

# SIGNAL SECURITY

**JANUARY 2025**



**ACTIVIST  CHECKLIST**

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# PROTECT YOUR MESSAGES & CALLS

This guide helps you take control of your private conversations on Signal. While Signal already encrypts everything you send, these extra steps ensure your chats stay private, even if your phone is lost, taken, or compromised. You'll learn simple ways to protect your messages, notifications, and identity.

# Set default disappearing message time & enable it for existing threads

Signal encrypts your communications, but disappearing messages is important if anyone ever gets access to your device.

If your device is confiscated/hacked or the people you're messaging with have their device confiscated/hacked, your messages will be exposed. Always using disappearing messages helps protect you from something you said from the past being used as evidence against you years down the line.

## HOW TO ENABLED DISAPPEARING MESSAGES

1. **To change the default:** Signal > Settings > Privacy > Disappearing Messages > Set to your desired time
2. **To change existing threads:** Signal > Open the message thread you want to change > Click on the person's name (or group name) at the top of the screen > Disappearing Messages > Set to your desired time
3. **Delete old messages/threads:** Disappearing messages does NOT apply retroactively. So you may want to delete old threads on your phone. This will not delete them on other

people's phones, unfortunately. So if it is very sensitive, you may need to ask them to also manually delete the thread. (And while you're at it, encourage them to turn on disappearing messages by default!)

**Choosing your disappearing message time:** How long you set your disappearing times depends on the sensitivity of your messages. A question you might ask yourself is "if someone's device was confiscated or hacked, how important is it that these messages are not accessible?"

- For chatting about low-risk things with friends, you might choose 4 weeks.
- For standard political organizing, you might choose 1 week
- For a direct action, you might set it to 1 day or 1 hour or 5 minutes, so the messages are gone before the action starts

**Note:** Message only disappear after the message has been read. So if the recipient doesn't read it for 2 weeks, and you have disappearing messages set to 4 weeks, it will actually disappear 6 weeks after you sent it.

# Hide name/preview for Signal notifications

If your phone is confiscated (and still on), the cops can read the messages on your home screen without unlocking it.

## HOW TO DISABLE SIGNAL NOTIFICATIONS

Open Signal > Settings > Notifications > Notification Content > Select "No Name or Content"

# Enable “Screen Lock” and “Hide in App Switcher”

If you hand your phone to someone, Screen Lock is an extra layer of security.

- **Screen Lock:** If you hand your phone to someone while unlocked, this ensures they must provide the face/fingerprint/PIN unlock again before opening Signal.
- **Hide in App Switcher:** This will hide your messages when switching between apps.

## HOW TO HIDE SCREEN IN APP SWITCHER

- **On iPhone:** Signal > Settings > Privacy > Enable “Screen Lock” then enable “Hide Screen in App Switcher.”
- **On Android:** Signal > Settings > Privacy > Enable “Screen lock” then enable “Screen Security.”

HIDE YOUR IDENTITY  
ON SIGNAL



# Don't use your real name or photo in your Signal profile

If you want to have the option to communicate more anonymously on Signal, protecting your name is a good idea.

The display name you choose will depend on the level of anonymity you need. The most secure would be to choose a different name to use in protest spaces and on Signal. This can be a good default to help buffer you from surveillance. You can always choose to reveal your real name if you build sufficient trust with someone.

If you don't need as much anonymity, you could just set it to your first name, which would make it slightly harder for someone to find you from a simple Google search.

## HOW TO CHANGE YOUR PROFILE

1. **Change your profile display name:** Signal > Settings > Tap on your name/icon near the top > Click the top item with the silhouette of a person > Edit your profile display name
2. **Change your profile photo:** Signal > Settings > Tap on your name/icon near the top > Edit photo > Upload a generic photo that you found online that doesn't relate to your identity/preferences/interests/location.

# Enable username and hide phone number

If you want to have the option to communicate more anonymously on Signal, protecting your name is a good idea.

If you installed Signal before March 2024 when they introduced usernames<sup>1</sup>, your phone number may still be set to be visible to others.

## HOW TO ENABLE USERNAMES AND HIDE YOUR PHONE NUMBER

1. Make sure you first change your profile display name (see the above item). If your Signal profile display name is your full name, then hiding your phone number will only be slightly helpful.
2. **If you want to change your username:** Signal > Settings > Tap on your name/icon near the top > Tap the @ symbol > Edit username > Set the username to something **completely unrelated** to your identity, or any usernames you've used anywhere before. It must end in at least 2 numbers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://signal.org/blog/phone-number-privacy-usernames/>

3. **Hide your phone number:** Signal > Settings > Privacy > Phone Number > Under “Who Can See My Number” > Select **“Nobody”**.
  - Optionally, you can change “Who Can Find Me By Number.” But this will mean that none of your existing contacts will know that you’re on Signal already unless you message them first. Only change this to “Nobody” if you need very high levels of privacy.
4. **Share your username instead of your phone number:**

If you’re connecting with someone new for political purposes, share your username. Signal > Settings > Tap on your name/icon near the top > QR Code or Link > Share either the QR code or the link with someone you want to be in contact with. Or more simply, just tell them your username.

# Disable link previews

## Can protect you against your approximate location being revealed

This protects you from certain attacks. But make sure you always take a close look at the URL that you're being sent to see if it's from a site you feel comfortable opening.

### HOW TO DISABLE LINK PREVIEWS

Signal > Settings > Chats > **Disable “Generate Link Previews”**

*Technical Background:* An attack was published<sup>2</sup> in 2025 that allows an attacker to estimate your location within about 250 miles.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://gist.github.com/hackermodev/45a3cdfa52246f1d1201c1e8c-def6117>

# SIMPLE GUIDES TO KEEP US MORE SAFE

We built this because digital security shouldn't be overwhelming. We take a harm reduction approach: start where you are and do what you can.

Find more guides like this on *[activistchecklist.org](https://activistchecklist.org)*

