30 Ways Your Windows 10 Computer Phones Home to Microsoft



Windows 10 phones home more than any other version of Windows before it. Along with Windows 10, Microsoft released a new privacy policy and services agreement containing 45 pages of legalese. If Google wrote these, Microsoft might say you were being "Scroogled."

Like it or not, Microsoft isn't alone here. What Windows 10 is doing has become common and normal across the web, Android, iOS, and other modern platforms. Microsoft is hoovering up all the data it can get to better target ads, personalize the operating system, and improve its software and services.

Editor's Note: almost everything is sending back data to somewhere — for instance, if you are using Chrome, everything you search for is sent back to Google. Ad networks are tracking you on every website (including this one). Facebook and Amazon have ad systems that border on creepy. We're not necessarily condemning Microsoft with this article, but with all the recent interest in privacy and Windows 10, we decided to build a list of all the things being sent back in Windows 10 and let you decide what you think.

Privacy Options, Personalized Ads, Location, Getting to Know You and Feedback



What's the Difference Between Windows 10's Express or Custom Setup?

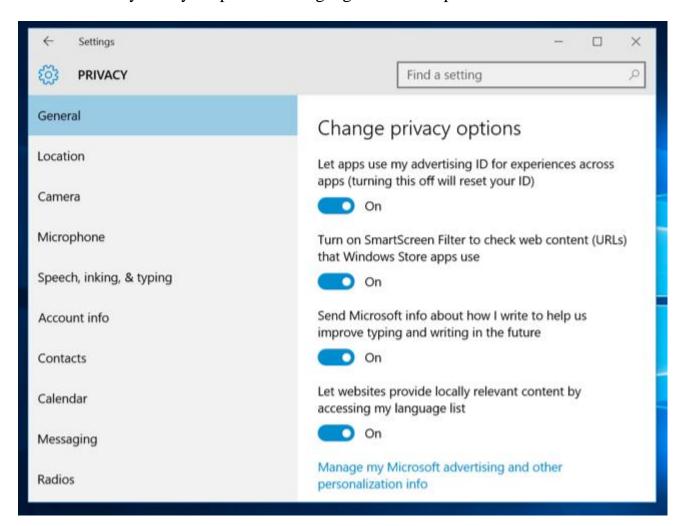
When you first set up Windows 10, Microsoft is going to want to rush you through the process with "Express... [Read Article]

You can actually change many of these options right after the installation process if you <u>select</u> "<u>Customize settings</u>" instead of "<u>Use express settings</u>." However, most people will probably click right through and use the express settings. This activates a lot of features that share data with Microsoft.

You'll find a lot of these features <u>under Privacy in the new Settings app</u>. (Click the Start button, click Settings, and select Privacy.) Some of the options here simply control which apps have access to different data — for example, which apps can control your webcam. Others allow you to set system-wide privacy options.

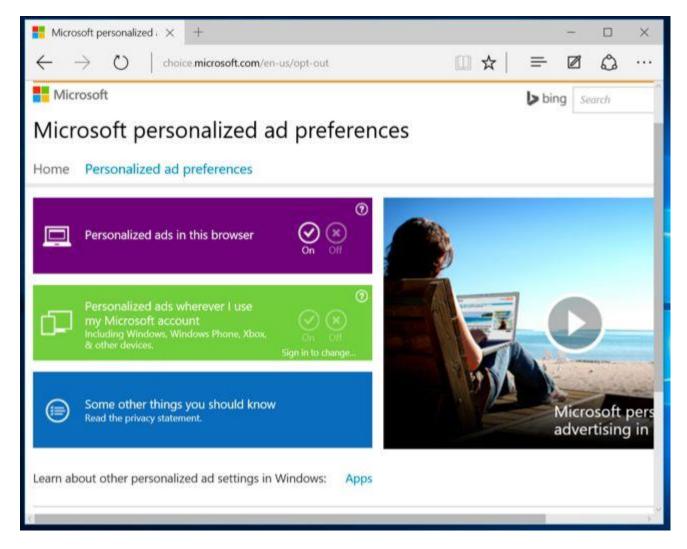
Under General, you'll find:

- 1. Let apps use my advertising ID for experiences across apps (turning this off will reset your ID) This enables a unique advertising ID that you can be tracked with across different "Windows Store", or universal, apps. Microsoft can track your use of apps and show you targeted ads across different apps.
- 2. Turn on SmartScreen Filter to check web content (URLs) that Windows Store apps use This enables the SmartScreen filter in universal apps. As we point out below, it's also enabled in File Explorer itself, Microsoft Edge, and Internet Explorer with different settings.
- 3. Send Microsoft info about how I write to help us improve typing and writing in the future This is related to the "Speech, inking, & typing" settings below. With it enabled, information about how you type and write is sent to Microsoft's servers.
- **4.** Let websites provide locally relevant content by accessing my language list Websites you access can see the languages you have installed on your system and choose to serve you in your preferred language with this option enabled.



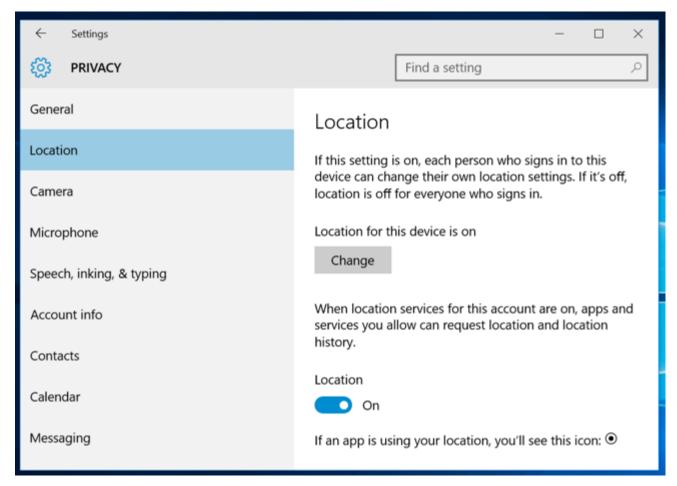
You'll see a "Manage my Microsoft advertising and other personalization info" link at the bottom here. Click it, and then click over to "Personalized ad preferences" on the web page that appears. You can also access this page at https://choice.microsoft.com/en-us/opt-out.

