

# Android - Checking for Hidden Apps and Sideloaded Apps (installed from an unofficial app store)

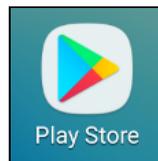
Compiled by the Clinic to End Tech Abuse

Last Updated: May 10, 2021

Guide developed with [Android 6.0 \(Marshmallow\)](#), [Android 7.1.2 \(Nougat\)](#), [Android 9 \(Pie\)](#), and [Android 11 phones](#)

## What are sideloaded apps?

Sideloaded apps are apps that were installed on mobile devices (e.g., a smartphone) from third-party sources, and not from the official app store. Android's official app store is called the Google Play Store:



Sideloaded apps are potentially dangerous because they do not pass through the Play Store's filters. Google regularly scans the Play Store (and apps you installed from the Play Store) to remove apps with viruses (programs that can steal your information or slow down your phone) or that could be harmful in other ways (for example, apps that could be used to spy on someone).

In most cases, if someone wants to install a sideloaded app on your device, they would need to have physical access to it.

## What is the app drawer?

This is the section in your phone where you see app icons. If you tap on one of them, you will open the app:



### What are hidden apps?

Hidden apps are apps that are installed on your device that do not appear in the app drawer. These usually consist of essential system apps, but can also include malicious surveillance apps.

Many mobile devices today have Google's Android as their operating system. The latest version is Android 11. Prior to Android 10 (which may not be available for all devices), it was possible for app developers to hide their app icons. Also, some apps might help users to hide other apps. Therefore, an installed app may not appear in the app drawer.

To check which Android version you have, follow these steps:

1. Open **Settings**
2. Depending on your Android version and device manufacturer, one of the following options will be available:

**Option 1:** Tap on **About device**

**Option 2:** Tap on **About phone**

**Option 3:** Tap on **About phone > Software information**

**Option 4:** Tap on **About phone > Device information**

**Option 5:** Tap on **My device > All specs**

**Option 6:** Tap on **System > About phone**

3. Check **Android version**

If your device gives you the option to update your software to Android 10 or later, we recommend that you do so, since this can help prevent someone from installing a hidden app on your phone.

For all Android versions, including Android 10 or later, we recommend following this guide to check for both sideloaded and hidden apps.

### Who is this guide for?

- Anyone who would like to check if there is a sideloaded or hidden app installed on their Android device.

### What does this guide cover?

[Step 1 - Open the Google Play Store app](#)

[Step 2 - Go to My apps & games](#)

[Step 3 - Check the list of apps you have installed](#)

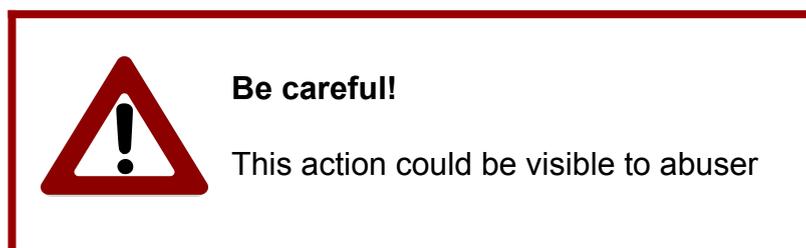
[Step 4 - Deleting a sideloaded app](#)

[Step 5 - Deleting a hidden app](#)

[Step 6 - Disable sideloading \(disable installation of apps from unknown sources\)](#)

### Before we start:

- If an abuser has access to your phone, they may know right away if you delete an app. Deleting an app can also stop the abuser from receiving information about you (where have you been, who have you talked to, etc.). Some abusers may become more dangerous if this happens.
- We strongly recommend that you talk to a domestic violence or other appropriate organization to make plans for your safety before you delete an app if you are worried about violence or threats.
- We have marked changes that could be visible to an abuser with the following sign:



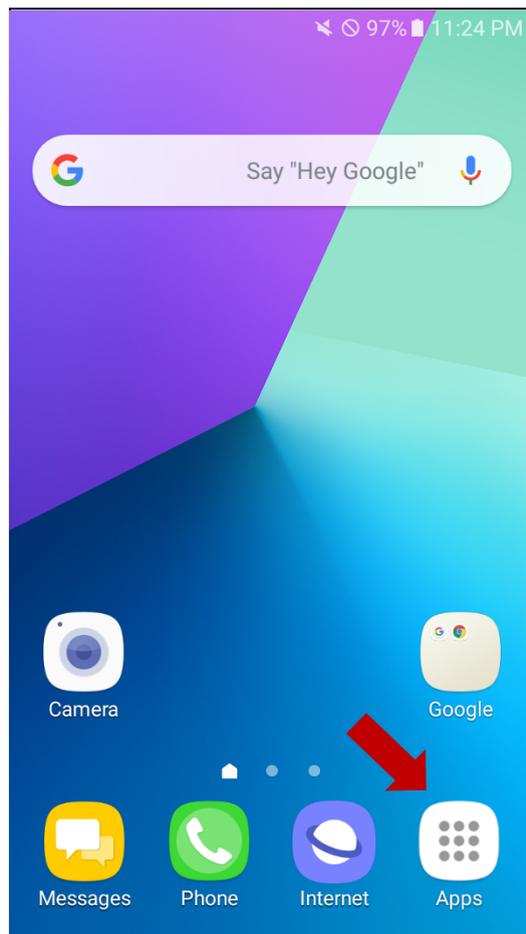
Images of the Android Mobile Operating System are included below for educational and research purposes only.

