



TAKE CONTROL OF

Find My AND AirTags

by GLENN FLEISHMAN

\$14.99

**4TH
EDITION**

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Read Me First

Welcome to *Take Control of Find My and AirTags, Fourth Edition*, version 4.1, published in February 2026 by alt concepts. This book was written by Glenn Fleishman and edited by Joe Kissell.

This book explores Apple’s Find My service, which lets you see the location of your iPhone, iPad, Mac, and Apple Watch, and select earbuds, headphones, AirTags, and third-party Find My network items. Find My lets people share their location with each other, too. The book also looks into how people stalk others using trackers and ways you can identify and deflect them.

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What's New in Version 4.1

Apple replaced the original AirTag with the 2nd-generation AirTag. While it has the same dimensions and features, it includes more powerful ultrawideband (UWB) and Bluetooth chips, which allow directional and range finding and triggering sounds at a greater range. The new model also has a 50% louder chime when it makes noise, according to Apple.

Important compatibility issues exist: to pair and track a 2026 AirTag, you need iOS 26 or iPadOS 26 (pairing or tracking) or macOS 26 or watchOS 26 (tracking). I address the new hardware in [Spot the Difference Between Old and New](#). I've noted changes throughout the book to address compatibility and range.

Precision Finding's distance and supported device set has changed with the release of the 2nd-generation AirTag and watchOS 26.2.1. I detail that in [Find with Precision](#).

I apparently overlooked a limit to using Find My items, like AirTags, that you're unlikely to encounter: you can only add a maximum of 32 items, and some AirPods earbuds count as two or three. See [You Can Add up to 32 Items](#).

Finally, Apple no longer offers regular AppleCare+ in the United States and certain other countries for an iPhone, iPad, or Apple Watch, only the version with theft and loss coverage. Because that more expansive warranty requires Find My to be enabled, I've updated [Find My Required for AppleCare+ iPhone Theft and Loss](#) to reflect the change.

What Was New in the Fourth Edition

This new edition of the book reflected significant changes introduced by Apple in fall 2025 to their hardware line-up and operating systems.

This edition brought the book in sync with the fall 2025 release of Apple's operating systems: iOS 26, iPadOS 26, macOS 26 Tahoe, and

watchOS 26. (Apple is now using the last two digits of the following year as the consistent numbering scheme for release numbers.)

Those updates introduced a new interface approach across all systems, called Liquid Glass. Where appropriate, I've updated screen captures.

This edition also includes:

- **Reset tracking for certain AirPods models:** Apple lets some AirPods models register with multiple Apple Accounts for sharing. This can lead to unwanted or accidental tracking. See [Manage Audio Hardware with Multiple Accounts](#).
- **Share location with family:** Previous editions didn't tease out how Apple manages sharing your location within a Family Sharing group, and how that appears in various parts of Find My and Location settings. See [Share Location with Family](#).
- **Improvements in sharing a Find My item's location temporarily:** Apple has improved many aspects of the process of sharing a time-limited link for a lost item with someone else. See [Share Your Items Temporarily](#).
- **Find My integration with airlines:** You can register your luggage with Find My tags with airlines via your boarding pass. See [Share Your Items Temporarily with an Airline](#).
- **Updated advice for accessing iCloud.com:** With two-factor authentication enabled on your Apple Account—as most accounts are—you could be unable to log into iCloud.com to use its Find Devices app to find a lost or stolen device. I've updated my advice for the alternative access methods you can set up in advance. See [Work Around Two-Factor Authentication](#).
- **Apple fixes Mac remote lock in Tahoe:** Apple finally (mostly) fixed the process by which you use Find My to lock a lost or stolen Mac and then unlock it if recovered after several semi-broken releases. I've updated how that works in [How Lost Mode Works with a Mac](#).

Introduction

Find My provides a way to know where your stuff is and where you left it behind and consensually know the location of other people and share yours with them. It's a useful and necessary logical addition to always-connected hardware. When you're at home, commuting to work, school, or a third-place café or co-working space, or traveling, Apple's Find My can help you have peace of mind in tracking forgotten items—and maybe reclaiming stolen ones. Find My is actually a roll-up of three distinct offerings, as I explained next.

Note: This book best serves readers with at least iOS 17, iPadOS 17, macOS 14 Sonoma, and watchOS 10 installed. Some features work only with the latest operating systems: iOS 26, iPadOS 26, macOS 26 Tahoe, and watchOS 26. The February 2026 AirTag hardware requires version 26.2.1 for all operating systems.

Find My Stuff

Mobile devices are exceedingly easy to lose. They're compact, slip out of pockets, or are easy to misplace under a stack of magazines or in the seat-back pocket on a plane. Your mobile device is also a desirable item for thieves. It's compact, it has a high retained value, and there's a huge market for used models.

Because we can misplace our mobile items and they're easy enough to be absconded with, I want to tell you how to use Apple's Find My service available across nearly every kind of hardware Apple makes. You can protect your data when your device is lost or stolen, make it impossible for a thief to use, and find it or other belongings you own, whether they were lost or stolen.