- **5. Personalized ads in this browser** This option is specific to each individual browser you use, and controls whether Microsoft will show you personalized ads in that browser.
- **6. Personalized ads wherever I use my Microsoft account** This option is tied to your Microsoft account and controls whether you see personalized ads on Windows, Windows Phone, Xbox, and other devices you use a Microsoft account on.



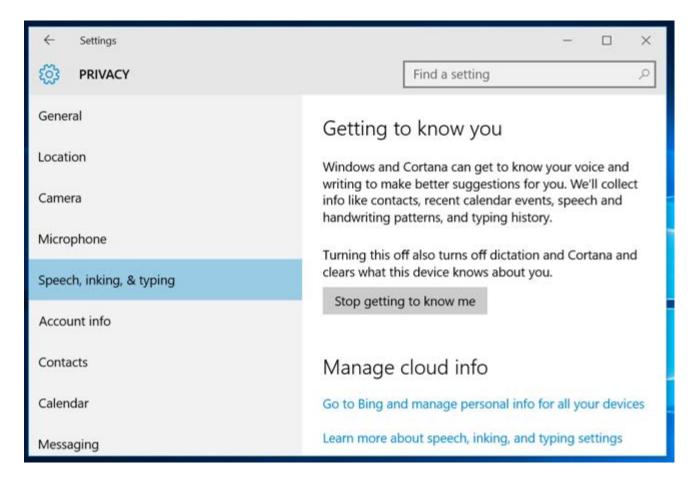
The Location screen activates location services. This isn't mentioned on the Location Settings window itself, but the custom setup screen states this will also "send Microsoft and trusted partners some location data to improve location services."

• 7. Location and location history – Your location is shared with individual apps that you choose to share it with. Location history is also available to apps, and stored only on your local device — and just for 24 hours. But apparently some data is shared with Microsoft and its trusted partners if you have location services enabled.

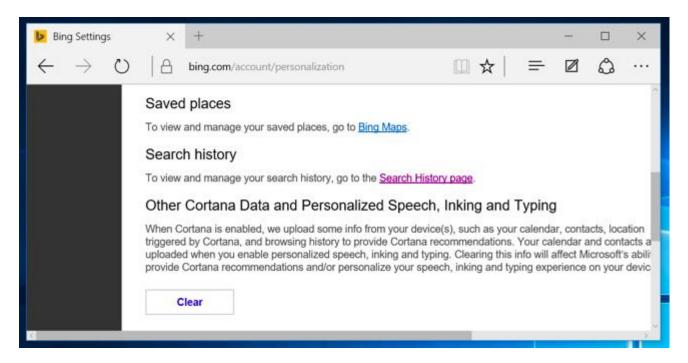


The "Speech, inking, & typing" section covers a surprising amount of data:

• **8. Speech, inking, & typing** – Windows and Cortana can "get to know you" by logging your voice, writing, contacts, calendar events, speech and handwriting pattern, and typing history. You can tell Windows to "Stop getting to know me" from here. This clears data stored only on your Windows device.

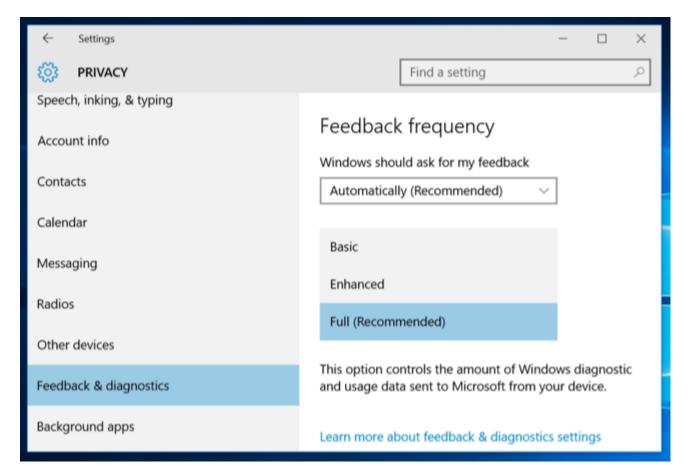


• **9. Speech, inking, & typing in the cloud** – Click the "Go to Bing and manage personal info for all your devices" option to clear personalization data stored on Microsoft's servers tied to your Microsoft account. This link takes you to the https://bing.com/account/personalization page. Use the "Clear" button under "Other Cortana Data and Personalized Speech, Inking and Typing" section to clear this data.



The "Feedback & diagnostics" setting has a surprising option. What's especially surprising is Windows 10 won't actually let you disable this option.

• 10. Diagnostic and usage data — By default, Windows 10 will send "Full" diagnostic and usage data to Microsoft. This seems to be Microsoft's new telemetry system codenamed "Asimov." You can select only Enhanced or Basic diagnostic and usage data. You can only disable this on Enterprise editions of Windows, and that requires changing the "Allow Telemetry" option in the group policy editor. This change doesn't even work on Professional editions of Windows. Yes, you can set the option to "0" which would normally disable it, but the Group Policy editor states that the "0" setting is ignored except on Enterprise versions of Windows. Instead, setting the option to "0" just sends "Basic" telemetry data.

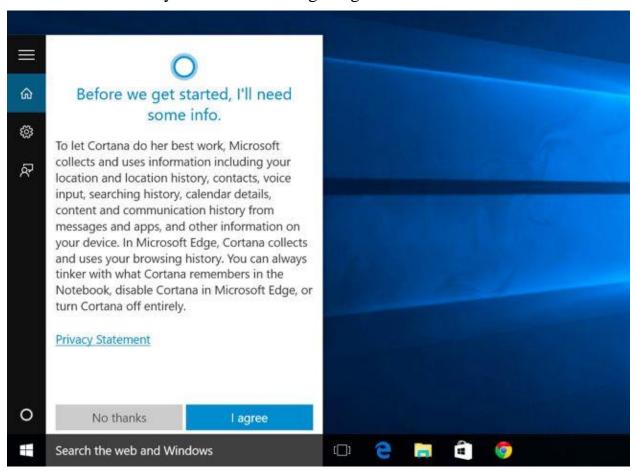


Cortana and Bing Search

Obviously, when you use Microsoft's built-in Cortana assistant, Cortana requires a lot of your information to function.

