Security: staying safe online

Security means keeping your information private and your devices clean. Three ideas cover most of it: encryption scrambles your information, antivirus catches the bad programs, and a VPN gives you a private tunnel on public Wi-Fi.

Best antivirus and anti-malware, and why

Antivirus: the guard at the door — Catches the classic viruses — bad programs that try to sneak onto your computer. Windows computers already have one built in, called Microsoft Defender, and it is free. For most people, the built-in guard is enough — you do not need to buy another one.

Anti-malware: the detective — Catches the newer tricks: fake virus pop-ups, spyware that watches what you type, and hijackers that change your homepage or search engine. Malwarebytes Free works as an on-demand cleanup scanner; paid Malwarebytes versions can also provide real-time protection.

Encryption: scrambled so only you can read it

iPhone — setting a passcode turns on Apple's Data Protection — use a strong passcode and keep the phone locked

Samsung — modern Galaxy phones encrypt automatically once the phone has a lock screen — no switch to flip.

Windows — BitLocker/Device Encryption is available only on supported hardware and editions.

Mac — FileVault is at Apple menu → System Settings → Privacy & Security → FileVault — turn it on only if you have a safe copy of your recovery key.

On websites — The little padlock and the letters https in your browser's address bar mean the site scrambles what you send it. The padlock only means the connection is private — it does not prove the site is honest.

VPN: a private tunnel for public Wi-Fi

A VPN (virtual private network) adds extra privacy when you use someone else's Wi-Fi — a coffee shop, a hotel, the airport. VPNs are a paid service — usually a few dollars a month, cheaper by the year. Free VPNs are not recommended — stick with a paid one, or ask us and we will set it up.

Everyday safety habits

- Keep the padlock habit.
- Let updates install.
- One antivirus, kept on. Microsoft Defender comes built into Windows — keep it on and let it update itself.
- A scary pop-up saying your computer is infected is almost always the scam itself. Close it before you click anything.