing generally lets you keep playing until the end of the period you already paid for. If you're offered a choice to end right away for a partial refund, read the screen carefully before choosing.

HEADS UP

Canceled on the console — but still charged?

Subscriptions belong to the account that pays, not the console. If a charge keeps appearing, sign in at **account.microsoft.com/services** with *each* family member's account; the subscription may be on a different account than you think. Purchase history is under **Payment & billing**.

SCAM ALERT

Microsoft won't call about your subscription

A call, text or pop-up saying your Game Pass "renewed for $399" and asking you to call a number for a refund is a scam. Check subscriptions only by typing account.microsoft.com yourself. Never let a caller connect to your computer.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing exactly where subscriptions live means you're never stuck paying for something nobody uses.

CHAPTER 17

Buying Games: Discs, Downloads & Gift Cards

Besides Game Pass, you can buy games to keep. There are three ways, and each has its place.

Way	What to know
Disc	Bought at a store. Only works on a **Series X with a disc drive**. Can be lent or resold. The disc must be in the console to play.
Digital download	Bought in the **Microsoft Store** on the Xbox, in the Xbox app or at xbox.com. Tied to the account that bought it; plays on any Xbox you sign in to.
Gift card	An Xbox gift card from a trusted store adds money to an account for downloads and add-ons.

Buying a download on the console

1. Press the **Xbox button** and open the **Store**.
2. Search for the game or browse. Check the ESRB rating on the game's page.
3. Choose the price button and confirm. If your profile asks for a passkey, enter it.
4. The game downloads and appears in **My games & apps**.

TIP

Look for "Included with Game Pass"

If you're a member, the Store marks games that are already part of your plan. No need to buy those.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing the difference between a disc, a download and a Game Pass game means you buy the right thing the first time — and don't pay for a game you already have.

CHAPTER 18

Cloud Gaming: Play Without a Console

Xbox Cloud Gaming lets you play Xbox games on a TV, phone, tablet or computer — no console needed. The game runs on Microsoft's computers and streams to your screen, like a movie, while your controller presses travel back over the internet.

Where you can play

- **Smart TVs:** select **Samsung** TVs from 2021 and newer, select **LG** TVs with webOS 24 or newer, and Hisense TVs running VIDAA — through the **Xbox** app on the TV.
- **Amazon Fire TV:** supported Fire TV Stick and Fire TV Cube models, through the Xbox app.
- **Phones and tablets:** iPhone, iPad and Android.
- **Computers:** Windows PCs, or a web browser such as Edge, Chrome or Safari at xbox.com/play.
- **Other devices:** Xbox consoles and select Meta Quest headsets.

HEADS UP

2020 Samsung TVs lost cloud gaming

As of **November 3, 2026**, the Xbox app no longer works on Samsung TVs from 2020 and earlier; Microsoft said the TVs' software can't keep up. Samsung TVs from 2021 and later still work. On an older TV, a Fire TV stick is one way to keep playing.

What you need

- A Game Pass plan that includes cloud play (Essential, Premium or Ultimate — not PC Game Pass), or purchased cloud hours (Chapter 19).
- A compatible controller, such as an Xbox Wireless Controller paired by Bluetooth. Phones can also use on-screen touch controls in some games.
- A strong, steady internet connection. A wired connection or a TV close to the router helps most.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A grandparent with a newer smart TV and a controller can play the same games as the grandchildren — or keep them busy during a visit — without buying a console at all.

CHAPTER 19

Cloud Hours, Controllers & Getting Started on a TV

Cloud gaming used to be unlimited for members. Starting in **November 2026**, Microsoft gives each Game Pass plan a monthly allowance of cloud play. Games you download and play on the console itself are **not** limited.

The monthly cloud allowance

Plan	Cloud play included each month
Essential	5 hours
Premium	10 hours
Ultimate	15 hours
PC Game Pass	Cloud play not included

- When the hours run out, you'll be offered more hours to buy from the **Xbox Store**.
- People without Game Pass can also buy cloud hours from the Xbox Store.
- Microsoft said it would share the prices for extra hours, and how to check your remaining time, in November 2026 — check xbox.com for the current details before you buy.
- Microsoft estimated the limits would affect about 4 percent of members; most families won't notice.

