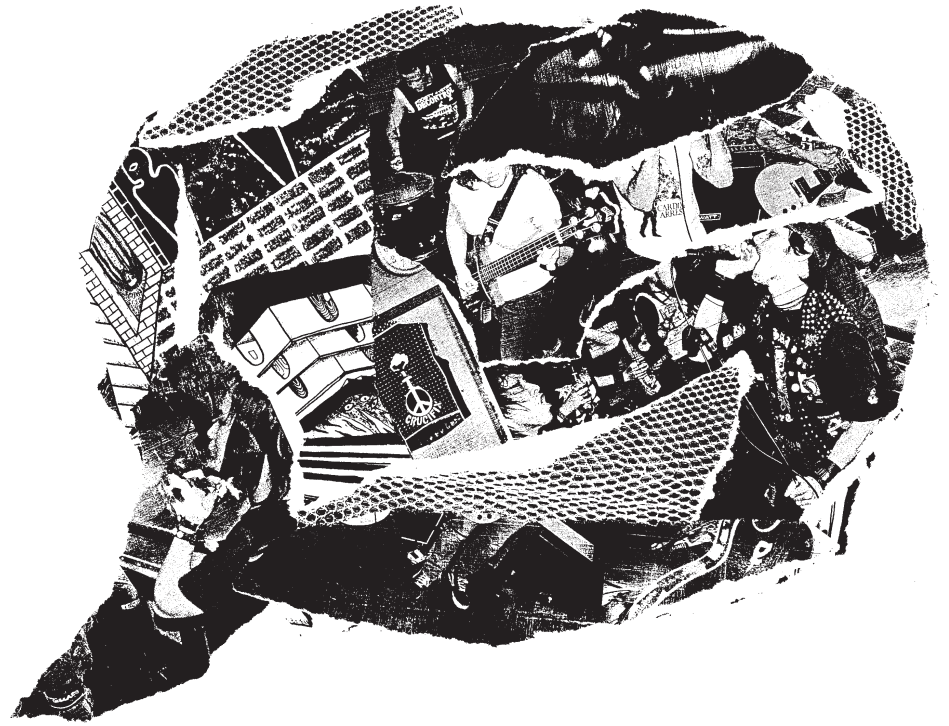


**WE HAVE
PROGRESSED
BEYOND THE
NEED FOR
INSTAGRAM
GEAR
THREADS...**



Signal

FOR PUNKS

Stories, Groupchats & More

From *The Counterforce* issue #7, September 2025



**THE COUNTERFORCE IS A DISTRIBUTED
AND COMMUNITY PROJECT**

PRINT THIS ZINE

This zine is available on our website as a PDF you can print out and distribute yourself, with more coming soon. **the-counterforce.org**

INTRODUCTION

I've been using Signal for at least 10 years, it's long been the best way to reach me. A few years ago, I started using the Signal Stories feature, mostly as an experiment. At first, I didn't know anyone else using Signal Stories, and I wasn't even sure if any of my friends were seeing the show flyers, clips of bands, and local groundhog sightings I was sharing.

Now, several years later, my circle of punk friends using Signal Stories has grown substantially. I keep up with a lot of my distant and local friends via Signal Stories and people regularly ask me how to use them. I don't think Signal is perfect, and I don't personally love the "Stories" format of social media, but it's clearly something that works for a lot of people.

Here I'll present Signal as a good alternative to the corporate social media platforms. One of the broader goals of The Counterforce is to help move hardcore punk culture away from corporate social media apps like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. So this is going to be a guide for punks on how to get started using Signal and Signal Stories.

As "social media," Signal Stories are great for sharing stuff relatively safely with a private audience that you control. For broadcasting information to a more public audience, (like promoting shows, bands and projects) I think alternative social networks like **Mastodon/The Fediverse** are better suited. Check out our Guide to Mastodon and The Fediverse (For Punks!) for much more about that.

Signal

Signal is an *end-to-end* encrypted messaging app for phones and computers originally designed by anarchist hackers and now operated by the USA-based non-profit Signal Foundation. Being a non-profit foundation, Signal's ultimate goal is to provide secure messaging for its users, **not** to create value for shareholders at the expense of its users' privacy and experience. There are **no ads**, and in over 10 years of using it extensively I think I've received maybe 1 or 2 spam messages.

