

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <https://www.djreprints.com>.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/33-mostly-free-ways-to-fix-your-familys-tech-problems-11545573601>

PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY: DAVID PIERCE

## 33 Mostly Free Ways to Fix Your Family's Tech Problems

A cheat sheet for addressing the whole family's IT issues, from TV and computer to smartphone and internet



By

*David Pierce*

Dec. 23, 2018 9:00 a.m. ET

If you're the tech-savvy person in your family, you know what the holidays really mean: getting ambushed by a year's worth of tech-support questions. Why is everything slow? Where did those icons go? Can you really get an Amazon gift card by clicking on this survey? (Answers: Because, somewhere and NO!)

Since it's the giving time of year, I present my cheat sheet for solving in-home information-technology problems. I can't help with everything, and some issues will unfortunately involve customer-service calls. For that, I can only recommend a nice cup of spiked eggnog—or a meditation app. But most problems, I've found, are simpler than they sound. And we can fix 'em before those chestnuts are done roasting. Let's get into it.

### The Internet

**Move the Wi-Fi router.** It's probably in a closet or underneath a desk somewhere, and to deliver the fastest speeds and best coverage it needs to be out in the open. Maybe split the difference: Hide it behind a lamp.

**Change the Wi-Fi password.** If it's still the default password, something like HGN\*~&\$!A198OFU, you should log into the router and change it to something humans can remember and use.

**Update the router firmware.** While you're in settings, make sure all the software is up to date. Good for security, good for speed. You'll need a password to get into router settings. Check the manual that came with the router, or Google for it—often the default login is “admin” and the password is “password,” or sometimes nothing at all.

**Get a mesh router.** The one your loved ones are renting from the service provider might not be cutting it.

If you're feeling generous, upgrade them to one of our picks.

## The TV

**Turn off motion smoothing.** Television makers turn this on because they think it makes sports and games look better, but actually it makes everything look unnatural and worse. Every TV is different: Samsung calls it Auto Motion Plus; LG says it's TruMotion; and Sony calls it MotionFlow. You get the idea. It's in display settings somewhere.

**Dial up the dialogue.** Can't hear the talking over the BRAHHHHHHHs of the soundtrack? Go into audio settings and switch the mix. Again, every TV is different—it's Dialog Clarity for Samsung and Clear Voice for Sony, and sometimes it's a “nighttime” or “news” audio setting—but regardless, it will bring the voices up and the explosions down.



With many Netflix accounts, you can create separate profiles for family members, and even share your multiple streams with relatives. Same goes for Hulu. PHOTO: EMILY PRAPUOLENIS/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

**\$ Turn your accounts into family accounts.** Netflix lets you add multiple profiles to your account, as does Hulu. Some family plans cost a few bucks extra a month, but many offer multiple accounts and simultaneous streams by default. You can give the gift of streaming without spending an extra penny—or ruining your recommendations.

**\$\$ Get a set-top box.** Even if the family TV is “smart,” it's probably still pretty dumb. Swap in a nice cheap Roku Premiere+, Google Chromecast or Amazon Fire TV Stick.



Smart TVs don't stay smart for long, but for \$50 or less you can remedy that, with a media streamer such as Roku's Premier+, at left, or Google's third-generation Chromecast. PHOTO: DAVID PIERCE/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

## The Computer

**Update the computer.** The operating system, the browser, the apps, everything.

**Run Disk Cleanup.** Part of Windows 10, it will free hard drives of temporary files, unneeded downloads and other assorted junk. (For Macs, search for Storage Management and run the Optimize Storage function.)

**Change the browser home page.** Maybe your loved ones just want email, a news site or Google. Make it so that's what they see every time they open the internet.

**Set up shortcuts.** There's nothing easier than a good ol' desktop shortcut for the most important things, with helpful names such as "email" or "bank."

**Back up the computer.** Sync files to an external hard drive a couple of times a year. In the event of a catastrophe—fire, theft or a malicious pop-up ad—it will be there to save the day.