• 11. Cortana – As you see when you enable <u>Cortana</u>, Cortana will collect and use "location and location history, contacts, voice input, searching history, calendar details, content and communication history from messages and apps, and other information on your device." Cortana also captures your browsing history from the Microsoft Edge web browser. Cortana as a whole requires sharing a lot of data with Microsoft, just as Google Now and Siri do with Google and Apple.

• 12. Bing Search in the Start Menu – Even if you've disabled Cortana, searches you make in the new Start menu will also return <u>search suggestions from Bing</u> and the Windows Store. This means Microsoft sends your Start menu search queries to their servers unless you disable the Bing integration.



RELATED ARTICLE



How to Disable Bing in the Windows 10 Start Menu

Windows 10, by default, sends everything you search for in the Start Menu to their servers to give you results...

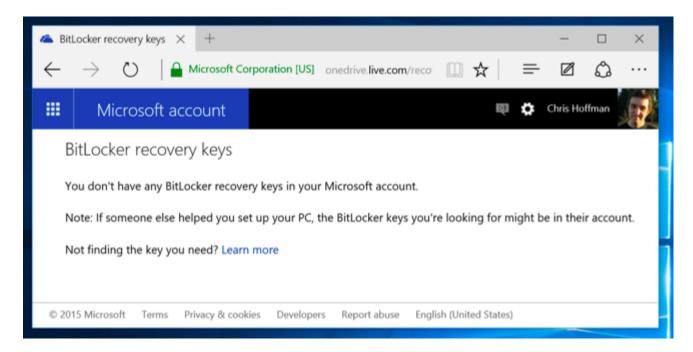
Device Encryption and Your BitLocker Recovery key

This part carries forward from Windows 8.1. If you buy a new device and it has the required hardware — as most new Windows 8.1 and 10 devices do — <u>it's automatically encrypted with BitLocker-like encryption known as "device encryption."</u>

• 13. Device encryption's BitLocker recovery key — This actually only automatically happens if you use a Microsoft account. And, if you do, it will upload your encryption recovery key to Microsoft's servers. This means that you can get access if you ever lose it, but it also means that Microsoft or anyone who can get the key from Microsoft — such as a government — can decrypt your encrypted files. Of course, this is still an upgrade

over the previous situation where all Windows Home devices were unencrypted. In that case, anyone could read their data.

You can avoid this by not logging in with a Microsoft account, but then your device won't be encrypted at all. if you'd rather not do this, you can upgrade to a Professional edition of Windows and use the standard BitLocker feature. BitLocker will ask if you want to store your recovery key with Microsoft for safekeeping, but that's optional. You can find these keys at https://onedrive.live.com/recoverykey.







Here's Why Windows 8.1's Encryption Doesn't Seem to Scare the FBI

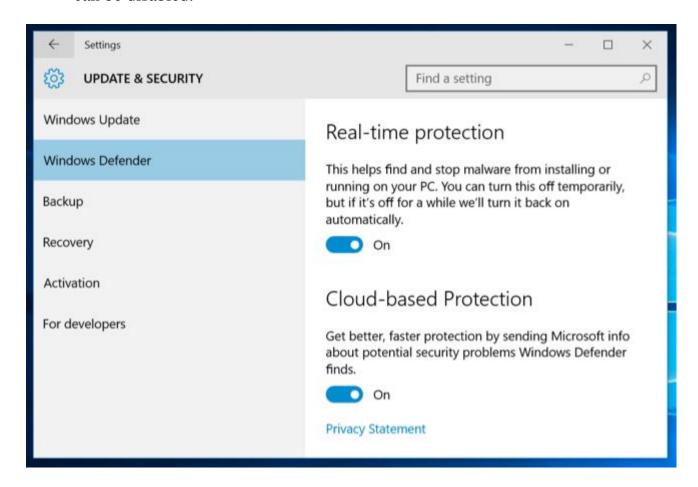
The FBI isn't happy about the latest versions of iOS and Android using encryption by default. FBI director James Comey... [Read Article]

Windows Defender

Windows 10 includes the Windows Defender antivirus, and it's enabled right out of the box. This is the successor to the Microsoft Security Essentials antivirus that was available for free on Windows 7. Settings for this are available under Update & security > Windows Defender in the Settings app. Windows Defender will automatically enable real-time protection. Even if you turn it off, it's only temporary — it will turn that real-time antivirus protection back on later. The only real way to turn it off is to install a third-party antivirus. Windows Defender won't run if another antivirus is running.

• **14. Cloud-based Protection** – Cloud-based antivirus protection "sends Microsoft info about potential security problems Windows Defender finds."

• **15. Sample submission** – This helps improve WIndows Defender's protection "by sending Microsoft malware samples" that Windows Defender finds. Both of these features are similar to the features found in popular third-party antivirus products, and can be disabled.



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How to Use the Built-in Windows Defender Antivirus on Windows 10

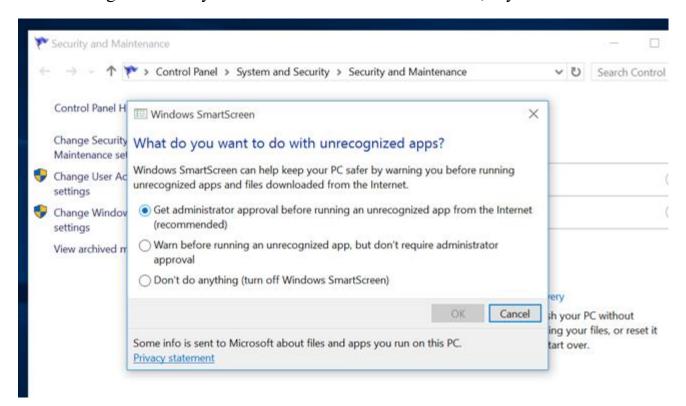
Windows 10 has built-in real-time antivirus, just as Windows 8 did. It automatically runs in the background, ensuring all Windows... [Read Article]

SmartScreen Application-Checking

Windows 10 also includes the SmartScreen filter introduced in Windows 8. When you run an application downloaded from the Internet, SmartScreen checks in with Microsoft's servers to check that application's reputation. If it's a known good application, Windows 10 will run it normally. or if it's a known bad application Windows 10 will block it. If it's unknown, Windows 10 will warn you and get your permission before running it.