HEADS UP

Kids can burn through hours fast

Five hours a month goes quickly for an eager child. If cloud play is the main way a grandchild plays at your house, keep an eye on the allowance before agreeing to buy extra hours.

Getting started on a smart TV or Fire TV

1. Pair an Xbox Wireless Controller to the TV or Fire TV by Bluetooth: in the TV's Bluetooth or accessories menu, choose to add a device, then hold the controller's small **Pair** button until the Xbox button flashes quickly.
2. Open the TV's app store and install the **Xbox** app (on some Samsung and LG TVs it's in the gaming area).

3. Open the app and sign in with your Microsoft account. The easiest way is usually to scan the code on the TV with your phone, or enter the code at the web address shown.
4. Browse the games marked for cloud play and choose **Play**.

TIP

If the picture stutters

Cloud gaming needs steady internet. Pause other big downloads in the house, move the router closer, or use a network cable to the TV. Chapter 24 has more.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

With a controller and the Xbox app, the TV you already own becomes a game machine for visits and holidays.

PART 7

Sharing, Comfort & Storage

Sharing games in the family, controllers and settings for every hand and eye, and what to do when the Xbox runs out of space.

CHAPTER 20

Sharing with the Family: Your Home Xbox

Digital games and Game Pass belong to the account that bought them. The **Home Xbox** setting is how they get shared with everyone who uses the family's console.

What Home Xbox does

- When you make a console your **Home Xbox**, anyone who signs in on that console can play the digital games you've bought.
- Your Game Pass membership benefits can generally be shared with others signed in on your Home Xbox, too — so one membership can cover the family console.
- On any other Xbox, your games work only when **you** are signed in.

Making a console your Home Xbox

1. Sign in on the console with the account that owns the games and Game Pass.
2. Press the **Xbox button** and go to **Profile & system** > **Settings**.
3. Choose **General** > **Personalization**, then look for **My home Xbox**.
4. Choose **Make this my home Xbox**.

HEADS UP

You can't switch it back and forth often

Microsoft limits how many times a year you can change your Home Xbox. Pick the console the family uses most, and leave it.

TIP

Grandparent's house, too?

If the grandchildren have their own Xbox at home and you have one at your house, the account that owns the games can only make one of them its Home Xbox. On the other console, the owner's account needs to be signed in to play those games.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

One purchase or one membership can serve the whole household's console — no need to buy the same game twice for two children.

CHAPTER 21

Controllers & Accessibility for Every Player

Xbox has done more than most to make games playable for everyone — including players with arthritis, limited vision, hearing loss or limited mobility. Many of these settings help grandparents, too.

Easier-to-see and easier-to-hear settings

Press the **Xbox button** and go to **Profile & system** > **Settings** > **Accessibility**. Look for:

- **Magnifier** — zoom in on part of the screen.
- **Narrator** — reads menus and text aloud.
- **High contrast** and text size options — bolder, easier-to-read menus.
- **Closed captions** — subtitles for the console and many games.
- **Controller** settings — including button remapping, so any button can do any job.

> TIP
> **Check the game's own settings, too**
> Many games have their own accessibility menu with bigger subtitles, slower speeds or easier difficulty. Open the game's options from its main menu.

The Xbox Adaptive Controller

Microsoft makes the **Xbox Adaptive Controller**, a flat controller with two large programmable buttons and many sockets along the back. Players plug in switches, large buttons, joysticks or foot pedals to suit their own hands and reach. It's designed for players with limited mobility and works with Xbox consoles and Windows PCs.

Pairing another controller

1. Turn on the Xbox and the new controller (press its Xbox button).
2. Press and release the **Pair** button on the console — on a Series X or S it's on the front, near the USB port.
3. Within 20 seconds, press and hold the **Pair** button on the top of the controller until the Xbox button flashes quickly.
4. When the Xbox button stays lit, it's connected.