Apple has two kinds of Find My services for hardware:

- **Find My *Device*:** Available for iPhone, iPad, Mac, Apple Watch, and via iCloud.com, Find My iPad, iPhone, iPod touch, and Mac rely

on location information that can include satellite-based coordinates, cellular tower locations, and Wi-Fi base stations to pinpoint a location. In Find My apps, this category appears as Devices; the Apple Watch and web app are called Find Devices.

It's two-way: you can find your device and send commands to it, like playing a sound or erasing it. Find My also provides an activation lock, a theft deterrent to prevent easy reuse without a password.

- **Find My network:** The Find My network is a privacy-protecting *crowdsourced* system in which people participating allow their iPhone, iPad, or Mac to relay encrypted Bluetooth signals emitted by an iPhone, iPad, iPod touch, Mac, or Apple Watch, Apple and Beats audio hardware, Apple's AirTag tracking items, and other Find My network items that use Apple's licensed technology. In Find My apps, this category appears as Items, except for audio devices, because they are paired with devices with screens (like an iPhone), and always appear in a Devices tab or Find Devices app.

This books dig deeply into both systems. You'll learn how to enable, disable, and control tracking, understand how to find missing hardware and trigger remote actions, and be aware of the potential misuse of tracking technology—and how to guard against it.

Note: Google introduced a similarly named Find My Device network in 2024 that includes items that work nearly identically to AirTags. Google's Android can identify Apple AirTags, and Apple added Google item recognition in iOS 18/iPadOS 18. Read more about why in [Understand Stalking via Tracking](#).

Find My People

People are a bit more complicated than devices. We may want to keep our whereabouts completely private or share them with certain people at all times. We might want to go off the grid—or always know approximately where our children are.

Look in the People tab in the native Find My apps for information about where you can find other people who have shared their locations with you.

Apple offers significant control over how and with whom you share your location and lets you change this at will. The Find My People service has the potential to aid unwanted tracking by abusive partners or family or by stalkers, and I explain the controls available to you and that you can help others configure for their safety.

Find My Quick Start

Apple's Find My services help you figure out where a device is when it fell behind a couch cushion; you left it at school, work, or a coffee shop; or it was stolen, among other scenarios. While many people will find it useful to read front-to-back, you can use the following overview to discover where to jump to in the book for particular answers.

Track your devices:

- Understand the Find My ecosystem; see [Learn How Find My Works](#).
- Turn on Find My on your iPhone, iPad, or Mac; see [Enable Find My](#).
- Find your devices on a map; see [Find Devices](#).
- Mark your device as lost or erase your device remotely; see [Mark Something as Lost](#) and [Erase Everything But a Mac](#).

Share locations with other people:

- Share your location and follow others who share theirs with you; see [Share Your Location and See Others' Locations](#).
- Manage notifications about when you or others arrive or leave locations; see [Receive Notifications](#).

Find items across Apple's crowdsourced Find My network:

- Dig into the Find My network; see [Discover Disconnected Devices](#).
- Deploy an AirTag or other item; see [Deploy an AirTag or Accessory](#).
- Find an item's location; see [Find Items](#).
- Keep track of luggage with help from your airline; see [Share Your Items Temporarily with an Airline](#).
- Share your Find My items with other people; see [Share Your Find My Items](#).
- Temporarily share a lost item's location to aid in its recovery; see [Share Your Items Temporarily](#).

Block stalkers and learn about anti-tracking tools:

- Learn how Apple deters stalkers; see [Understand Stalking via Tracking](#).
- Understand how people, devices, and item can be tracked without consent; see [Unwanted Tracking of a Person](#), [Unwanted Tracking of Devices](#), and [Unwanted Tracking via Find My Items](#).
- Get to know how Apple's and Google's tracking items notify people on the other ecosystem to deter unwanted tracking; see [Unwanted Tracking via Find My Items](#).

Learn How Find My Works

The Find My system is a clever interconnected system that emphasizes privacy while also providing often near-continuous location tracking. In this chapter, I explain how all the networked and hardware-dependent pieces work together.

Tip: If you're not interested in understanding the details of the system, skip ahead to the next chapter for AirTag and Find My items, [Deploy an AirTag or Accessory](#), or the following one, [Enable Find My](#), to turn on and figure Find My on your equipment.

Find My lets you discover the current or last known location across three categories:

- **People:** If other people have shared their location with you, you can see their current position, derived from Apple devices they carry and how they chose to indicate their presence. You can also share your location with others.

Note: Find My items don't reveal someone's shared location unless they've also shared their Find My items with you; see below.

- **Devices:** Apple lets you track Apple-made *devices* (their term for this category) connected to your iCloud account or, as with Apple/Beats audio hardware, paired with an iPhone or iPad. If you're in a Family Sharing group and members of the group have shared their location with you, you can also see the locations of their devices.
- **Items:** You can deploy low-power, non-networked tracking devices, like the Apple AirTag, on or in your stuff, and find their locations on your devices by relying on a crowdsourced system described below. You can opt to share the locations of these with up to five other people. Apple refers to this category as *items*.

