



Replace Messaging with Signal

Difficulty: Technical ★☆☆☆☆ Social ★★☆☆☆

Time: 30 mins

Why Signal?

23 Billion text messages are sent every day, transmitted in readable form through the cellphone network. Your phone logs your messages and calls, texts can be read by your mobile carrier, and in 2013 Edward Snowden revealed that the US Government was already accessing this private data to pinpoint activities and persons it deemed suspicious.

70 Billion messages are sent every day over Apple iMessage and Meta's WhatsApp. These use end-to-end encryption so that messages cannot be read by third parties. The companies still know who you are talking to and when. MetaAI can read anything you share with it in a WhatsApp message. And Apple withdrew end-to-end encryption in the UK under court order.

Meta and Apple are large corporations. Meta profits off your data, Apple profits off keeping you in a walled garden. Both systems make it difficult to leave because all your friends are there, and/or all your data is there. But you can evade them.

The best app for end to end encryption and privacy is *Signal*. It is made by a mission-driven, not-for-profit Foundation dedicated to the goal of privacy and full encryption. They do not need to sell you products or sell your data to be profitable. They are leaders in the call for full encryption and privacy.

Signal supports individual and group chats. It can send text messages, voice messages, and images using your phone's data plan without using SMS or MMS messages. Signal supports voice and video calls without long-distance charges. There also versions available for your desktop computers and tablets, although these must be linked to an app running on your phone.

Signal can automatically disappear message after a certain amount of time, or to send messages that can only be read once by the recipient. Ensure your chats have an expiration date for maximum security.

How to Install

Signal can be installed **through your phone app store**. When you install Signal, you need to register your phone number and receive a text confirmation. Then, you can choose whether to share your phone number to allow discovery by other Signal users, or create a user name that you can share with others so they can chat with you without needing to know your phone number.

On iOS, press and hold the app image on the home screen to get the pop-up menu, and select "Open with Passcode". That way your app can't be opened by someone without a lawful warrant.

Notifications can be enabled as an optional feature. If notifications contain the full message, it can be read by your phone's operating system. We recommend you disable this feature:

On iOS: go to the **Notifications** screen of Settings, or per app from Settings, by tapping **Apps > Signal > Notifications**. Set "**Show Previews**" to **Never** so you will be notified but nothing will leak to your phone. Go to Siri settings and set **Learn from this App** to **off** to prevent its AI from "learning from how you use Signal to make suggestions across apps."

On Android: open **Settings > Notifications > App notifications**. In the dropdown menu, tap **All apps** until you find Signal. Tap Signal then turn the app's notifications to **off**.

Now what?

Now that you have Signal installed, make a plan for how to transition from your old messaging apps.

Boycott: Send a courtesy message to your contacts and active chats there saying, "I have moved to Signal for better information privacy. Please join me there at <username>. Goodbye!"

Earmark: You may need to use WhatsApp for your kid's soccer team, or iMessage to talk to your mom. That is okay. **ONLY** use it for the kids' soccer team. Move everything else over to Signal. Better yet, get a burner phone cheap from eBay, install WhatsApp there, and only use that device.

Balkanize: Move *some* of your chats to Signal but not all of them. The goal is to scatter your traces. Bonus points if different devices use different tools and they are otherwise disconnected. In my experience people find this strategy very confusing as they don't know how to reach you: it can also provide more flexibility through more options. Just bear in mind that anything you say over less secure channels can be read by others, and move convos to Signal if you need to be private.

Grow an Alternative. Signal is an alternative, but it is constantly under threat from governments requesting backdoor access, and they are doing a lot with few resources and dedicated team. If its assets are bought or threatened by a company or nation-state, it may fold. Consider contributing donations to support The Signal Foundation's mission and keep the organization and its technology afloat, at <https://www.signal.org/donate/>

Migrate in Community: Get a group together – of your family, close friends, classmates, or other contacts – and everyone agree to migrate to Signal together. Then trade usernames so you can chat. You can even start right now in this session!

You are in the driver's seat. That means you get to decide whether to have private conversations in Mark Zuckerberg's living room or not. You are the start of a network effect – so be bold, you've got this!