• 16. Windows SmartScreen in File Explorer – These settings can be controlled from the old Control Panel. To access them, open the Start menu, type "Smartscreen", and click "Change SmartScreen settings." This will take you to the System and Security > Security

and Maintenance window in the Control Panel. Click the "Change WIndows SmartScreen settings" link and you'll be able to disable SmartScreen, if you like.



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HTG Explains: How the SmartScreen Filter Works in Windows 8

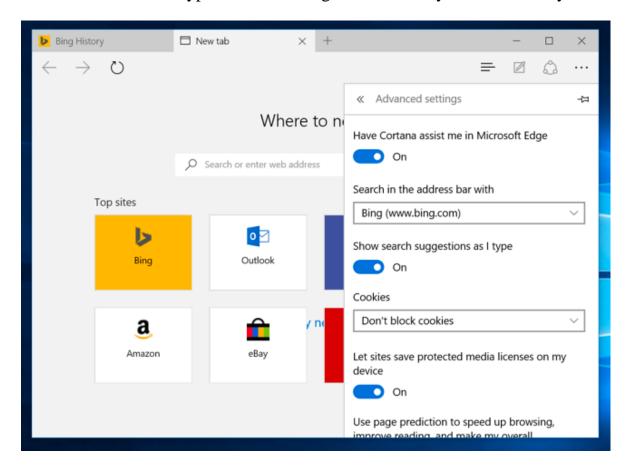
Windows 8 includes a SmartScreen filter that prevents unknown and malicious programs from running. SmartScreen is part of Internet Explorer... [Read Article]

Microsoft Edge

SmartScreen and Cortana are also part of <u>Microsoft Edge</u>, Windows 10's new web browser. You'll find the privacy related options under the menu in Edge — select Settings and then select "View advanced settings."

- 17. Have Cortana assist me in Microsoft Edge When Cortana is enabled in Microsoft Edge, Cortana will track your browsing history and other information, saving it.
- **18. Show search suggestions as I type** When you start typing in the address bar, your typing will be sent to your search engine Bing unless you <u>change the search engine</u> and it will return search suggestions. This means Bing will see your typing even if you're typing a web address directly. All modern browsers, aside from Firefox with its separate address bar and search box, work this way.
- 19. Help protect me from malicious sites and downloads with SmartScreen filter Like Google Safe Browsing in Chrome and Firefox, Edge uses a filter to help block dangerous sites.

Choose to save other types of data in Edge, and it will sync online with your Microsoft account.



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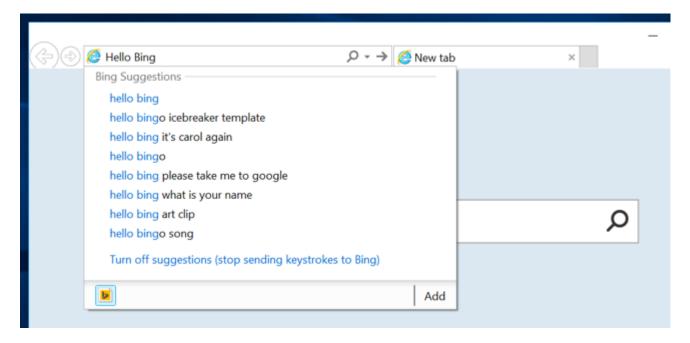
11 Tips and Tricks for Microsoft Edge on Windows 10

Windows 10 includes Microsoft Edge, which replaces Internet Explorer as the default browser. Edge's interface has been rewritten from scratch,...

Internet Explorer

Internet Explorer is still around, although it's not the default browser.

- **20.** SmartScreen Internet Explorer also uses SmartScreen, and this can be controlled by clicking the gear menu, pointing to Safety, and selecting Turn off SmartScreen filter.
- **21. Enable Suggested Sites** This is an older feature and isn't enabled by default, but is still offered under the Advanced list of settings in the Internet Options window. This little-known feature of Internet Explorer has been around for a long time, and <u>it uploads</u> your browsing history to Microsoft if you enable it.
- 22. Bing Suggestions As in Edge, anything you type in the address bar is sent to Microsoft's Bing search engine to provide you with search suggestions unless you change search engines or click "Turn off suggestions (stop sending keystrokes to Bing)" after typing in the address bar.



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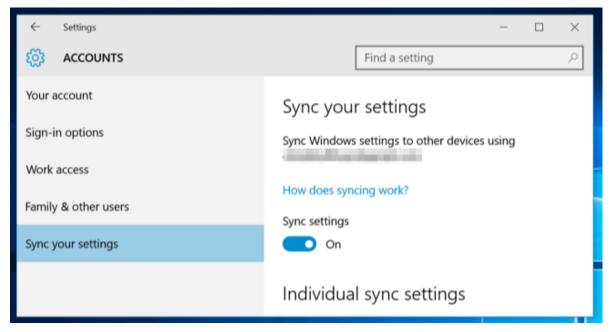
Disable and Remove Suggested Sites From Internet Explorer 8

If you're a user of Internet Explorer 8 either by choice or due to work requirements, you might be tired of seeing the annoying Suggested Sites feature in the Favorites Bar. Today we show you how to disable Suggested Sites and remove it from the Toolbar.

Microsoft Account and Sync

Windows 10 recommends you sign in with a Microsoft account, just like Windows 8. This allows you to log in with the same account you use for other Microsoft services like Outlook.com, Office 365, OneDrive, Skype, MSN, and other services. This also enables a lot of online features in Windows 10, like access to the Windows Store and many included apps that require a Microsoft account, OneDrive file access in File Explorer, and various sync features. You can choose to use a local user account if you prefer.