Hardware support for Find My services covers a variety of equipment, each of which may have a different set of remote capabilities and

limitations. This support affects how your location and that of other people who share their position with you may be viewed, too. The hardware differences are as follows:

- **iPhone, iPad, Mac, and Apple Watch:** You can see the device's location. If it can connect to the internet, you can also play a sound on it, lock it or mark it lost, or erase it. (An Apple Watch picks up this setting from the iPhone with which it's paired.) These devices are also relied on to locate you for someone else on a Find My map, or to identify other people's location shared with you.

Note: U.S. phone carriers also offer phone-tracking services, which can work across a family account and different smartphones and dumb phones. Each comes with a separate fee and various enhancements and limitations. If everyone in your family is using an iPhone, there is no advantage to the carrier's plan.

- **AirPods and supported Beats devices:** When paired with an iPhone or iPad, Find My is automatically enabled for all Apple audio hardware and [most Beats devices](#). If you have Apple or Beats earbuds, check whether the earbuds, charging case, or both are tracked—it varies. For instance, the AirPods 4 (Active Noise Cancellation or ANC) and AirPods Pro 2 and later can track each earbud and the case separately, marking each as lost as well. Audio hardware appears in the Devices tab or in Find Devices apps.
- **AirTag:** An AirTag's location may be tracked via ultra-wideband (UWB) wireless and Bluetooth over inches to hundreds of feet (centimeters to tens of meters) from a nearby paired iPhone or iPad; or from anywhere, whenever it's away from you and near anyone's iPhone, iPad, or Mac that has an internet connection and has enabled Find My network participation. An AirTag can't receive commands via the internet, but it can over Bluetooth. (See [Discover Disconnected Devices](#).)
- **Third-party items:** Apple allows other companies to embed Find My technology inside their products. These products must be paired with an iPhone or iPad and, just like AirTags, can be found within

Deploy an AirTag or Accessory

AirTags, third-party items, and associated accessories can be used in a lot of ways, some of them more obvious than others. Clearly, you might add them to a keychain (AirTags require a keychain holder), or zip them into the pocket of a purse, messenger bag, backpack, or luggage.

Less obvious might be placing them in an interior pocket of a jacket, sewing them into clothing, or putting one in a saddle bag on your bicycle—or on a pet’s collar.

Many third-party Find My items are built into devices. By embedding the hardware, a manufacturer makes the tracker more invisible and harder to remove without destroying the thing of which it’s a part.

To understand how you might best use AirTags and compatible items from third parties, let’s look first at some case studies I’ve tested and considered since the introduction of Find My items. Then I’ll get into the details of how to set up and use them.

Note: Apple differentiates between hardware that can use both the Find My *Device* options and Find My network and those, like AirTags, that can only use Find My network. The former, like Macs, iPads, and audio hardware, Apple always calls *devices*; the latter, *items*.

Consider Your Purpose

An AirTag is a powerful piece of always-on, always-broadcasting technology that can help you in one four distinct ways:

- **Track stuff you lose:** If you routinely can’t find things, I would urge you to not be ashamed of it. All brains are different and, as I’ve learned from my wife—an ADHD/executive-function coach—some

people are not wired to retain the location of objects. Hurray, technology can help!

- **Track stuff that gets stolen:** A sad fact of existence across all societies and in nature is that organisms steal from one another. If you're concerned about theft or have been a victim of it, a Find My item can sometimes help with recovery.
- **Tracking kids:** Parents definitely overestimate the risk of a child being abducted by a stranger. But the number of children who go "missing" for an hour or a few hours is huge. They might take the wrong bus, get lost, or actually be perfectly safe with a family friend, relative, parent, or guardian other than the one who is legally responsible. Putting a tracking tag in a kid's backpack or clothing may alleviate worries and reduce anxiety.
- **Tracking animals:** Those who have pets know they roam. Sometimes, we're just curious where they get to. Other times, we need to rescue them when they're stuck or lost. Except in quite rural areas, a lost or wayward pet is almost always quite near an Apple device possessed by people passing nearby.

We Don't Track Adults

Tracking a child can be fraught with issues of agency, consent, and purpose, but it's generally legal (this is not legal advice) and may be advisable. For adults, however, it's nearly always unwarranted and unwelcome, and may violate civil statutes and constitute a crime unless one is in a guardianship relationship with the person (again, this is not legal advice). See [Understand Stalking via Tracking](#) for more details on how Find My items can be misused.

Track Compact Items

For items like keychains, wallets, and even non-Apple mobile devices, like gaming consoles or Kindles, adding a Find My item can mean the difference between tearing your hair out but never finding something, and easily recovering it.

Enable Find My

Find My comprises multiple different services blended together into a single app. In this chapter, I explain how to enable Find My on your hardware, requiring a deeper dig into which devices support Find My.