## Step 1 - Open the Google Play Store app

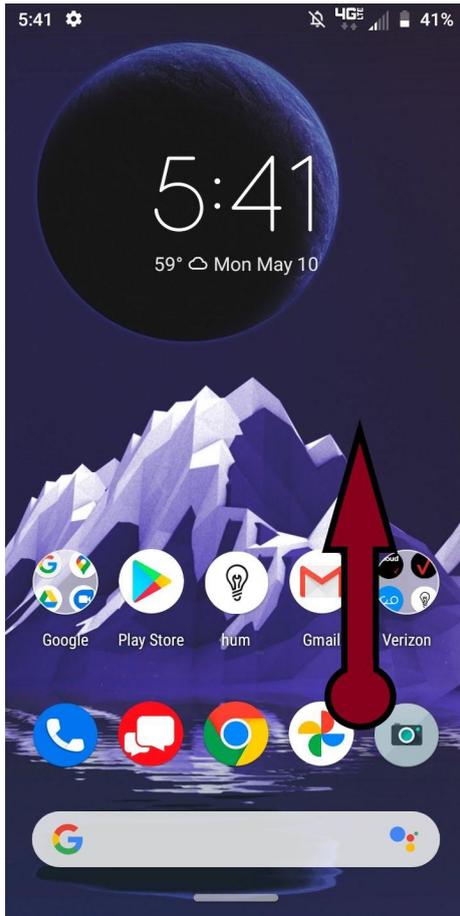
Open the Google Play Store app. This is the app's icon:



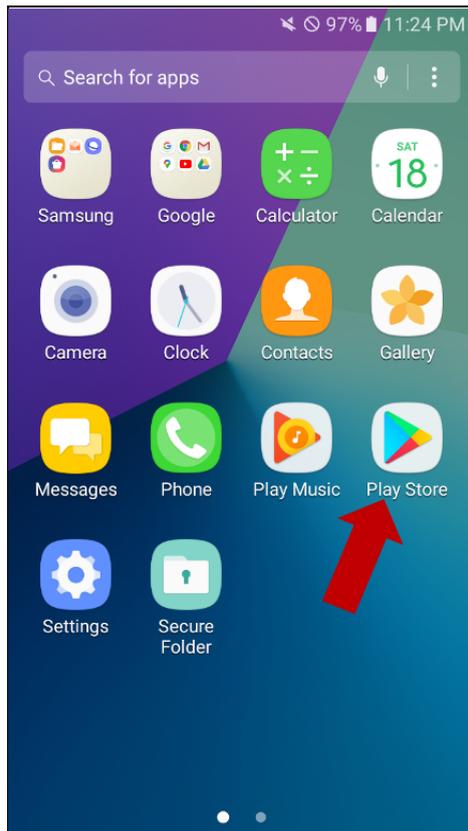
The Google Play Store app might be located in your **app drawer** (the section in your phone where your installed apps are displayed). One way to access the **app drawer** is by tapping on **Apps** on your home screen:



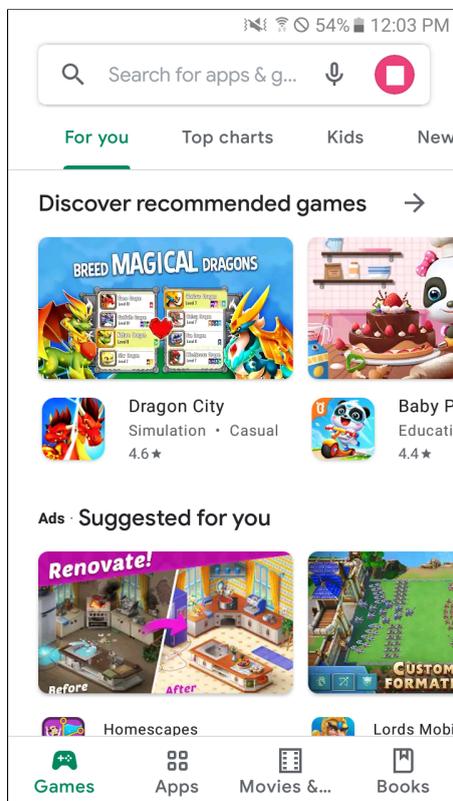
On newer Android versions, the app drawer icon may be unavailable. You will need to swipe up on the home screen to access the app drawer:



Now, tap on the **Play Store** app to open it:

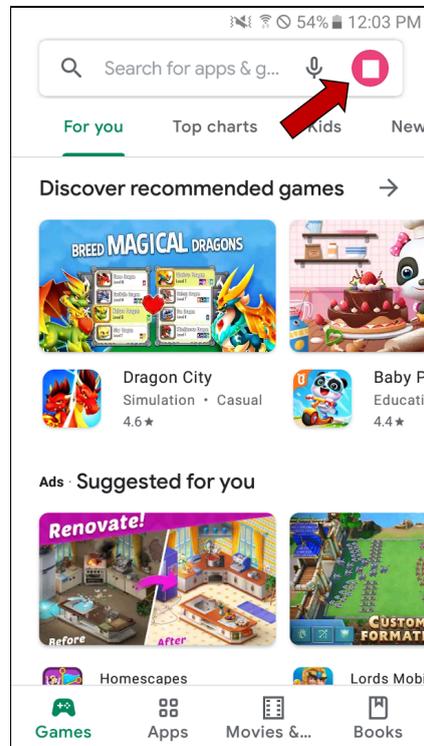


You will see a page like the following:

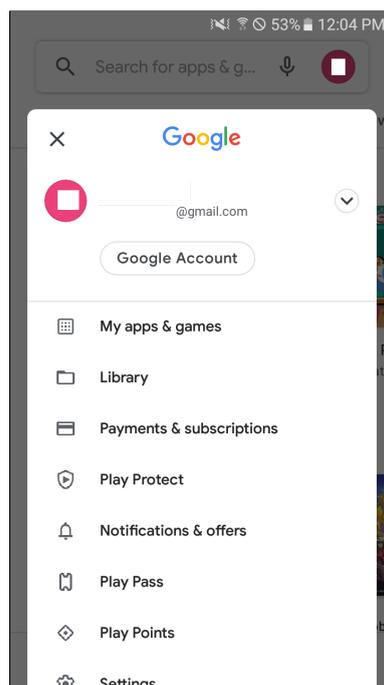


## Step 2 - Go to *My apps & games*

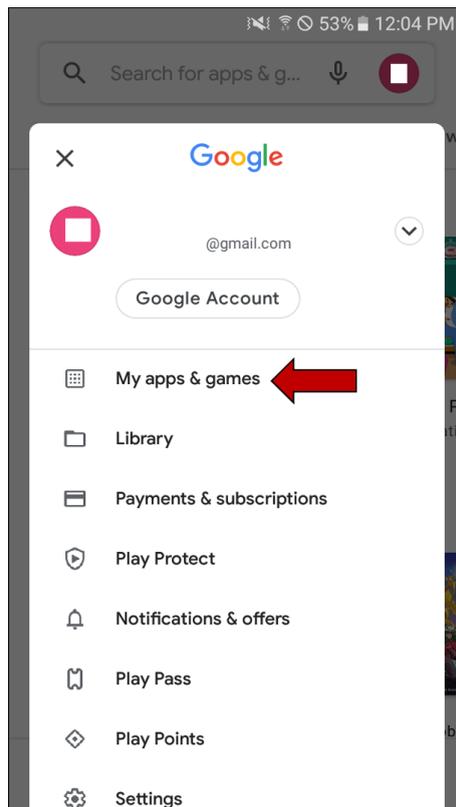
Tap on the circled button that appears on the top right corner (it might have the first letter of your name):