"End-to-end encrypted" means that messages sent with Signal can't be read by anyone except by the sender and the receiver. The Signal Foundation, and all the various Internet pipes and servers that are used to transmit your messages, can't read them. Signal is open source, which means that independent experts look through the source code for bugs or errors.

The Signal encryption protocol is so well designed, it is widely considered the gold standard. Other applications which offer encrypted messaging just copy the Signal protocol, although that doesn't mean these apps are as good or as secure as Signal. Besides the encryption, Signal is carefully designed to minimize any other kinds of data ("metadata") that is generated through your usage of the app (for example, who you are messaging and when, what groups you are a member of, etc.).

In 2025, you should be using Signal if you are not already. Even if you don't think you "need" the security offered by Signal, you know someone who does. If you or anyone you know might ever have an abortion, take gender-affirming hormones, use drugs, or express outrage at the genocide of the Palestinian people, you should be using Signal.

I understand hesitancy around installing another app to your phone. Consider you could just delete Instagram to make room for Signal! It's likely that more of your friends are already using Signal than you realize, and frankly they are probably your cooler friends. And if you don't have any cool friends, well, using Signal might help!

Hide your phone number

- Settings -> Privacy -> Phone number
- Set "Who can see my number" to "Nobody"
- Set "Who can find me by number" to "Nobody"

This will prevent unwanted people (like your landlord or a delivery guy) from contacting you on Signal. Your Signal contacts also won't be able to find out your actual phone number unless you choose to share it with them.

- People will have to use your Signal username or link to add you.

Video/voice calls

- Signal calls are also encrypted, but if you are having a call with someone who is one of your Signal contacts already, the call is peer-to-peer which means they could determine your IP address.
- You can turn this off by choosing "Always relay calls" in Settings -> Privacy -> Advanced- Notifications
- You can customize how much information is displayed in Signal notifications on your lock screen. By default, the name and contents of messages are shown, so anyone looking at your locked phone can see them (and if you have a cursed phone with an AI assistant, the AI can probably read these notifications too)
- You turn this off in Settings -> Notifications -> Show

Signal's security is only as good as your security. Signal can't protect you if you add an enemy to a group chat by mistake, or if your phone is stolen and the thieves can unlock it.

If you want to read more about how to keep your phone activity safe in general, check out this zine: <https://distro.f-91w.club/keeping-safe/>

MY SECRET SECURE MESSAGING APP IS BETTER THAN SIGNAL!

OK, so you are some kind of reply-guy and you are dying to tell me about a messenger app that is "more secure" than even Signal?

My goal here is to demonstrate an app that is accessible to my punk friends, already widely used, and has the features people want. Signal isn't perfect, I know. But please don't get in touch to talk about your favorite alternative secure messaging app. I don't want to flex but I can almost guarantee I know more about secure messaging apps than you do, I've already heard about whatever app you think is better than Signal!

ADD THE COUNTERFORCE ON SIGNAL!

As of this writing, the Signal username of The Counterforce is **counterforce.99**

Add us and send a message if you want to try out Signal, test out stories, or have any questions. Or for submissions, suggestions, hate/love letters, etc!! Thanks for reading. ☺

Keeping Stories up to date

First, a recap from earlier on how to add new contacts to Signal. To be able to view each other's Signal Stories, you and a friend must be Signal Contacts, so you first have to exchange a direct message. Being in a group chat together isn't enough! If you want "add someone on Signal" to start swapping Stories, you can start a new direct message with them by:

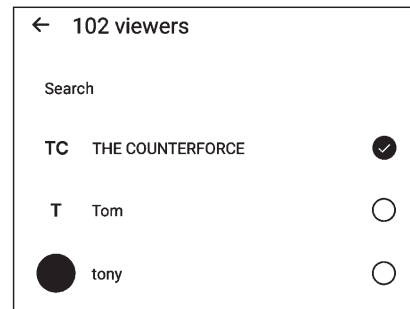
- composing a new message to their phone number (if they have that feature enabled)
- composing a new message to their Signal username (e.g. **counterforce.99**) – via their Signal Link/QR code.