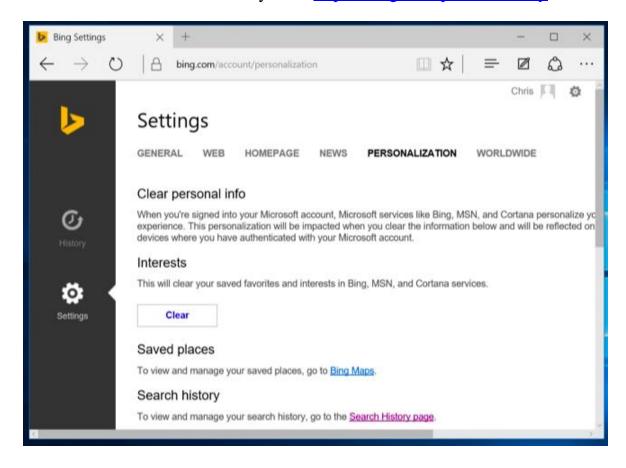
- **23. Sync settings** A variety of Windows settings such as your saved passwords and web browser data are synced by default if you sign in with a Microsoft account. These options are available under Settings > Accounts > Sync your settings.
- **24. Devices you've logged in from** Microsoft will keep track devices you've logged in with your Microsoft account. You can view this list at https://account.microsoft.com/devices.



Personal history and interests

Microsoft says: "When you're signed into your Microsoft account, services like Bing, MSN, and Cortana will personalize your experience."

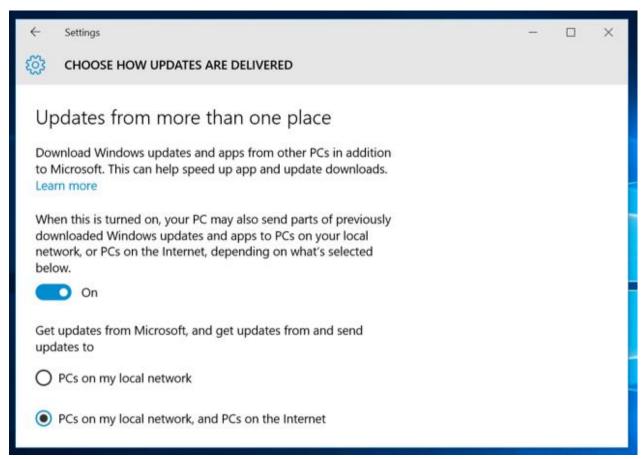
- **25. Personal history and interests** You can clear personal info and "interests" in Bing, MSN, and Cortana from the https://bing.com/account/personalization page.
- **26. Bing search history** Search using Windows 10's Start menu and the Bing search in Edge and you'll build up a Bing search history tied to your Microsoft account. You can view and clear this history from https://bing.com/profile/history.



Windows Update, Store, and Activation

While it's not technically "phoning home," <u>Windows Update</u> uses your upload bandwidth by default to upload Windows Updates to other users. It's a bit like BitTorrent, and similar to how Blizzard's Battle.net downloader distributes game updates. These settings can be controlled under Settings > Update & security > Windows Update > Advanced options > Choose how updates are delivered. You can make Windows only share updates with PCs on your local network, not the entire Internet.

- **27. Windows Update** Windows 10 Home requires you install security, driver, and feature updates automatically, and you can only <u>prevent Windows 10 from automatically downloading updates</u> by setting your device's connection as a metered connection or upgrading to Windows 10 Pro. Thankfully, there is at least a way to <u>block updates you don't want</u>.
- **28. Windows Store** The Windows Store will automatically check in with Microsoft and download new versions of included universal apps like Microsoft Edge. Even Cortana and the Start menu can be updated via the Windows Store.
- **29. Windows Activation** Windows still includes <u>Windows</u> <u>Activation</u>, which checks in with Microsoft's servers to ensure you're using a properly licensed and activated version of Windows.



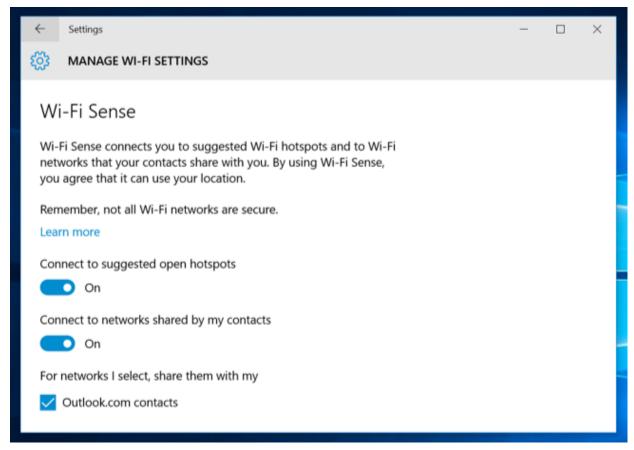
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What You Need to Know About Windows Update on Windows 10

Windows Update has seen a lot of changes on Windows 10. The biggest is a more aggressive approach to getting...

Wi-Fi Sense

• **30. Wi-Fi Sense** – These options can be controlled under Settings > Wi-Fi > Manage Wi-Fi settings. Note that Windows 10 won't actually share your Wi-Fi network's passphrase with anyone else unless you choose to manually share that individual network. However, if you give a friend access your passphrase and they connect and click the Share option, they could share it with their entire network of Facebook, Skype, and Outlook.com email contacts and give them access to your Wi-Fi network.



<u>The Wi-Fi sense feature</u> is enabled by default, and it will automatically connect to suggested open hotspots and network your Outlook.com, SKype, and Facebook contacts have shared with you.

This is just a conservative list, and probably isn't complete. There are many other ways Windows 10 arguably phones home. Windows 10 includes apps for a variety of Microsoft services: Cortana, Bing, Outlook.com, OneDrive, Groove Music, MSN, and Xbox. Each of these services may have its own privacy policy and store data about you in a different place if you use them.

But Microsoft could certainly do a better job of putting these options in a single place and better explaining them, though. They're scattered not just across Windows 10's interface, but across a variety of different Microsoft websites.

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What is Wi-Fi Sense and Why Does It Want Your Facebook Account?

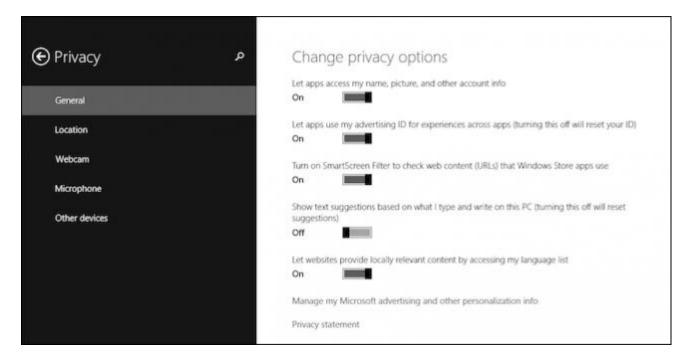
Wi-Fi Sense is a feature built into Windows 10. You may see a pop-up saying "Wi-Fi Sense needs permission to use your...