Find My comes in three flavors:

- **Device-based, two-way short-range and internet:** This version is the original and better understood, and can be enabled on devices: an iPhone, iPad, or Mac, and, by extension, an Apple Watch paired with an iPhone. The device actively sends its location over the internet whenever the internet is available. Find My *Device* allows the owner of a device to send remote events, like playing a sound or triggering erasure, to a device. Apple and Beats audio devices near their paired device act like this as well.
- **Find My notification network:** Described above in [Discover Disconnected Devices](#), the Find My network is a one-way notification system that relays location via other people's internet-connected devices. It can be enabled on an iPhone, iPad, or Mac, and is an inherent attribute of "items": AirTags and third-party Find My products. Audio devices like AirPods Pro, AirPods Max, and several models of Beats earbuds and headphones act like Find My items when away from their paired device. An owner can't send commands via the Find My network.

The AirTag, some audio devices, and other items can *receive* a command to play a sound via Bluetooth from a nearby device. This allows either an owner or someone whose device has been relaying Find My network location data to play a sound on an AirTag.

- **Device-based, Bluetooth range:** For Apple AirPods, you can track location only when they're near their paired iPhone or iPad. They use Bluetooth and don't participate in the broader Find My network, but their current or last-known location appears in the

Devices tab in Find My and the Apple Watch Find Devices app. An owner can trigger a sound when they are near these audio devices.

Because *devices* can connect to either the two-way or notification network, the other way to look at it is this way:

- **Devices can use both networks:** An owner of a device can perform a remote action whenever it's connected to the internet (or its paired device is and is nearby, with audio hardware), but can see its location when it's picked up via *either* form of Find My.
- **Items can use only the Find My network:** Items can only *ever* report their location.

With that in mind, let's look at how you enable Find My and its two flavors on devices and items.

Enable Find My Device

Local- and internet-based Find My on an iPhone, iPad, or Mac requires an active Apple Account associated with iCloud. You likely already set up Find My when upgrading or setting up your device.

Tip: To enable Find My on an iPhone, iPad, or Mac, if you haven't signed in with an Apple Account yet, go to System Settings/Settings > *Account Name* > iCloud and enter your credentials.

On an iPhone or iPad, tap Settings > *Account Name* > Find My to view and make changes in settings; these settings also affect any paired Apple Watch. On a Mac, go to System Settings > iCloud > Show All. If Find My isn't enabled, turn it. Once Find My is active, you can tap or click the Find My item to access additional settings, like the Find My network or, on an iPhone/iPad, Send Last Location.

Enabled devices are automatically added to your iCloud account's list of devices. For supported devices, Apple enables Activation Lock. I explain Activation Lock next, and then how to remove devices from your Apple Account.

Share Your Location and See Others' Locations

Disclosing your location is a two-edged sword—or maybe a multi-bladed throwing star. It can be incredibly handy to let other people know where you are for travel, safety, timing, and even accountability. However, letting others know where you are means they *know where you are*, which even for close friends, family, and partners can feel like too much knowledge and the expectation of you sharing your position can feel invasive. (You also may feel it's excessive that, when you launch Find My, you can see the precise location of everyone who has shared with you, even though they did so willingly!)

Apple tries to strike a balance with location sharing just as it does with nearly all other aspects of digital privacy that they mediate and let you choose your comfort level with.

Find My is the interface through which the location you share from an iPhone, iPad, Mac, or Apple Watch gets viewed, but it's only partly the way in which you choose what is shared! That split is left over from when Apple introduced the previous standalone app, Find My Friends, and relied on preferences buried in Settings to manage all the details.

In this chapter, I explain the various forms of location sharing and control. In the next chapter, under [Find People](#), I dig into how you see others' locations.

Note: When you share your location, the other person cannot see your devices, but only your *presence*: the device marked as showing where you are. Only people in a Family Sharing group can see each other's devices, and only if the person is sharing their location with them. Items don't pick up Family Sharing settings. You can share them with up to five people.

Configure Your Location Sharing

Location has two interrelated components: how you share your location and how you choose to accept seeing the location of other people. Let's start with you.

Control Your Location Sharing

You can use the native Find My app to view and change personal settings, even if you're part of a Family Sharing group:

- **On an iPhone/iPad:** Go to the Find My app > Me button.
- **On a Mac:** In the Find My app, click Me and click the Info ⓘ button.
- **On an Apple Watch:** In the Find People app, tap the Me entry.

Let's break down what appears in the My Location section on all these devices (**Figure 22**):

- **Share My Location:** A single tap and you let yourself be seen by those you've shared with; another tap, and you run silent—your location isn't sent again until it's re-enabled.
- **Sharing From:** Often called *presence*, this defines which devices is shared in Find My as being your location as a human if you own multiple devices. My Location reads *This Device* if you're on the one defining your location; it shows the name of that device otherwise. (See [Get To Know Location Sharing for People](#).)
- **Location Label:** At the top of the Me view, you see the current inferred address. However, Find My tries to offer something more descriptive. If you've defined your home or work location in Contacts or Phone, it should show Home or Work as the label. You can also create your own names for other addresses; see [Edit a Place Name](#).