Get into the habit of asking for a Signal username (instead of an Instagram handle!) when you meet someone new you want to stay in touch with.



Whenever I get a new Signal contact, I go back to the Story Privacy settings (go to the Stories tab, and click the 3 little dots in the top right to get to Story Privacy) and open up the settings for the Story I want to add them to.

I search for the new person's display name to add them to my story. This is also where you can just scroll through and add or remove people from a Story.



People can't see which of your Stories you've added them to. For each Story, you can choose whether people can react or reply to your posts.

It's not the best interface for managing who can see which Story, but it's not too bad. And you have a lot more control and options than what Instagram gives you. Or just YOLO and let every Signal contact see all your stories...

BONUS: USING SIGNAL MORE SECURELY

If you are interested in leveraging Signal's encryption and secure design to keep you safe out there, there are a few tips to using Signal in a secure way.

First off, Signal is about as good as it gets for a secure messaging app that is also easy to use. It hasn't been hacked and it is not a CIA op. There are often viral claims or news articles about Signal being hacked or insecure, and thus far they have always been wrong.

Use disappearing messages

- Turn them on by default and adjust as necessary (you can set a different disappearing message timer for each 1-on-1 conversation or group chat). For example, if you are going to share a password or some other sensitive information, set the disappearing message timer to something really short!
- Leave and delete groups when they are no longer necessary.

Signal “alternatives”

Many people already use similar apps like WhatsApp or Telegram (hello readers outside North America!). WhatsApp is operated by Meta (who owns Facebook/Instagram), so using that app keeps you in Zuckerberg's Meta ecosystem of hell. Telegram is widely considered quite *insecure*, and is operated out of the UAE. Both these apps harvest as much of your data as they can, and share it with advertisers, data brokers and law enforcement/government agencies (happily and at every opportunity).

Signal is a much better and safer alternative to these apps, and it has all the same features you need (and it doesn't have an AI chatbot shoved into it).

SIGNAL BASICS

Getting started

Signal is available for Android and iOS. You need a phone number and a smart phone to use it.

There are also Desktop versions for Linux, MacOS and Windows, but the app needs to be installed on a phone first before syncing with other devices.

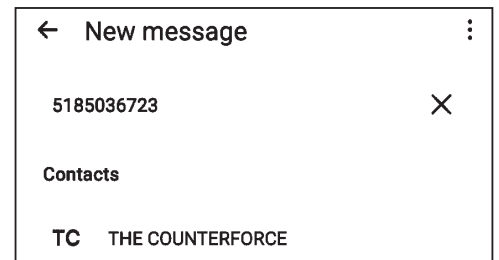
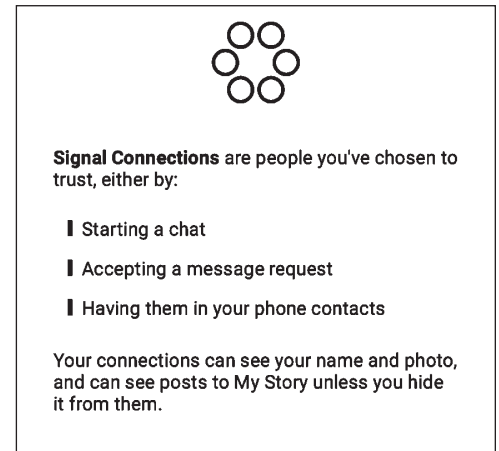
Adding contacts

A Signal contact is basically anyone you have exchanged direct messages with in the past (and haven't subsequently blocked). Signal calls it "Connections."

Signal allows users to find each other based on phone number by default, and many people leave this feature on since it can make it easier to find people you know on the app. If a Signal user has this turned on, you can just start a new message and enter their phone number, and Signal will find them. If you give Signal access to your phone contacts when you install it, it will also automatically add any users whose phone number you have and who have left this feature on.

However, you can disable this feature so people **can't** find you by your phone number. I recommend doing this, and these days many people do turn it off. It stops, for example, your boss or your landlord from finding you on Signal. I'll show you how to do this later.

Without phone numbers, you add other people using their Signal **username** or a QR code / contact link.