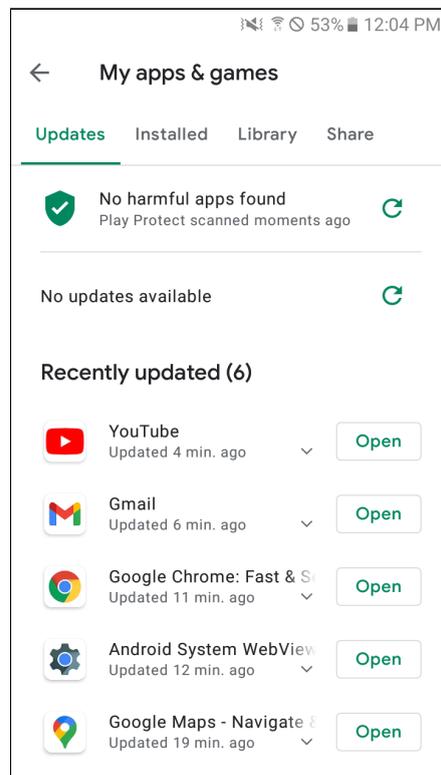
The following will appear:



Tap on **My apps & games**:

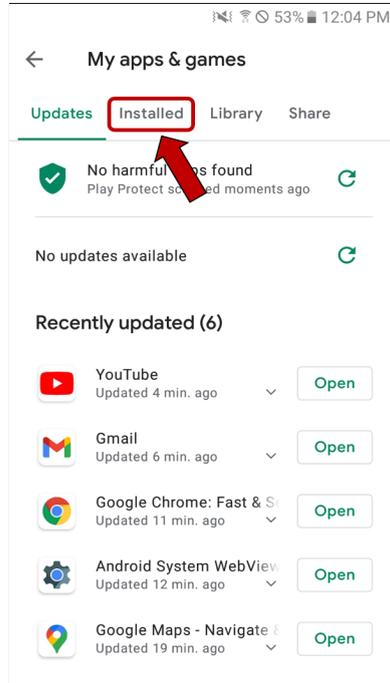


The following screen will appear:

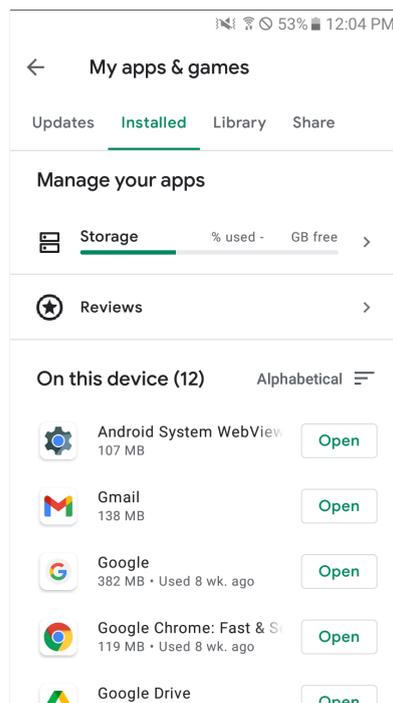


### Step 3 - Check the list of apps you have installed

Tap on the tab called **Installed**:



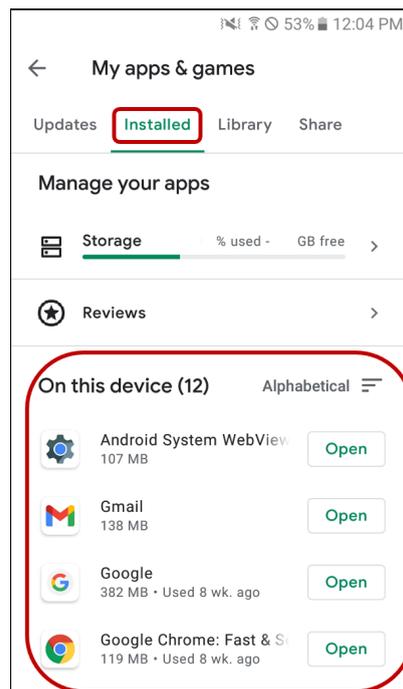
The list that appears will show you the apps that are currently installed on your device, and that were installed using the Google Play Store:



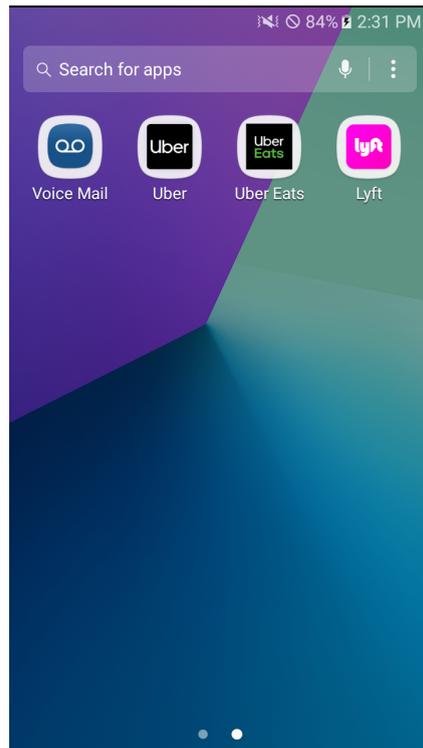
## Step 4 - Deleting a sideloaded app

**Important:** the process to delete an app might vary slightly depending on the Android version you have.

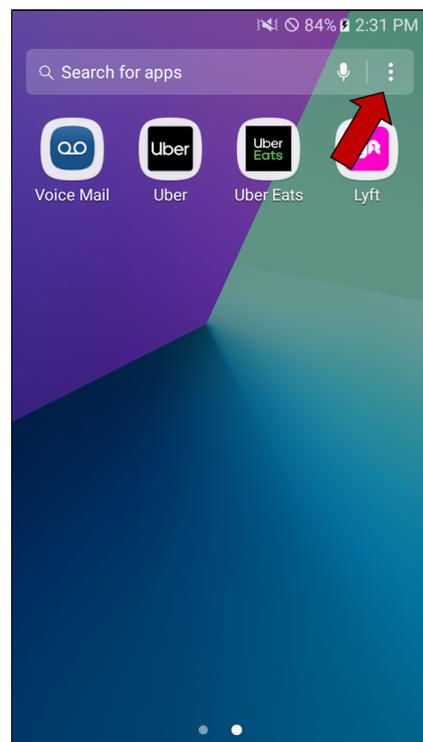
If you see an app in your **app drawer** but do not see it in the **Installed apps list**, there is a high probability that it was installed from an unofficial app store:



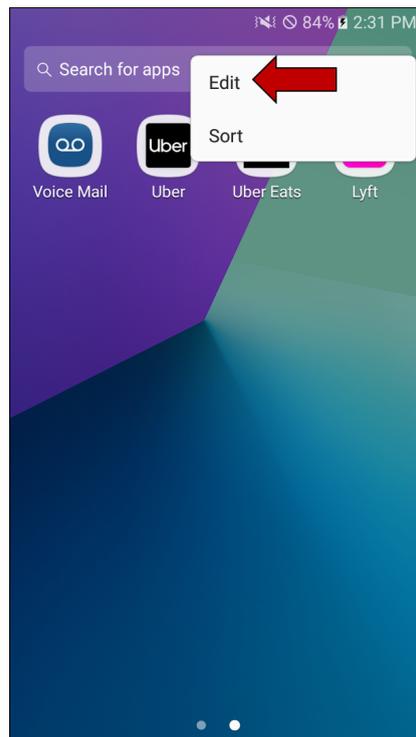
If you want to delete a sideloaded app, go to the **app drawer**:



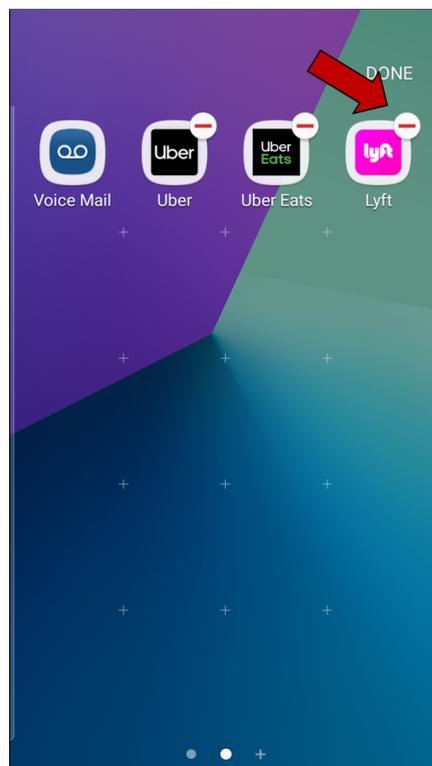
Tap on the **three dots** at the top-right corner (or press for a few seconds on an app icon and then click on app info):



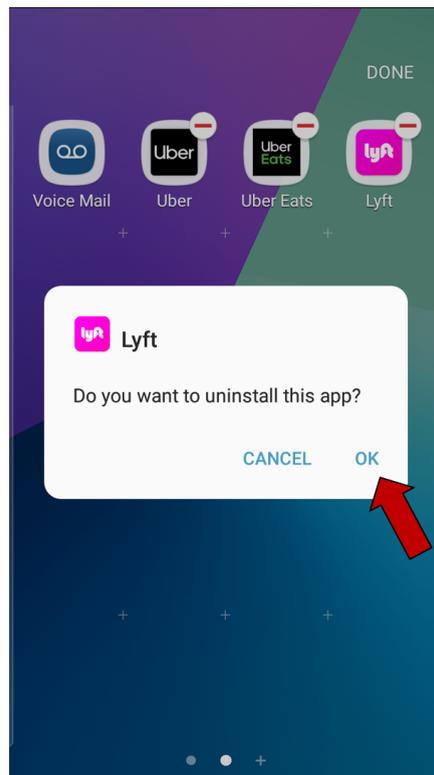
Now, tap on **Edit**:



Tap on the “ - ” **button** that will appear on the top right corner of the app you want to delete:



A message will appear. Tap on **OK** to uninstall the app:

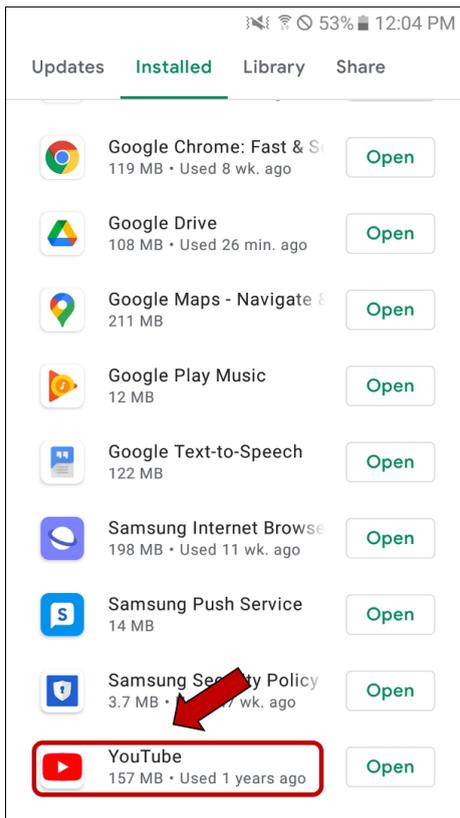


## Step 5 - Deleting a hidden app

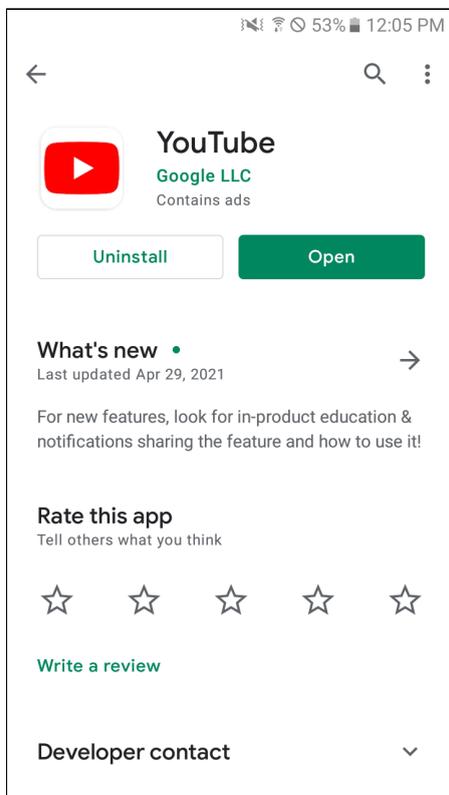
**Important:** the process to delete an app might vary slightly depending on the Android version you have.

If there is an app in the **Installed apps list** that you cannot see in the **app drawer**, that app is a hidden app.

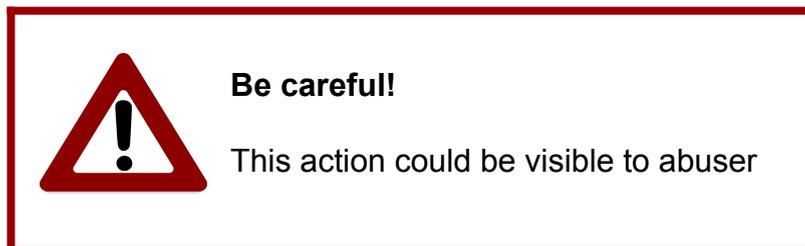
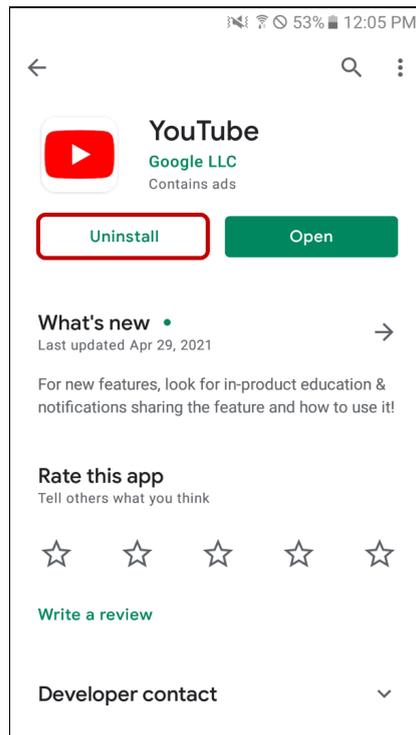
If you want to delete an app that appears on the **Installed apps list**, tap on its name:



You will see something like this:



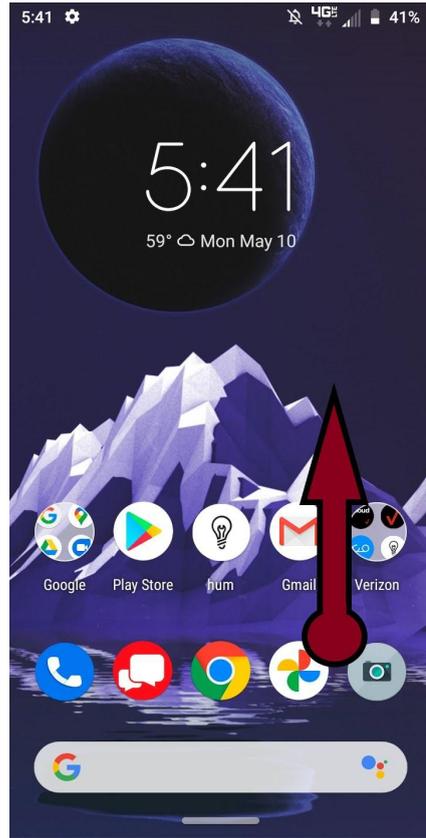
If you tap on **Uninstall**, the app will be deleted:

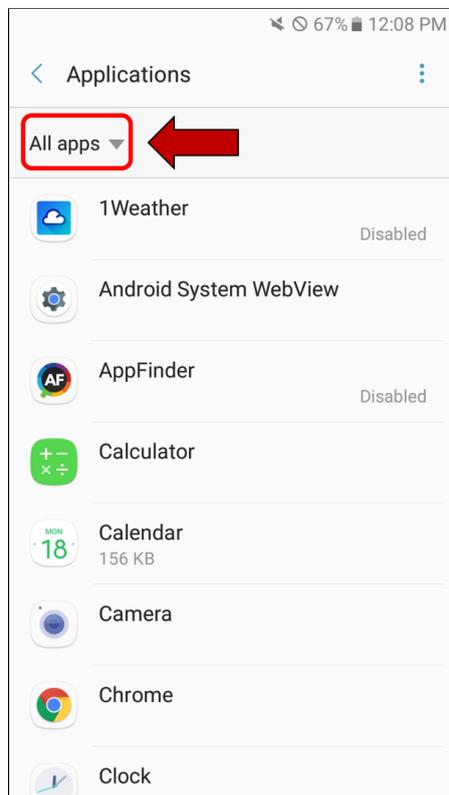
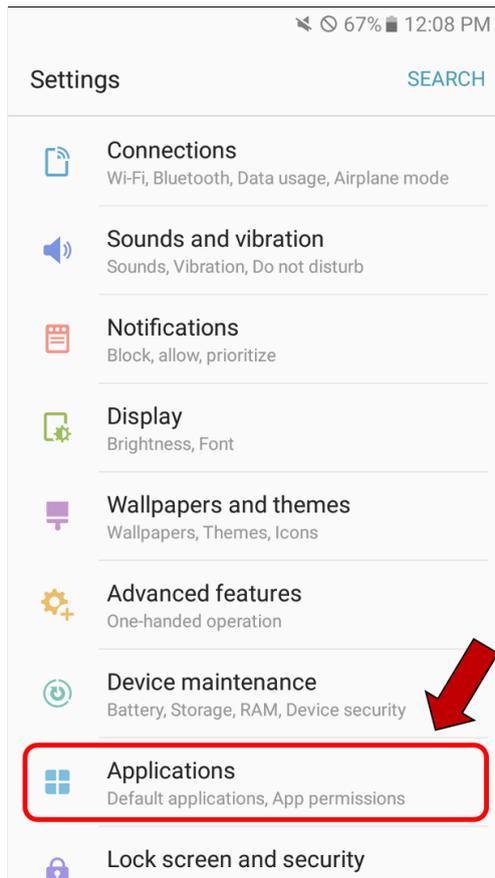


If the abuser has installed and is using an app to get information about you, they may know right away if you remove it because they would stop receiving that information.