View Locations

To view your device's location, those of people in a Family Sharing group, or your items, use the Find My app on an iPhone, iPad, or Mac, or the Find Devices app on an Apple Watch or iCloud.com. By activating Find My, you're signed in to the app on all those operating systems and on iCloud.com. Each view in the iPhone, iPad, and Mac Find My app offers access to a different category of location finding. Those views are separate apps for Apple Watch (Find People, Find Devices, and Find Items) and available only as Find Devices on iCloud.com.

Tip: You can add a Find My widget to the Home screen or Notifications Center that lets you see people and devices without opening the Find My app.

Tip: The map in each view has typical actions, like zooming in and out, satellite view, and 2D. The icons, like the Choose Map  icon and 3D view  icon, appear the same as in Apple Maps.

iCloud.com Web App Lacks Native App Features

You can't track people or items on iCloud.com, only devices (via the Find My link which takes you to the Find Devices app). However, iCloud.com's Find Devices web app is useful for one purpose: when a device is missing or stolen and that person whose device it is lacks access to Find My on any equipment they own. See [Help Someone Find Their Lost Device \(or Find Your Own\)](#).

For each category—People, Devices, and Items—Find My shows the last time a location was updated in the list: to the right of the item on an iPhone/iPad and under the item on a Mac, Apple Watch, and (for devices) on iCloud.com. It also shows this information in the detail view for a given selection.

Here's what the status messages mean:

- **Live:** Devices can provide a continuous stream of location information in the right circumstances. You can watch someone walk down a street or see their train move across the landscape. (Frankly, a little creepy, even though it's done with permission?)
- **Now:** If live updates aren't possible due to battery, location, connectivity, or operating system version, Now is the second-best. It indicates an update within the last minute.
- **Time duration:** Find My shows *X* minutes ago or a specific date and time for the last location update.

Note: Because an Apple Watch has three apps that correspond exactly to each view in the iPhone, iPad, and Mac apps, I won't call out the particular app (like Find People) for Apple Watch unless there's a particular detail. When I say "People view," for instance, I always also mean the Find People app on an Apple Watch.

Find People

The People view provides a list of everyone with whom you share your location, whom you follow, or both. The list reveals some basic information, such as their current location with an address or a name, how far away they are, and the last update received. With no one selected, the portion of the view with the map plots everyone you follow for whom a current location is known. This view zooms the map to show them all if they are in reasonably proximity to one another (**Figure 41**). People are identified with their avatar.

Note: If people aren't within some reasonable distance of one another—say one of your children is in Europe and you live in Seattle—you only see the people nearest you. Apple doesn't define this distance, but it seems to be within a few hundred miles.

Take Remote Action

Find My lets you take a variety of remote actions on devices or and short-range actions on items. Options vary in utility based on whether your device has fallen behind a couch cushion, or has been misplaced or stolen, and whether the device or item is directly reachable via a local network, the internet, or the Find My network. With devices, Apple follows up many actions with an email message sent to your Apple Account's associated address.

Receive Notifications

You can set up notifications within Find My to provide a variety of information depending on the category:

- **People:** You can opt to receive alerts when they arrive and leave locations you define, or send them alerts based on your location.
- **Devices and Items:** You can be notified when a device is found if it's marked as lost. You can also receive a prompt when you leave something behind.

Let's start with people.

Notifications for People

People-based notifications let you track when someone (including you) arrives at or leaves a location. The alert can be set once or on a recurring basis.

Here's how to create a notification for a person on an iPhone, iPad, or Mac:

1. In a native Find My app, bring up the action sheet for a person via the Person view.
2. Tap or click Add.

3. Select Notify Me or Notify *Person*.
4. For you or someone else, you can select *Person*/I Arrives and *Person*/I Leaves; for someone else, you can select *Person* Is Not At.
5. Pick a location. Some locations will be prefilled, such as you or another person's current location (**Figure 52**). You can also tap or click New Location and drag a map or enter a location. Clicking or tapping in the search field brings up potential matches from the person's contact card before you start typing.

The screenshot shows the 'Notify Me' notification setup interface. At the top, there are three buttons: 'Cancel' (blue), 'Notify Me' (black), and 'Add' (blue). Below this, the interface is organized into three sections: 'WHEN', 'LOCATION', and 'FREQUENCY'. In the 'WHEN' section, there are three options: 'Arrives', 'Leaves' (which is selected with a blue checkmark), and 'Is Not At'. In the 'LOCATION' section, there are two options: '[redacted]'s Current Location (which is selected with a blue checkmark) and 'My Current Location'. Below these is a '+ New Location' button. In the 'FREQUENCY' section, there are two options: 'Only Once' and 'Every Time' (which is selected with a blue checkmark).