**Teach loved ones keyboard shortcuts.** Copy (Ctrl-C), Paste (Ctrl-V), New Tab (Ctrl-T), that sort of thing. If your loved ones are still opening the File menu just to move text, you have only yourself to blame.

**\$\$\$ Ditch the old personal computer.** Switch them over to a Chromebook or an iPad. They're easier to manage and harder to infect with malware.

## The Phone

**Update everybody's phones.** The apps, the operating systems, everything. New versions of iOS and Android both work well on older phones, and everyone will want the latest security.

**Get everyone on Google Photos.** Sharing photos through email and group texts is a pain, and nobody can ever find them again anyway. Set up a few shared albums, and let everyone know that's where all the photos will be from now on.



Give a loved one a lesson in emoji: It could mean the difference between losing contact and keeping in touch. PHOTO: DAVID PIERCE/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

**Clean out their ports.** Take a toothpick or bobby pin and scrape around gently inside their charging ports and headphone jacks. If you have canned air, even better. All the gunk and dust that accumulates can cause batteries not to charge, headphones not to work and more.

**Show them the emoji keyboard.** Maybe your older relatives don't want to text, but I bet they would be more willing when all it took was a well-placed heart or disco dancer.

**Make the fonts bigger.** Nobody wants to hold their phone at arm's length or stare at it over their glasses.

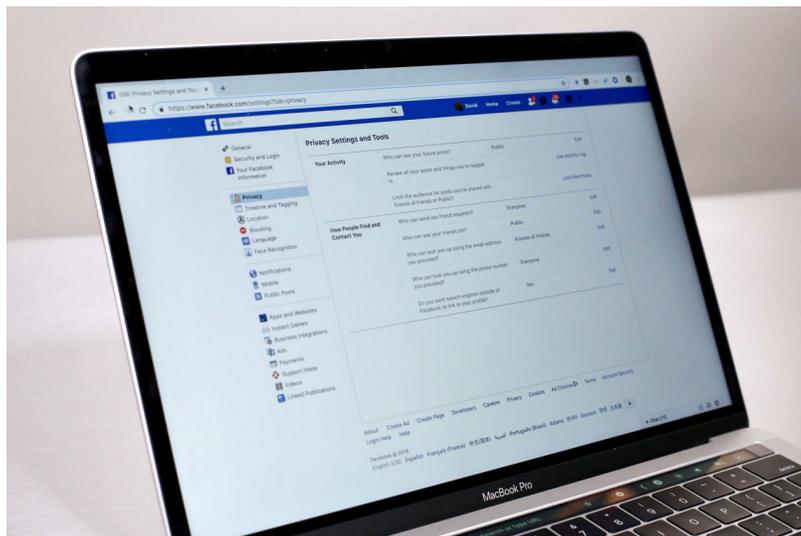
**\$ Get more cloud storage.** The dreaded "Out of storage space" messages are easily avoided with a couple bucks a month for either iCloud or Google Drive.

**\$\$ Swap the battery.** Take any older iPhones to the Apple Store for service. A new battery can make an old phone run fast again, and Apple's still offering swaps for \$29 until year-end. If the phone is really old—that is, it won't update to iOS 12—it's probably time to buy a new one.

## Privacy and Security

**Double-check social settings.** Make sure your loved ones aren't posting publicly or otherwise sharing personal info on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter or wherever else they hang out online. (If they have Venmo, lock that down, too.)