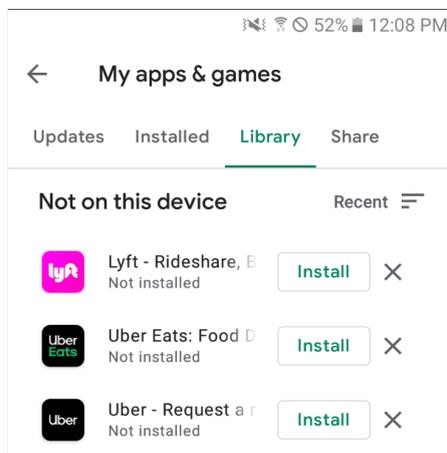
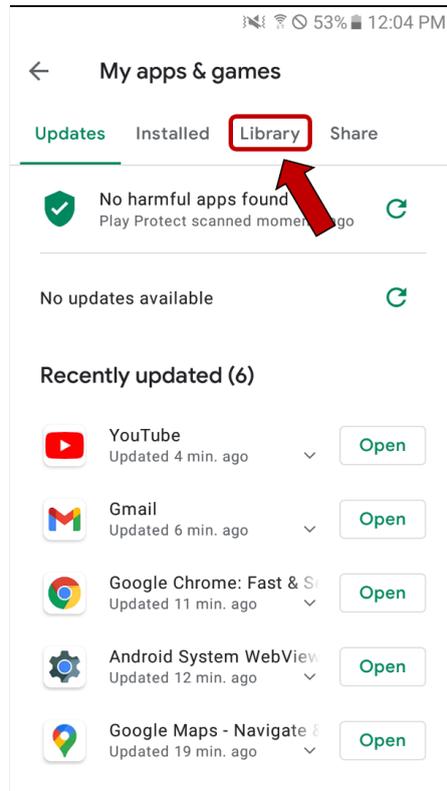
We strongly recommend that you talk to a domestic violence or other appropriate organization to make plans for your safety before you delete an app if you are worried about violence or threats.

Another way to check for **hidden apps** is by going to **Settings > Applications (or Apps & notifications)** and selecting **All apps**:

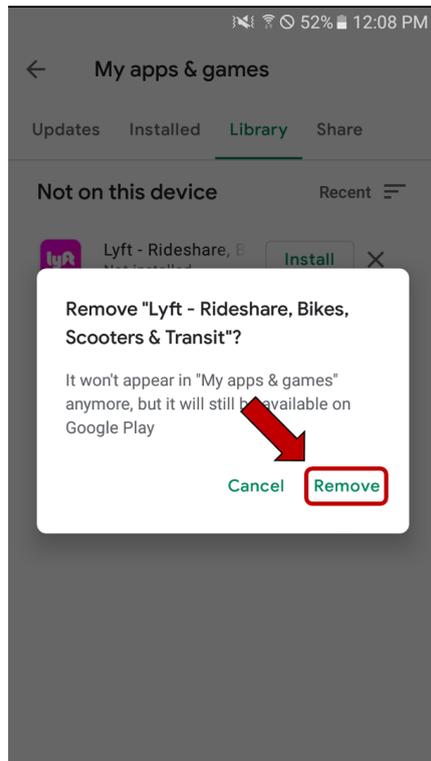
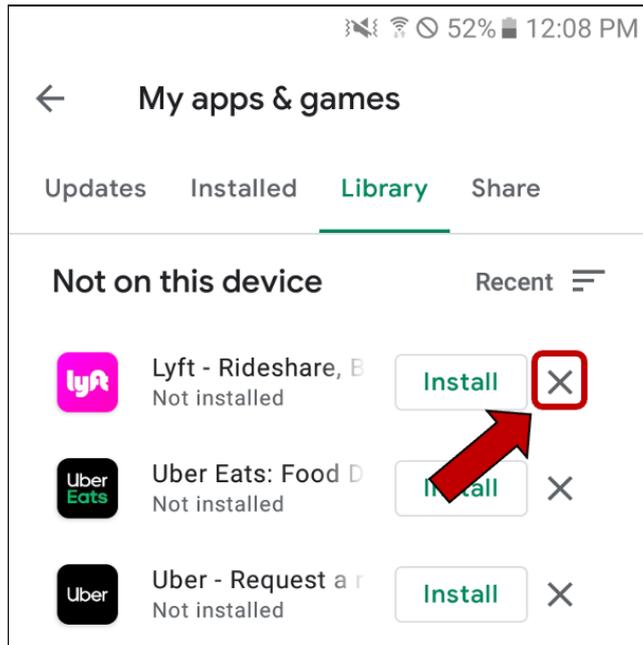




Finally, if you tap on the **Library** tab, a list with all the apps you have ever downloaded on all the devices associated with your Google account will appear:



You can delete an app from the list by tapping on its corresponding “X” button and by tapping **OK** in the popup window that appears:

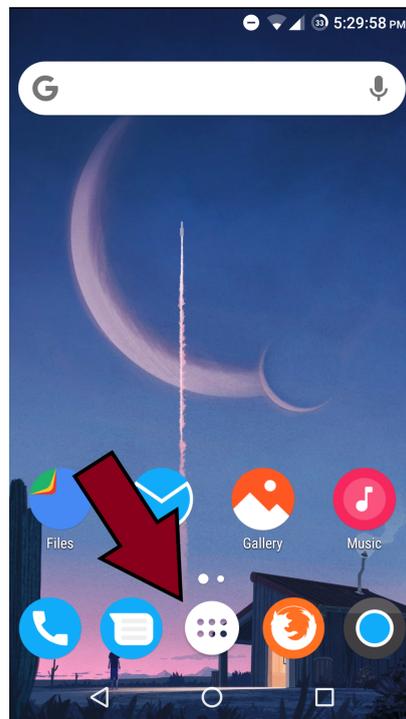


## Step 6 - Disable sideloading

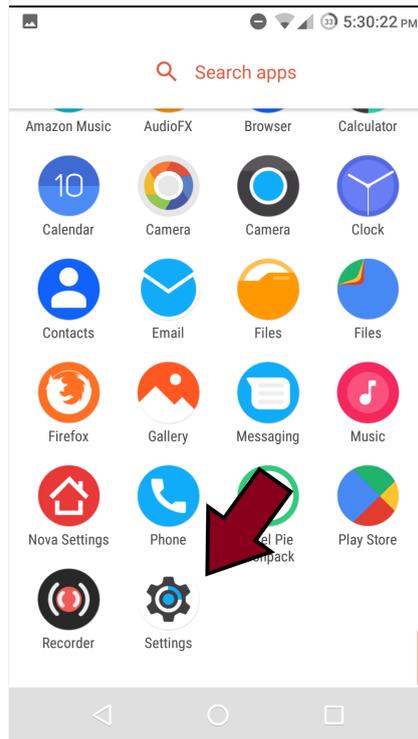
You can prevent future attempts to install sideloaded apps on your device by disabling installation from unknown sources. Note that this will not remove sideloaded apps already present on your device (please see Step 4 for relevant uninstallation instructions). The steps to disable sideloading differ between Android versions.

### Android 7.x or earlier

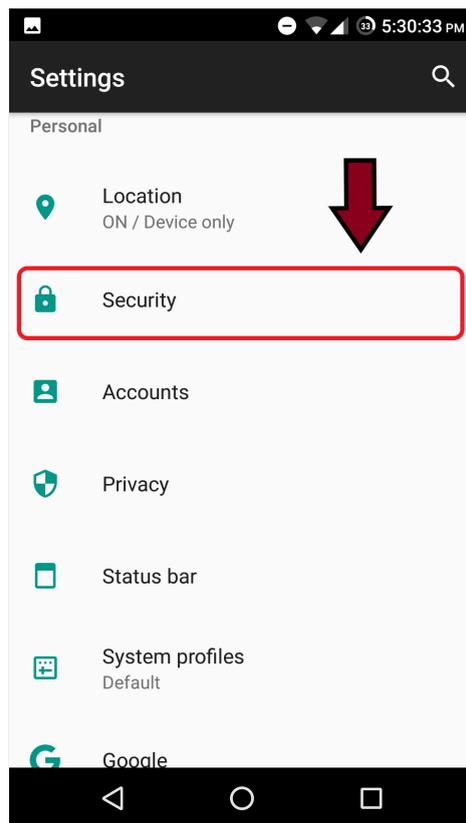
Open the app drawer:



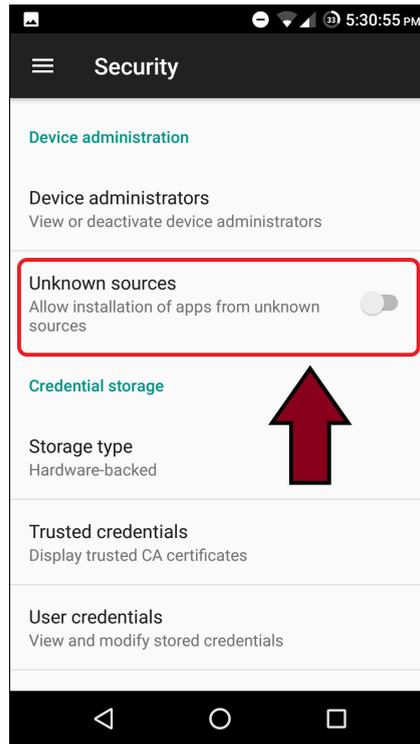
Open **Settings**:



Tap on **Security**:

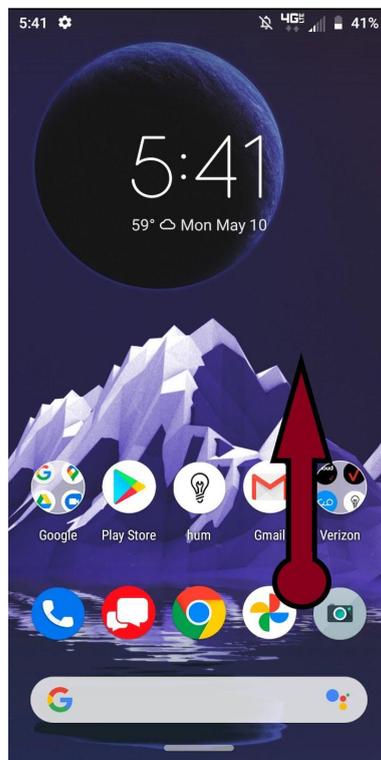


Tap the **Unknown sources** switch to turn off:

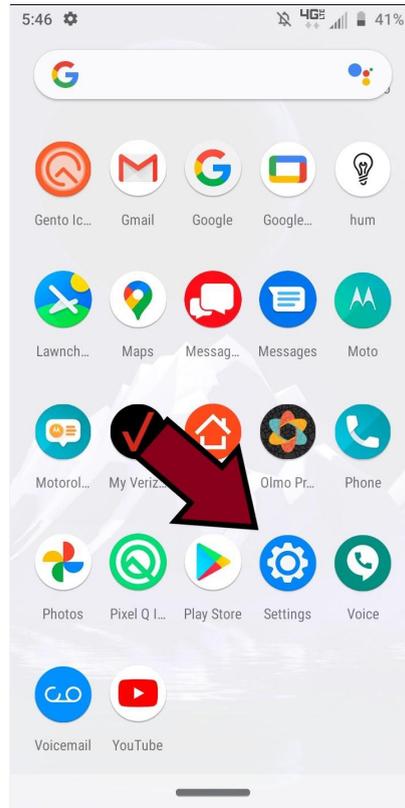


## Android 8.x or later

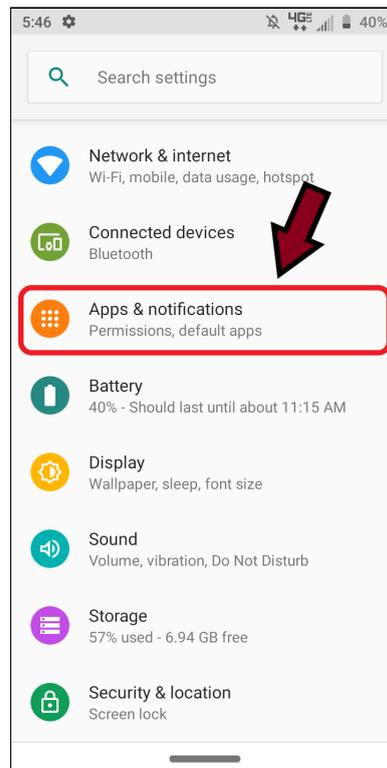
Swipe up:



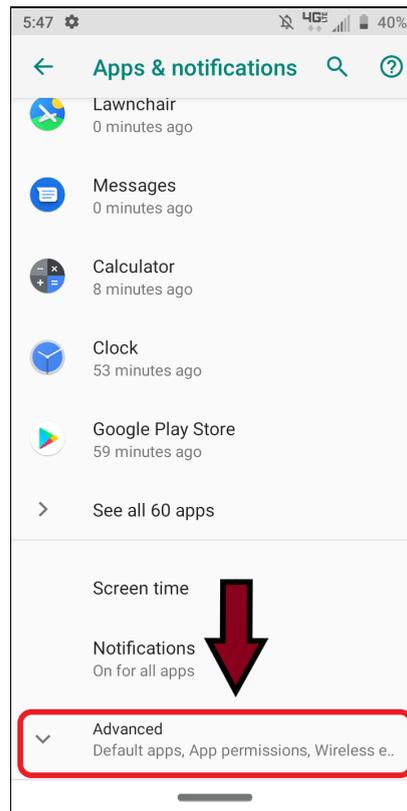
Open **Settings**:



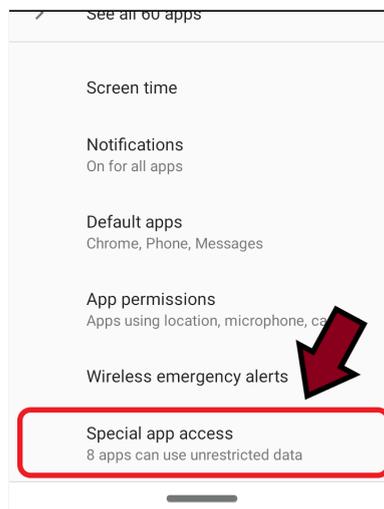
Tap on **Apps & notifications**:



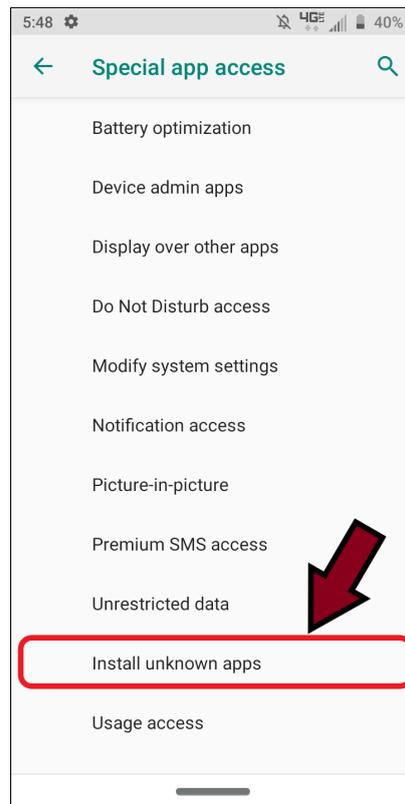
Tap on **Advanced**:



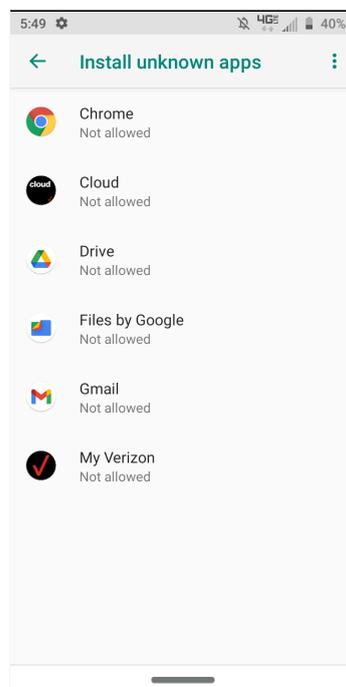
Tap on **Special app access**:



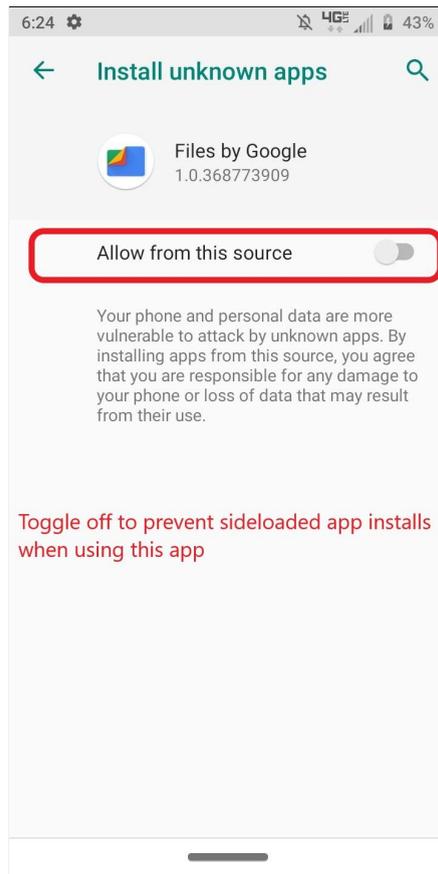
Tap on **Install unknown apps**:



You will see something like this:



Tap on each of the apps that appear and turn **Allow from this source** off:



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