Figure 52: I set a notification whenever [redacted] leaves their current location.

Mark Something as Lost

Find My lets you mark items as lost to help in recovering items you can't find or might be stolen. Marking something as lost puts the hardware into a special Lost Mode and lets you provide details to someone finding it—or even a thief you want to encourage to return it.

Note: Apple labels the feature as *Lost Device Type* on the Find My action sheet and *Mark As Lost* when you Control-click/right-click a device in Find My for Mac's device list. However, the option to turn the feature on is labeled *Lost Mode*. (Formerly, it was labeled on some platforms as *Mark as Lost* and other names.)

This information is available differently (or not at all) based on the kind of thing that's marked as lost:

- **Devices:** For devices, you can enter text (such as offering a reward) and provide your phone number. Both appear on the device.
- **Audio hardware without a screen:** AirPods (3rd generation), AirPods Pro, and AirPods Max can be marked as lost. However, because they lack a display, you can't provide information to someone who finds them.
- **AirTags and other items:** With a Find My item—like AirTags or a Pebblebee Card—you can provide your phone number or email address; Apple prefills the message “This item has been lost. Please call me.” This information appears on a webpage associated with the device that a finder can retrieve as described in [Get Info from a Found Find My Item](#).

Note: Regular AirPods (not Pro/Max models) and Beats models that support the Find My network have no option to be marked as lost.

Because devices have screens, marking a device as lost puts the finder on notice that you know approximately where it is—they can see that

from the lock screen. Were your hardware stolen, this is a way to tell a thief that you have their location, and advise them to give it up.

With supported Apple audio hardware or a Find My item, it's trickier, as a finder has to take additional steps to determine its status rather than looking at a screen or receiving an alert—although they will hear an item make a sound or sounds in certain circumstances: see [Unwanted Tracking via Find My Items](#) for those cases.

In the next three sections I break down marking devices as lost in the native Find My apps, marking devices as lost in the iCloud.com Find Devices app (useful when you can't get to a native app), and marking items as lost in a native Find My app (the only option).

Mark a Device as Lost in a Find My App

When a device is marked as lost, the device is locked and can be unlocked only with a device passcode (iPhone, iPad, or Apple Watch) or Apple Account password or macOS account password (Mac). Apple Pay is disabled and all associated cards are temporarily suspended.

The Lost Mode option in the Find My native apps requires these steps:

1. Tap or click Activate beneath Lost *Device Type*, except on an Apple Watch, where you tap the Lost Mode button.
2. Apple explains what will happen to the device in a screen labeled Lost Mode (iPhone, iPad, Apple Watch, AirPods [3rd generation], AirPods Pro, AirPods Max), or “Lock this Mac?” (**Figure 67**, left). Tap or click Continue to proceed or Cancel to back out.
3. Enter a passcode if prompted and verify it. (This is unlikely, but it may happen. Make a note of the passcode so you aren't locked out.)
4. On devices other than Macs or supported audio devices, optionally set a phone number for a call back (**Figure 67**, right). On an iPhone, a finder can call only that number. On other devices, the call-back number is displayed. Tap or click Next.

Finding a Lost Device

While this book is largely about how you manage your own equipment, it's incredibly useful to know how other people interact with your stuff when it's lost or stolen and they find it. This lets you understand how someone might reply to you—by calling, emailing, or posting a note in a neighborhood forum—and what they would see that led them to it.

How Lost Mode Appears on Devices

Once the action is sent to an iPhone, iPad, iPod touch, or Apple Watch:

- If the device is connected to the internet and asleep, the next time it's woken, a passcode must be entered to gain access.
- If the device is online and in use, the operating system drops the user into the Lock screen where the passcode-entry dialog or keypad is shown along with any message or phone number that was entered when setting up Lost Mode (**Figure 73**).
- If the device is offline, the next time it accesses any network with an internet connection, the passcode lock is put into place.

