

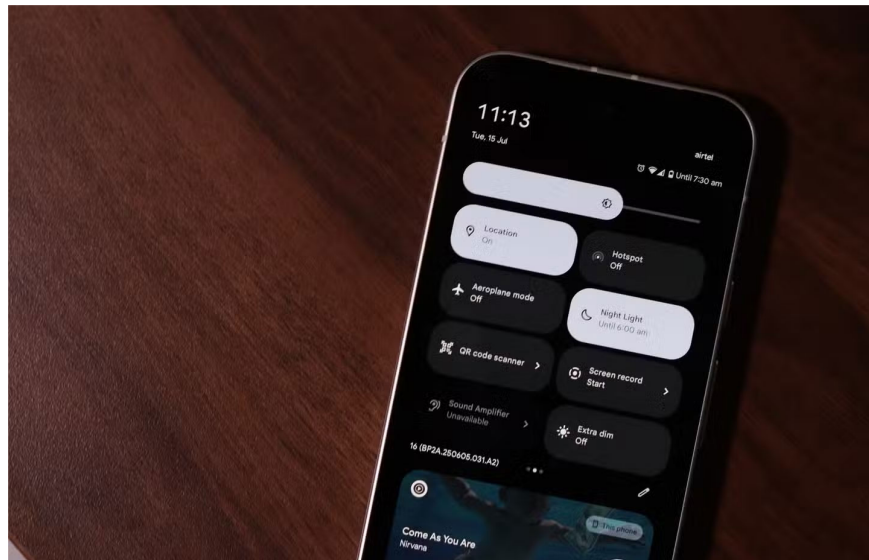
Here's What Phone Thieves Do to Stop You From Tracking Your Device!

While both Android and iOS have device tracking measures, there are still plenty of things thieves can do to prevent you from tracking your phone once they've taken it.

Of all the things you carry with you, your phone is one of the most likely to be stolen. While both Android and iOS have device tracking features, there are still plenty of things thieves can do to prevent you from tracking your phone once they've taken it.

5. Turn on airplane mode to prevent tracking

One of the first things a thief will do after taking possession of your phone is turn on Airplane Mode. This is the quickest and easiest way to turn off all cellular, Bluetooth, and Wi-Fi connections your phone may have. Worse yet, both iOS and Android have an Airplane Mode toggle that can be accessed from the Control Center or notification bar without unlocking your phone.



Your phone needs to be connected to the Internet to update its location on Apple's Find My network or Google's Find Hub. Some newer devices can update their location even when they're turned off, but unless you have a relatively modern phone, it will probably disconnect as soon as Airplane Mode is turned on.

4. Discard SIM

A SIM card is the only way your phone can get online when you're out and about and not connected to a Wi-Fi network. If you lose your cellular connection, it becomes difficult to track your device over the internet or do cell phone triangulation — a method often used by law enforcement to track phones or devices using their IMEI numbers .

This is one of the biggest reasons why you're advised to use an eSIM to lock down your smartphone from theft. eSIMs won't protect your data from being accessed or your phone from being stolen, but they can't be swapped out as easily as physical SIMs. This means your phone will still be registered to your carrier's network, and if you have mobile data turned on, it will be able to update its location to any tracking service you're using. This makes it easier for you and law enforcement to find a lost device.

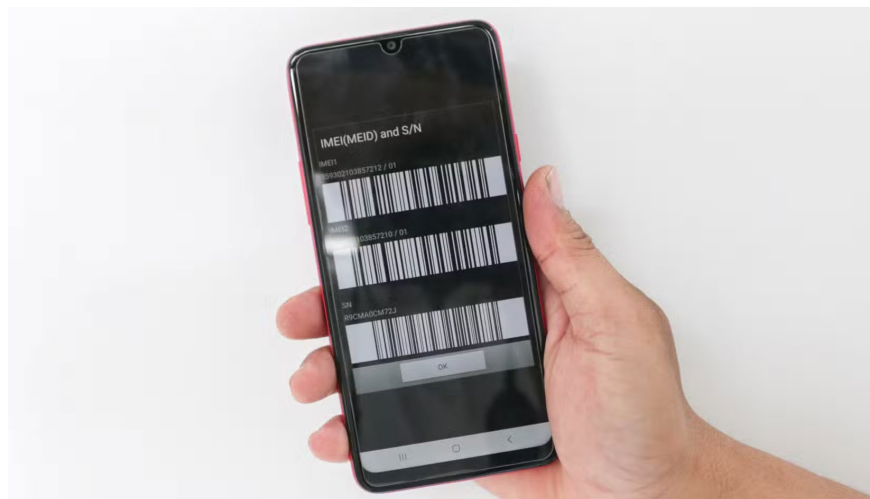
3. Restore factory settings and flash new ROM

On older devices that don't have modern factory reset protection, thieves can factory reset the phone or install a new operating system and run it as a new device. It's not the easiest process, but it's certainly easier than replacing the eSIM. Most phone repair shops can flash a new ROM onto an existing phone to bypass any protections in place.

Android phones are generally more vulnerable to this attack than iPhones, especially given the number of smartphone ROMs available for download online. Note that this method requires unlocking the device's bootloader, so again, technical expertise is required to perform this operation.

2. IMEI Swap

Another effective, but technically difficult, way to prevent your phone from being tracked is to swap out your IMEI number. The IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity) number is a unique 15-digit code that identifies your phone on your carrier's network. As long as the phone has a working SIM card and is connected to the network, it will report its IMEI number and can therefore be tracked.



IMEI swapping is illegal in the UK, but there is no law against it in the US. However, it is not easy to do properly; it is one of the most technically sophisticated things a thief can do to disguise a stolen device and sell it on the second-hand market. There are tools on the internet that can modify a device's IMEI, but this is usually only temporary and does not mask the real IMEI.

This is another method that works better for Android devices than iPhones, although it depends on what chipset your Android device uses.

1. Hardware modification

Last but not least, you can swap or remove the phone's processor/motherboard components to bypass protections and unlock/recover the stolen device.

Many kernel-level or hardware-level protections operate on individual components. So if someone were to swap out the entire integrated circuit on a phone's motherboard, they could theoretically bypass those protections. This approach is surprisingly cost-effective, and any repair technician who works on phone motherboards should be able to identify vulnerable components with a little research.



As phones get smarter, it's easier to track them down when they're lost. But phone thieves are also getting more sophisticated at finding ways to hide them. The best defense is still the simplest: Be vigilant in public and avoid having your phone stolen in the first place. It's a frustrating and often costly situation, from personal experience.

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