FROM BILL

Two players, one controller each

Most family games need one controller per player. If grandchildren visit, a second controller is often the best small purchase you can make.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

With the right settings and controller, nobody has to sit out — including Grandma and Grandpa.

CHAPTER 22

Storage: When the Xbox Is Full

Modern games are big, and a 512 GB Series S fills up quickly. When there's no room for a new game, you have three options: delete something, add storage, or play from the cloud.

Seeing what's taking up space

1. Press the **Xbox button** and choose **My games & apps** > **See all**.
2. Look for the option to **Manage** storage, which lists games by size.
3. Select a game you no longer play and choose **Uninstall**.

GOOD TO KNOW

Uninstalling doesn't lose the game

Saved games are kept in the cloud for your account, and a bought game can be downloaded again any time from **My games & apps**. You only lose the space, not the game or the progress.

Adding storage

- **Storage expansion card:** a small card that plugs into the back of a Series X or S and works just like the built-in storage. The most expensive option, but the simplest.
- **USB external drive:** less expensive. Newer Series X|S games can be *stored* on it but must be moved back inside to play; older Xbox One games can play straight from it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Clearing old games before buying storage often frees all the room you need — at no cost.

PART 8

Scams, Fixes, When to Call Bill & Your Cheat-Sheet

The scams aimed at Xbox families, simple fixes, an honest word about when a hand is worth it, and a one-page summary to keep near the TV.

CHAPTER 23

Scams Aimed at Xbox Families

Where there are children, money and gift cards, scammers follow. The good news: almost every Xbox scam fits one of a few patterns, and once you know them, they're easy to spot.

The common ones

Scam	How it works
"Free Game Pass" or "free game codes"	Videos, ads and websites promising free memberships or game money if you sign in or download something. They steal accounts. Real offers come only from xbox.com or the Microsoft Store on the console.
Fake Microsoft support	A pop-up, call or email saying your account is hacked or you were charged, with a number to call. Microsoft doesn't make unsolicited support calls.
Gift card requests	Anyone asking to be paid in Xbox, Apple, Google Play or other gift cards — for a bill, a refund or a "fine" — is a scammer. Always.
Too-good-to-be-true consoles	Websites or social-media sellers offering a new Xbox far below the prices in Chapter 2. The console never arrives.
"Your child owes money"	In-game messages asking a child to share a password or code to get items or avoid a ban. Real game staff never ask for passwords.

SCAM ALERT

Gift cards are for gifts — never for payments

No real company, government office or tech support will ever ask you to pay with gift cards. If someone asks you to buy gift cards and read them the numbers, hang up. It's a scam every time.

SCAM ALERT

Never share a sign-in code

A code that arrives by text or email is the key to your account. Anyone who asks for it — even sounding official, even "from Xbox" — is trying to take the account and its card.

SCAM ALERT

Free Game Pass offers are bait

Websites and videos promising free Game Pass, free game money or a "code generator" are designed to steal accounts or install harmful software. Teach children: if it's free and it's not on xbox.com or the Microsoft Store, it's a trap.

If you think it happened

1. Stop talking to the person and don't send anything more.
2. Change your Microsoft account password at account.microsoft.com, and turn on two-step verification.
3. Check **Payment & billing** > **Order history** and your subscriptions for anything unexpected.
4. If gift cards were sent, call the card company's number on the back of the card right away.
5. Report it to the FTC at **ReportFraud.ftc.gov**, then call me — I'll help you sort it out calmly.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A five-minute talk with the grandchildren about "free" offers and secret codes protects the whole family's accounts.

CHAPTER 24

Troubleshooting: Simple Fixes

Most Xbox problems are fixed by one of a handful of steps. Try them in order, slowly.