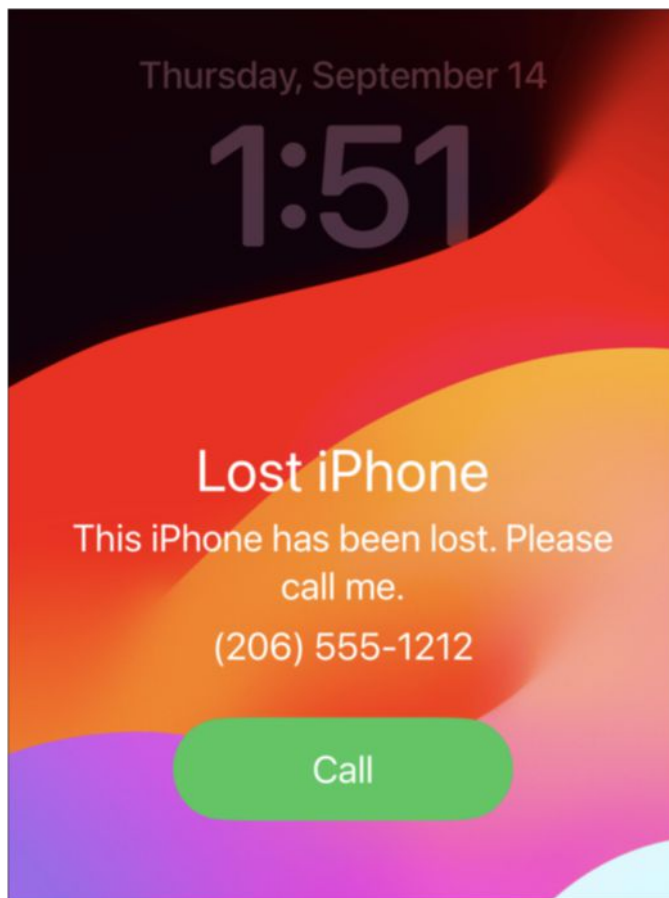


Figure 73: Someone finding your device has a call to action and a literal Call button on an iPhone.

How Lost Mode Works with a Mac

Apple updated the unlock procedure several years ago to provide enhanced security when coupled with an Intel Mac with T2 Security Chip or any M-series Mac. (Intel Macs added the T2 chip in models released starting in 2018.)

Note: Apple has never updated their documentation to cover the newer method of unlocking a Mac. I have written it up at length, in version after version of this book, but Apple still doesn't provide instructions on their support site. Even the email they send you when your Mac is locked says you need a PIN to unlock it, which is true only for the oldest Intel Macs; see below.

Understand Stalking via Tracking

It's easy to see how Find My could be abused by someone trying to track a person surreptitiously. Someone with access or given too much trust can track a person or, via Family Sharing, track their devices. With Find My items, it can be even more insidious, although Apple built anti-tracking features into that network that they continue to evolve, including in cooperation with other tech companies.

Let's look at all three scenarios: tracking a person, tracking devices, and tracking via Find My items, like AirTags.

Sources for Help

There are many organizations beyond law enforcement eager to help people trapped in situations of domestic abuse or child subject to violence and an unsafe environment. For adults in the United States, that includes the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#); for children or those concerned about their welfare in the United States and Canada, the [Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline](#).

For those being stalked, one starting point is [Safehope](#). It's more likely you will need the help of police or federal authorities. Local police departments have their own paths to navigate, but for online or *cyber* stalking, it may be better to [start with the FBI](#).

Unwanted Tracking of a Person

Apple tries to balance safeguards against unwanted tracking with the utility that ostensibly most people use a feature for. When tracking people with Find My, Apple requires a transparent, consent-driven process when a person shares their location on an ongoing basis with someone else. (See [Notifications for People](#).) But even after someone has granted permission to be digitally followed, Apple requires *more*

consent if their Find My follower wants to receive location-based notifications about when they arrive at, leave, or aren't at a location.

Check the People List

Find My uses the People view to list all the people you follow or who are following you. While that seems like great disclosure and an easy way to control location tracking, it doesn't address a few situations:

- A non-savvy iPhone or other Apple device user could have people added to Find My without realizing it. This might be a stalker who somehow gains brief access to equipment or an untrustworthy partner. They might create a pseudonymous account that takes the name of someone you trust. Once set up, Find My doesn't provide additional, ongoing information about person-based tracking. This is in contrast to on-device location tracking on an iPhone or iPad, where you're regularly asked if you want to continue to share your location with an app.
- A domestic abuser, problematic ex-partner, or abusive parent who demands access to personal devices could add themselves to Find My tracking and require—under threat of violence—that you keep it in place.

There is, of course, a completely valid case for parents wanting to track their children at any age while they are minors and living under their strictures, however lax or tight—but that's a separate matter from a parent or guardian who uses that information not for safety or conforming to promises or rules, but instead as an excuse for abuse and control of the child.

If you're in the first group or know someone who is, ensure you or they have strong device protection and potentially check Find My from time to time to make sure only names appear they know about.

See [Manage Sharing Relationships](#) on how to stop sharing with people you don't want to.

Erase Your Device

We're all quite rightly concerned about our private data stored on our most personal devices—the ones we carry with us all the time. Apple has done a stellar job in locking down access to an iPhone, iPad, Mac, or Apple Watch. But there's still a fear: what if someone guesses our passcode or passphrase, or uses some new cracking technology to break in?

Apple offers an excellent option that can assuage some fears. You can remote erase your device by sending it an irreversible command that takes place immediately if it's connected to the internet, or as soon as it's next connected—if it ever connects again.

Erase Everything But a Mac

The last resort in some cases (or first in others) is a remote wipe, in which all the user data on an iPhone or iPad is erased.

An erased device that has Find My enabled before erasure and remains associated with an Apple Account cannot be unlocked without the account password due to the Activation Lock feature mentioned earlier.

The erase option lets you provide a phone number and message so that a person who found (or stole) your device can get in touch. The device is essentially useless to them without the password.