Signal usernames

Signal lets you set a Display name (the name that shows up in chats) alongside a profile pic, which is what people see when they're chatting with you. But Signal **usernames** are what you share with other people so they can add you on Signal. The username consists of a word + a random number — for example, the current Signal username for The Counterforce is: **counterforce.99**

You can only have one valid Signal username at a time. This gives you a bit more control over who can find you on Signal.

To set or change your Signal username, go to Settings and then click on your profile pic and display name at the top.

In addition to connecting via username, you can also generate a QR code or link that someone can use to add you. On the same Settings screen, you can generate a Signal contact QR code or link. You can share these with anyone you want to find you on Signal.

Groups

Signal groups work like group chats on other apps like WhatsApp or Instagram. No more Instagram band chats or gear threads! We have progressed beyond the need for Instagram gear threads!!

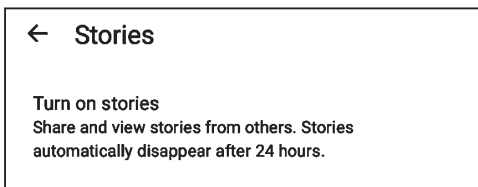
Other users in groups you're in do not become a Signal Contact unless you exchange direct messages with them. So you can be in group chats with relative strangers, and they can see your Signal profile but you won't see each other's Signal Stories unless you first message them directly.

SIGNAL STORIES

OK, yes, Signal has Stories that work like Stories in other apps. You can share a short video (<30 seconds) or an image. You can draw on or add text or stickers to the image. You can share just a text-based Story (and include a link!). Stories are visible to your contacts in a Stories feed for 24 hours and then they disappear.

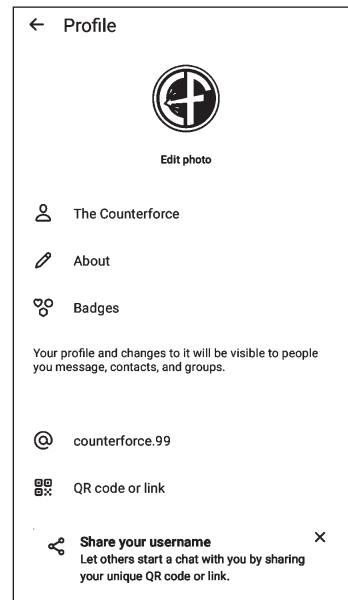
Signal offers better privacy, both because Signal itself can't see your Stories (it isn't censoring your stories, training AIs on them, etc.) and because you have a lot of control over who *can* see your stories (more on that below). Also did we mention there are NO ADS, and no algorithmic promotion of some stories over others?

Once you start using Signal Stories, you'll probably discover a bunch of your friends already are, and if you stick with it more will follow your lead!



Turn it on!

If you've been using Signal for a while, you may need to turn on Stories. Go to Settings -> Stories to do this. Now you'll start seeing Stories from your Signal contacts (if you have any cool friends).



Show me the Stories

Once you have Stories turned on, you'll start seeing them here. It's not very intrusive. Just a little red dot to tell you how many new stories there are. I usually check my Signal Stories once per day at most!

Posting your own stories is pretty intuitive. To save space I'm not going to get too into it.



Stories

Story Privacy

Signal allows you to create many different Stories which are seen only by different groups of your contacts.

My Story is the default. You can choose different ways to restrict who can see it:

- **All your Signal connections:** (anyone you've ever directly messaged on Signal — not people you are just in a group with)
- **All except...** (hide your story from specific people)
- **Only share with...** (only share with selected people)

You can also create as many additional Stories as you like. For each one, you can decide who will be able to see it (as in "Only share with..." for the default My Story).

I have the default **My Story** set to "Only share with selected people" and I select only my close IRL friends.

I also have a Story for **Local Punks** that is shared with all the local punks I know (even people I'm not close with), for sharing show flyers and such.

Other stories I have are **Family** (got the whole family group chat on Signal!) and **Bandmates** for all my bandmates.

When you create a new Story post, you can select which of your Stories to send it to. Additionally, you can send it to any group chats you are in, and the Story will show up as a special Group Story for all the other members of those groups.