Digging into and Understanding Windows 10's Privacy Settings



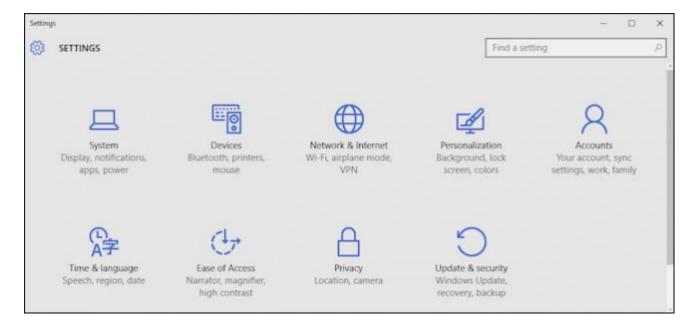
Windows 8 introduced privacy settings and Windows 10 adds a bunch more. If you are interested in protecting your privacy while using Windows 10, you're going to want to read further.

In Windows 8.1, you could <u>access the Privacy options from the PC settings</u>, which contain five categories: General, Location, Webcam, Microphone, and Other devices.



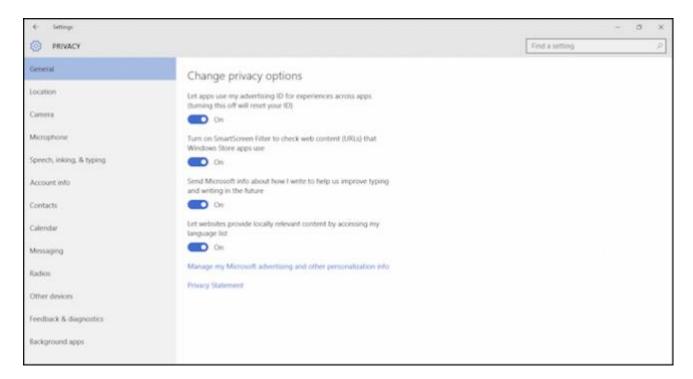
Windows 10 greatly increases the number of privacy options to twelve. In some cases, you can disable many things ahead of time by <u>using the customized setup versus the express</u>.

There's quite a bit to go over, so let's carve into each category one by one and explain what you should expect to find, and some important things you need to know.

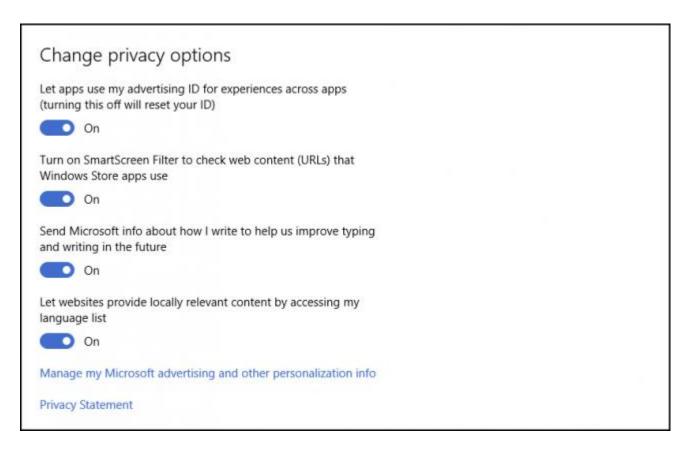


The Privacy options are available in the Settings as their own group.

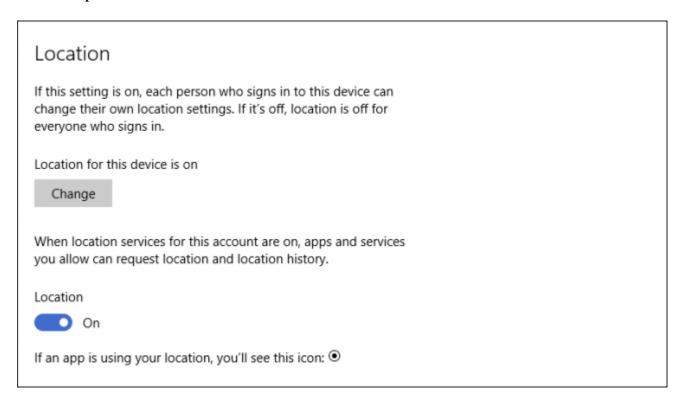
In the Privacy group, you'll find the aforementioned twelve categories, the first of which are the General settings.



The General settings are pretty similar to the those found in Windows 8.1, except the option to let apps access your name, pictures, and account information has been relocated to its own "Account Info" section.



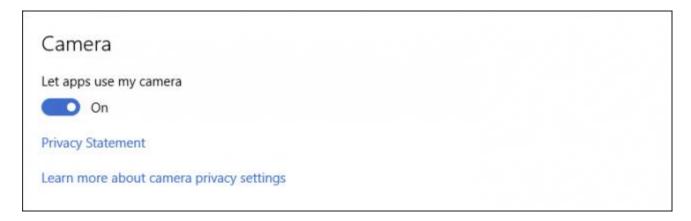
The Location settings should be familiar to you. If they are not, we suggest you read this article, which explains their various functions.



Simply, if want to control whether Windows tracks and reports your location to various apps, you can make those adjustments here.

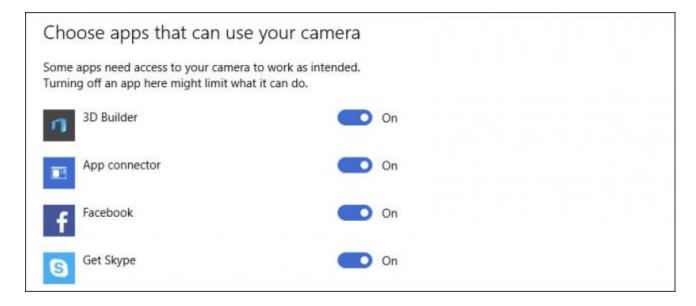
Camera and Microphone

Do you have a camera on your laptop? If you're concerned about apps using it, then you can err on the side of safety and turn it off completely.