Once you erase a device (or if someone else has), Find My can find its location only if it's an iPhone or iPad running iOS 15/iPadOS 15 or later. Before that release, erasing a device disables its ability to send Find My tracking data when connected to the internet.

Note: You can remove a device from your Find My list; see [Remove Devices from an Apple Account](#).

It's a multi-step process to prevent accidental erasure; you can cancel at any stage until step 6:

1. In the Find My app, tap or click Erase or Erase This Device.
2. You're warned that everything is about to be erased. Tap or click Continue (**Figure 83**).

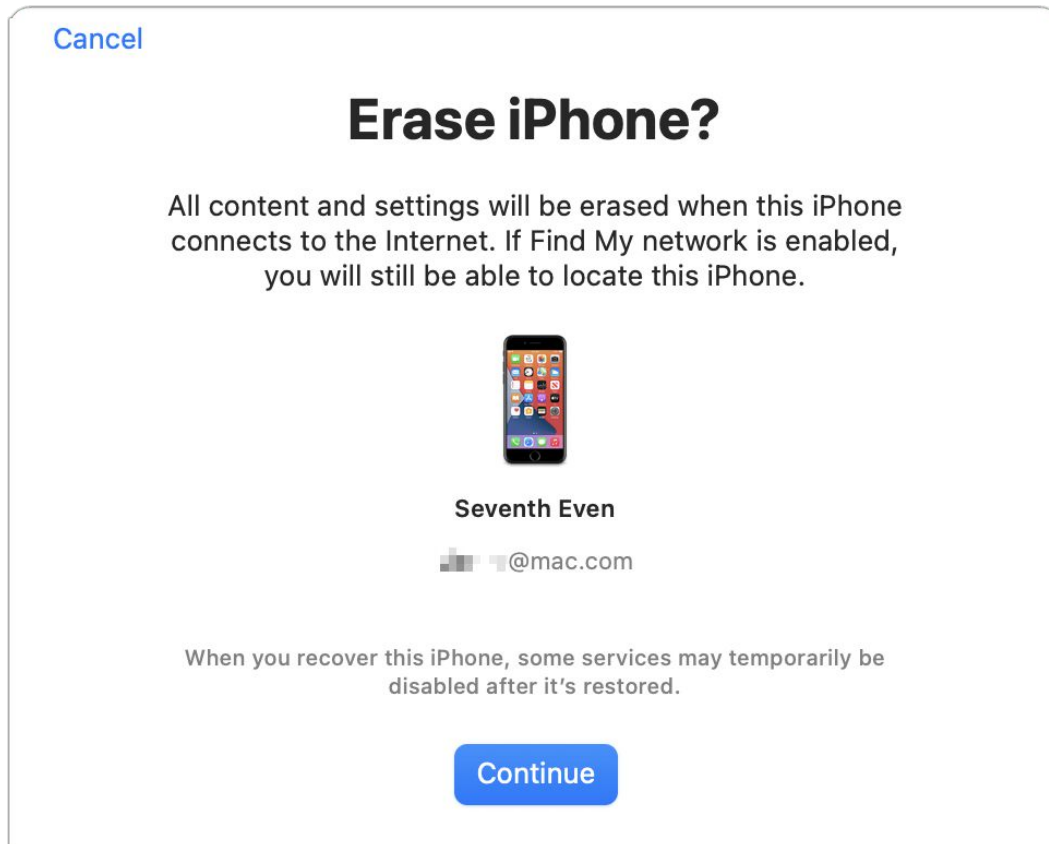


Figure 83: Start by making sure you know what comes next. (White space removed vertically for compactness.)

3. Optionally enter a phone number at which you can be reached after it's erased, and tap or click Erase.

Warning! The device will be erased *immediately* in the next step.

4. Enter your Apple Account password and tap or click Erase. If this is another member's device, accessible via Family Sharing, enter their Apple Account password.

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Take Control Books Executive Editor Glenn Fleishman never stops writing about technology and its implications. He's in his third decade of writing for publications as varied as *American History*, *Fast Company*, the *Economist*, *Increment*, the *New York Times*, *Macworld*, and *TidBITS*, and many others. In 2012, he was a two-game champion on *Jeopardy*!

You can find Glenn on [Mastodon](#) (@glennf@zeppelin.flights) and [Bluesky](#) (@glennf.com). Reach him by email at glenn@glennf.com.

Shameless Plug

I have two recent books about technology that—mostly—aren't about computers. [Six Centuries of Type & Printing](#) is a brisk yet thorough look at the technological development that has taken us from Gutenberg (and even before) to the present day. You can order a copy of the print, ebook, or audiobook edition [directly from me](#).

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Credits

- Editor and Publisher: Joe Kissell
- Cover design: Sam Schick of [Neversink](#)
- Logo design: Geoff Allen of [FUN is OK](#)

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Take Control of Find My and AirTags, Fourth Edition

ISBN: 978-1-990783-80-7

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