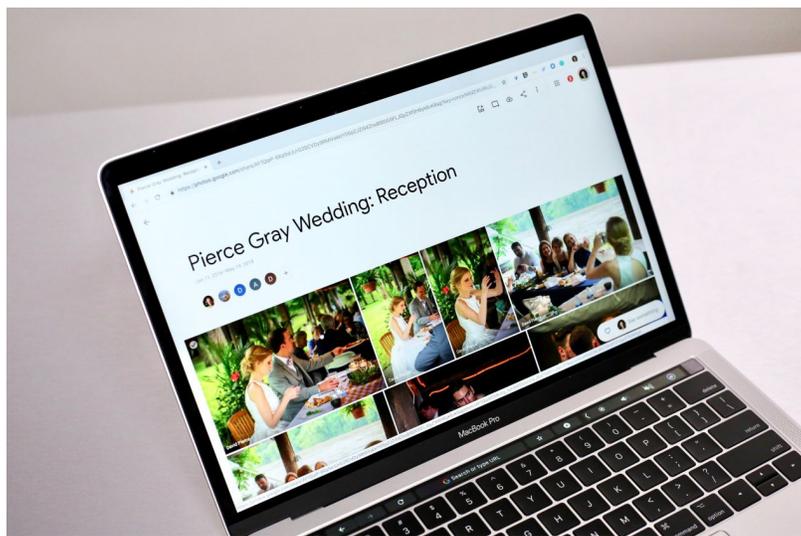
**Delete unused apps.** You'd be surprised how much data these apps can still collect about you.



One of the best gifts you can give this year is helping your loved ones lock down their social-media privacy settings, starting with Facebook. PHOTO: DAVID PIERCE/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

**Set up a family group chat.** If you don't have one already, Apple's Messages app works fine, but only if everyone has an iPhone. If you have some Android users in the family, try WhatsApp or, better yet, Signal.

**\$ Get them a password manager.** Yes, because it's safer to have complex and unique passwords for each service, but also because this software can fill in credentials for them, so they don't have to type as much.



Google Photos works well on Windows or Mac, Android or iPhone. Its smart search is by far the best, though it requires trusting Google to be responsible with your personal data. PHOTO: DAVID PIERCE/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

## Everything Else

**Get the printer working.** You're kind of on your own here; printers are impossible. My best advice is plug it into ethernet if that's an option, so at least the Wi-Fi can't screw it up. (The

newer Wi-Fi printers are a little better, so my actual advice might just be to buy a cheap new one.)

**Teach them “Fortnite.”** This isn’t even a tech thing so much as a relationship thing. If relatives want to keep up with the younger children, they must learn the ways of the Battle Bus.

**Connect smart-home gear.** Maybe they got smart lights, a Nest cam or a Ring doorbell for the holidays. All those devices are great, once they’re working. Consider your white-glove installation part of the gift.

---

READ MORE

---

- From Wi-Fi to Bluetooth to 5G, All Your Wireless Is About to Change [January 27, 2019](#)
- Every Gadget and App Should Have a Dark Mode [January 20, 2019](#)
- This Really Is the Next Revolution in TV Technology [January 8, 2019](#)
- Virtual Assistants Have Hit a Wall—and It’ll Be Years Before They Reach Full Potential [January 6, 2019](#)
- Robot Vacuums Are Finally Good—Here’s Which One to Buy [December 16, 2018](#)
- Why You Need Better Headphones—and Which Ones You Should Buy [December 9, 2018](#)

**\$\$ Get an Amazon Echo Dot or Google Home Mini.**

These solve so many little problems, like playing music and answering questions—and they take no

time to set up and figure out.

If you do some of the these once, you likely won’t have to repeat them for a while. But the job of a Family IT Person is never truly over. So before you leave, make your life easier for the next house call.

**Teach them to take screenshots.** Power + volume-up on the iPhone, Power + volume-down on Android, PrntScrn on Windows, Cmd-Shift-3 on Mac. Now they can show you their problem instead of telling you about it.

**Set up screen-sharing.** Install an app like TeamViewer that will let you remotely take over their computer, or just get them up to speed on FaceTime or Skype. Just make sure they know that when they answer, you can...see them.

And finally, when in doubt, when all else fails and you can’t guess what could possibly be the matter...

**Just unplug it and plug it back in again.**

Problem solved.



When in doubt, unplug it, then plug it back in again. PHOTO: DAVID PIERCE/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

## Corrections & Amplifications

s

The PC command to open a new browser tab is Ctrl-T. A previous version of this column incorrectly said it was Ctrl-Shift-T,

the PC command to re-open the most recently closed tab. (*Dec. 26, 2018*)

*Appeared in the December 24, 2018, print edition as 'To Be the Family Help Desk, Try These Tips.'*

Copyright © 2019 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <https://www.djreprints.com>.