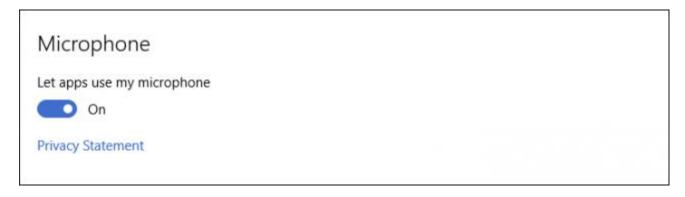
Parents will probably want to pay attention to this one.

Otherwise, you can choose which apps can use the camera, rather than it being an all-or-nothing kind of deal. That said, you only want to enable the apps you will actually use with the camera.

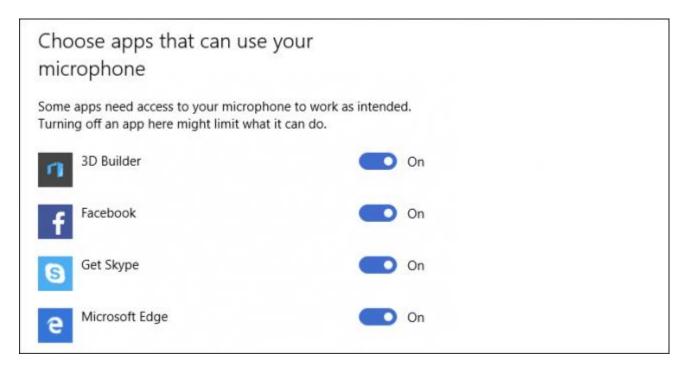


If you simply want to disable the camera outright, then there are <u>a number of solutions we can suggest</u>.

Your laptop will also have a microphone, which certain apps (like Skype) can use. To prevent this, turn the microphone off.



Similar to the Camera privacy options, you can decide which specific apps can use the microphone.



Again, less is more. If you only use one or two apps in this list, then turn the rest of them off. The camera and microphone really fall under the same privacy area, so you'll likely want to treat them similarly.

Microsoft Wants to Get to Know You

Windows will automatically "get to know you" by learning your voice and handwriting. It will also collect other information on you such as calendar events and typing history.

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What's the Difference Between Windows 10's Express or Custom Setup?

When you first set up Windows 10, Microsoft is going to want to rush you through the process with "Express...

Worse still, it stores this information in the cloud so you can go from Windows 10 computer to Windows 10 computer and pick up where you left off with your Microsoft account.

This one is up to you, but we think turning this off is a good idea. Unless you're truly on board with Cortana and want it to know every nuance and lilt of your voice, we're not sold on the prospect of sharing all this information with Microsoft.

Getting to know you

Windows and Cortana can get to know your voice and writing to make better suggestions for you. We'll collect info like contacts, recent calendar events, speech and handwriting patterns, and typing history.

Turning this off also turns off dictation and Cortana and clears what this device knows about you.

Stop getting to know me

You're not done though, you still want to click the "Go to Bing" link and clear the data stored there as well.

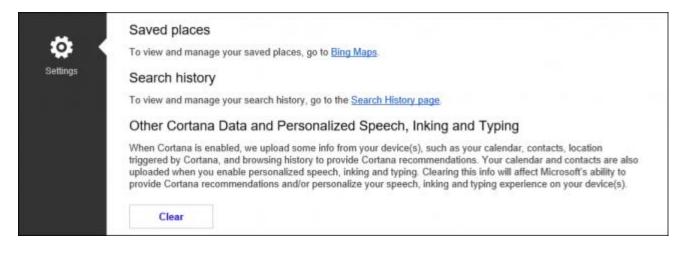
Manage cloud info

Go to Bing and manage personal info for all your devices

Learn more about speech, inking, and typing settings

Privacy Statement

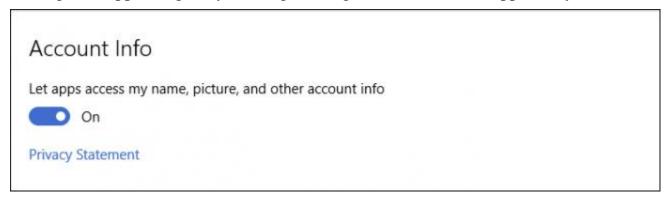
On the Bing settings page, click the "Clear" button under "Other Cortana Data and Personalized Speech, Inking and Typing".



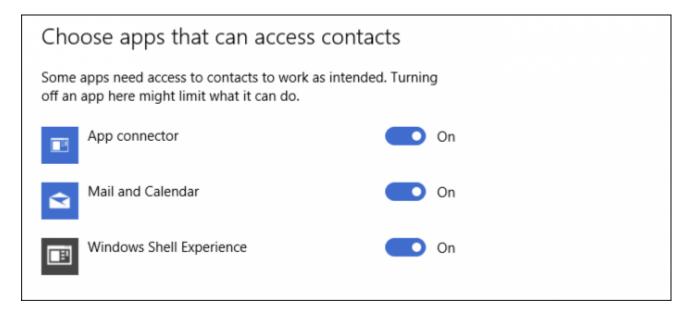
Pay attention to these settings and rest assured we'll be covering it in more detail soon.

Account Info, Calendar, Messaging, and More

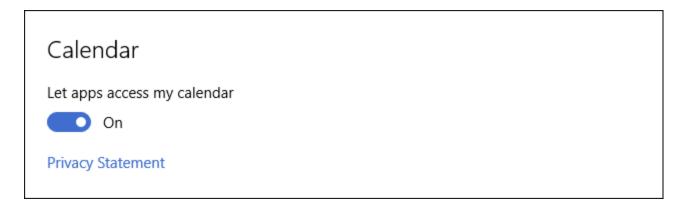
Remember that setting that used to be in the General category in Windows 8.1? It's been relocated to its own place, and just like items before it, you can completely disable account info sharing with apps or again, you can go through and choose each app one by one.



In Windows 10, there will be certain apps, which may want to access your contacts. There's no one control to completely disable this, so you'll need to allow or disallow apps individually.