Problem	Try this
No picture on the TV	Check the TV input (Chapter 4). Push the HDMI cable in firmly at both ends. Try another HDMI port on the TV.
Frozen or acting strangely	Restart: hold the **Xbox button** on the controller, then choose **Restart console**.
Won't respond at all	Hold the power button on the front of the console for about 10 seconds until it turns off. Wait a minute, then press it again to turn it on.
Controller won't connect	Fresh AA batteries first. Then pair it again (Chapter 21), or connect it with a USB-C cable.
Can't connect to the internet	**Settings** > **General** > **Network settings** > **Test network connection**. Restart the router if needed.
Cloud games stutter	Pause other downloads, move closer to the router, or use a network cable.
A game won't start	Restart the console. If it still fails, uninstall and reinstall the game (Chapter 22).
Forgot the password	Go to **account.microsoft.com** on a computer or phone and choose the option to reset it.
Child locked out by screen time	Grant extra time from the Xbox Family Settings app (Chapter 10).
Charged and not sure why	Check **account.microsoft.com/services** and order history (Chapter 16).

TIP

Write down any error code

If an error message has a code, write it down or snap a photo. It makes looking up the fix — or helping me help you — much faster.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A restart solves more than you'd expect. Trying these steps first often saves a call — and when it doesn't, you'll already know what's been tried.

CHAPTER 25

When to Call Bill

I've written this guide so you can handle most of an Xbox on your own. 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

- **Setting up a gift before the big day** — accounts, family group, family settings and updates done ahead of time, so the child can just unwrap and play.
- **The Family Settings app won't show the child**, or limits don't seem to apply.
- **Charges you don't recognize** or a subscription you can't find to cancel.
- **Cloud gaming on your TV** — picking a compatible device and getting the controller paired.
- **A suspicious call, message or pop-up** about your Microsoft account.
- **Weak Wi-Fi where the Xbox sits** — I can test and fix the signal.
- **You'd simply rather have a patient person set it up** and show you the ropes. That's always reason enough.

What working with me is like

I work at your pace — no rushing, no talking down, and no gamer jargon. I explain what I'm doing in plain words, and I'll always tell you honestly when a purchase or a membership isn't worth your money. I bring 30+ years of professional experience to every visit, and Bill's Home Tech serves Portage County, Ohio. I can often help over a remote session, or come to your home.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call or text **(330) 200-8042**, or book a time at **billshometech.com/book**. My help is **$49 remote · $99 in your home**. This guide is free to keep and share.

GOOD TO KNOW

You may meet Sophie first

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

Thank you for taking the time to understand the Xbox. It's a lot more fun when you know how it works — and a wonderful excuse to play together.

— Bill

CHAPTER 26

Your Xbox & Game Pass Cheat-Sheet

Keep this summary handy near the TV. The whole guide, boiled down.

The essentials

To do this	Do this
Lost or confused	Press the **Xbox button**, choose **Home**.
Choose / go back	**A** chooses, **B** goes back.
No picture on the TV	TV remote > **Input/Source** > the Xbox's HDMI number.
Restart	Hold the Xbox button > **Restart console**.
Screen time	Xbox Family Settings app > child > **Screen time**.
Content filter	Xbox Family Settings app > child > **Content restrictions**.
Purchase requests	Approve or decline in the Xbox Family Settings app.
Cancel Game Pass	**account.microsoft.com/services** > **Manage**.
Game Pass prices	Essential $9.99 · Premium $14.99 · Ultimate $22.99 · PC $13.99 a month (Nov. 2026).
Cloud hours each month	Essential 5 · Premium 10 · Ultimate 15.

Write it down once

Keep handy	
Model	_____
The Xbox is on HDMI number	_____
Wi-Fi name and password	_____
Parent's Microsoft account email	_____
Children's gamertags	_____
Console passkey (keep private)	_____
Game Pass plan and renewal date	_____

When something's wrong, in order

1. Press the **Xbox button**, go Home, and try again.
2. Restart the console (hold the Xbox button, Restart console).
3. Check the TV input, the power cord and the Wi-Fi.
4. Note any error code and look it up at support.xbox.com.
5. Call Bill at (330) 200-8042 — that's what I'm here for.

Money-smart and safe habits

- Keep payment cards on the grown-up account only, protected by a passkey.
- Turn on purchase approval (Ask to Buy) for every child.
- Pick the Game Pass plan the family actually uses — or none at all.
- Never pay anyone with gift cards, and never share a sign-in code.
- Turn on **two-step verification** for every grown-up Microsoft account.