Before you erase, find the copies.

Use another trusted device or computer. Leave the locked iPhone unchanged while you review what already exists.

Do not erase to test a backup. A setting or backup record does not prove that your wanted files are included.



On the iPhone
Local files



Synced library
Current cloud items



Device backup
A dated copy



Saved export
Independent files

Check the items, the date and the access.

☐ 01 **Photos and videos**

Look for the wanted items and dates in an accessible synced library or existing export. Sync can pause; an enabled iCloud Photos setting is not proof that every original uploaded.

☐ 02 **Messages**

Check another Apple device already using Messages in iCloud, plus existing backups. Messages are not browsed at iCloud.com. Confirm the actual conversations and attachments.

☐ 03 **An iCloud device backup**

Match an existing backup to this iPhone and the relevant period. Photos and Messages already syncing to iCloud are excluded from the device backup. A recent date is a lead, not a contents guarantee.

☐ 04 **A Mac or PC backup**

Preserve the dated backup. For an encrypted copy, locate its original password privately. A new backup password cannot open the old copy. Do not delete or overwrite a valuable backup as a check.

Review status - not a recovery guarantee

☐ Copies found to verify ☐ Access still uncertain ☐ Assessment needed

With Advanced Data Protection, web access may need trusted-device approval. An inaccessible web view is not proof that no copy exists.

Read the full locked-iPhone guide **1300 806 557**

Reference guidance checked 10 November 2026. Not a scan or compatibility result.

support.apple.com/108770 support.apple.com/102630 support.apple.com/108313 support.apple.com/108809

Check overlooked copies. Protect the original.

Separate useful copies from assumptions. None of these checks requires resetting, restoring or guessing the passcode on the locked phone.

1 **Find**
Locate an existing copy.

2 **Verify**
Check wanted items and access.

3 **Preserve**
Keep the original copy intact.

☐ 05 Shared Albums

Check existing access from another trusted device. Shared items are not automatically saved independently. Save wanted copies where possible and check quality: album versions and sharing conditions differ.

☐ 06 WhatsApp

An existing iCloud chat backup needs the same phone number and Apple Account. Later messages or videos may be absent. Encrypted copies may need the original passkey, password or 64-digit key. Do not replace the backup to test it.

☐ 07 Other accounts and people

Look in existing Google Photos, OneDrive or Dropbox libraries, old computers, saved exports, sent email and copies held by message recipients. Verify the files themselves; a signed-in account is not proof of a complete copy.

☐ 08 Authority and family access

Confirm who may act for the owner. Apple account or Legacy Contact access is separate from unlocking the phone and has conditions and exclusions. Estate papers do not decrypt local files by themselves. Ask about the appropriate route.

Useful facts for an engineer

- ☐ Model and software, if already known.
- ☐ Files and period you need.
- ☐ Copies located and access still missing.
- ☐ Exact screen, error and first symptoms.
- ☐ Passcode known? Do not write it here.
- ☐ Ownership or authority papers available.

Pause before a destructive choice. Do not erase, restore, uninstall an app or replace a backup simply to investigate. If the files matter and copies are uncertain, ask for an assessment.

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