Windows 10 includes a calendar, which can be accessed by other apps. Again, you can turn this all off universally, or one app at a time.



Messaging is another privacy concern. If you use your Windows 10 device to send or receive text messages, then other apps can read or send those messages. This might be your primary messaging app, or not. It's best to run through those apps and decide which ones have access. Alternatively, you can just turn this all off.



Let apps read or send messages (text or MMS)



Privacy Statement

Radios, which are usually something like Bluetooth, can send and receive data on your device. To do this, apps may need to automatically turn these radios on and off. You can disable this feature completely, or do it app by app.

Radios

Some apps use radios—like Bluetooth—in your device to send and receive data. Sometimes, apps need to turn these radios on and off to work their magic.

Let apps control radios



Privacy Statement

Were almost done, just a few more settings categories to attend to but it's important to know about them.

The Remaining Settings

The Other Devices category will let your apps automatically sync information with wireless devices that you haven't paired with your device.

Sync with devices

Let your apps automatically share and sync info with wireless devices that don't explicitly pair with your PC, tablet, or phone



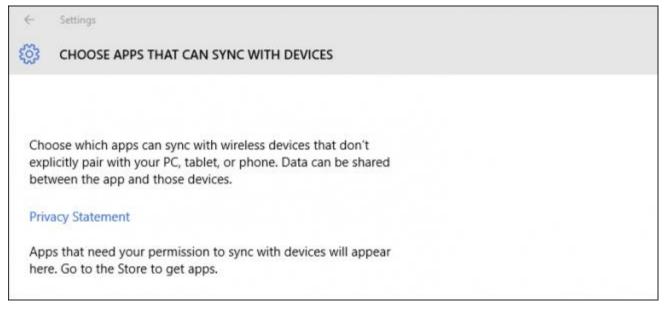
On

Example: beacons

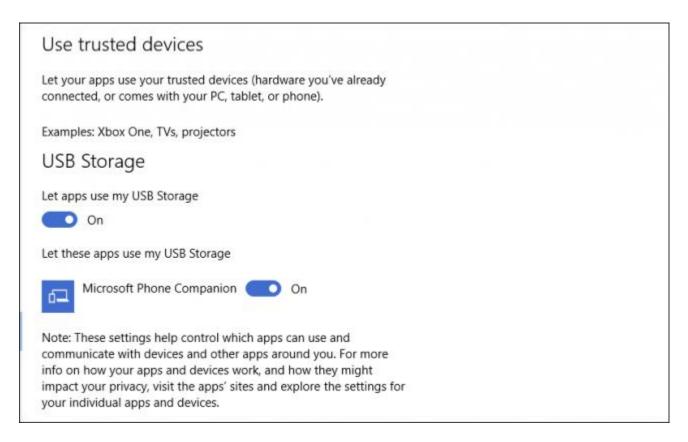
Choose apps that can sync with devices

Privacy Statement

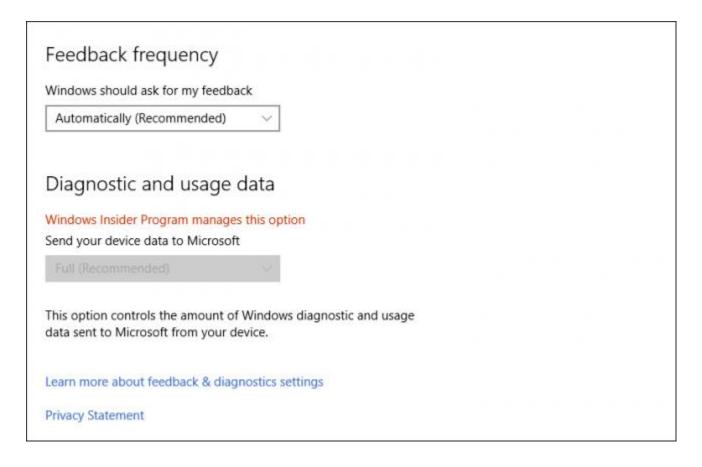
Click the "Choose apps that can sync with devices" link to see if there are any apps that can sync with these devices.



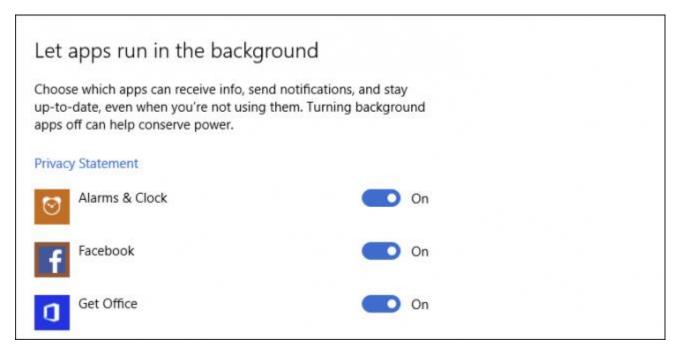
Below, there's a section for trusted devices (devices you've already connected to your PC, tablet, or phone), and an option to prevent apps from using USB storage. Again, you can choose which apps can use USB storage, if any.



You can adjust when Windows asks for your feedback, and how much diagnostic and usage data it sends to Microsoft.



Finally, we get to background apps. These are apps that run in the background, receive information, remain up-to-date, send notifications, and other stuff, even when you're not using those apps.



There are a lot of privacy settings in Windows 10, and we are pretty sure they're going to confuse quite a few new users. While the camera and microphone settings are pretty simple, the "Getting to know you" is going to deserve careful scrutiny. Again, we recommend you double-check your location settings as well.

While Microsoft's attempt to make privacy in Windows 10 more complete, we admit there's a lot of stuff to wade through. It's not likely a regular, everyday user is going to want to muck about in the settings for long periods of time.

RELATED ARTICLES

How to Disable or Configure Location Tracking in Windows 10

Windows 10 includes a whole bunch of new privacy settings, all are important in their own right, but perhaps none...



How to Disable Your Webcam (and Why You Should)

Once a concern that was the province of the paranoid, years worth of reports and revelations have made it readily...

To that end, we hope you can use this guide to quickly get to the important stuff. It's really better to turn as much stuff off as possible but keep in mind, as you disable more and more, you'll have less of the true Windows 10 experience that Microsoft is trying to convey.