

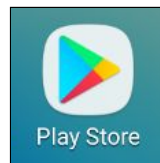
Android - Checking for Hidden Apps and Side-Loaded Apps (installed from an unofficial app store)

Compiled by the Clinic to End Tech Abuse

Last Updated: August 14, 2020

What are side-loaded apps?

“Side-loaded” apps are ones that are installed on a mobile device, but that were installed from an unofficial app store. Android’s official app store is called the Google Play Store:

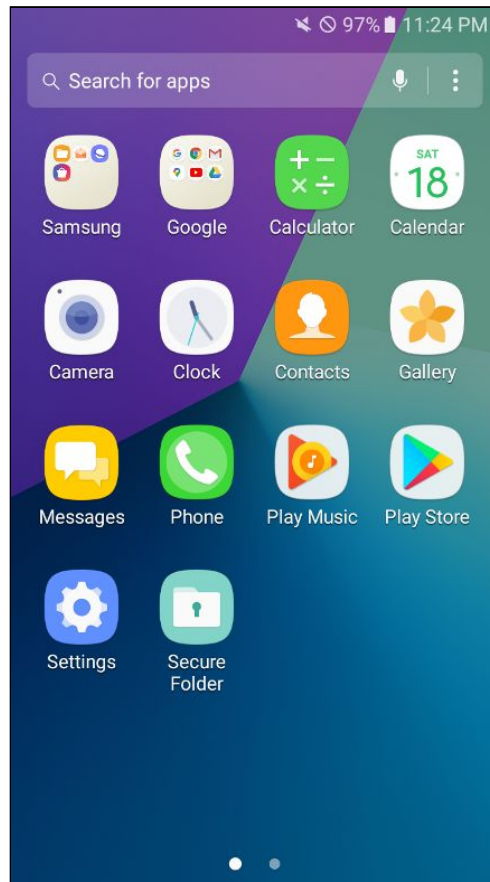


Side-loaded apps are potentially dangerous because they did not pass through the Google Play Store’s filters, which are designed to block apps with viruses (programs that can steal your information or make your phone slow) or that could be harmful to users in other ways (for example, apps that could be used to spy on someone).

If someone wants to install a side-loaded app on your device, they will need to have physical access to it. It is generally not possible for someone else to install an app on your phone or other device unless they can physically touch 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 ones that are installed on your device but that you cannot easily see because they do not appear in the app drawer.

Android devices such as phones use Android software to run. In versions of the software prior to Android 10 (which is not available for all devices yet), it was possible for app developers to hide their app icons.

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, 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, we recommend following this guide to check for both side-loaded and hidden apps.

Who is this guide for?

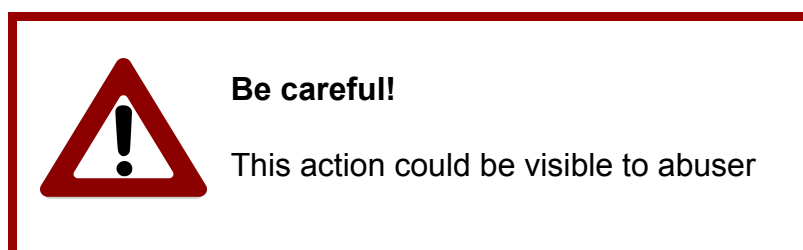
- Anyone who would like to check if there is a side-loaded or hidden app installed on their Android device.

What does this guide cover?

- How to manually check if your Android device has a side-loaded or hidden app installed.

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:



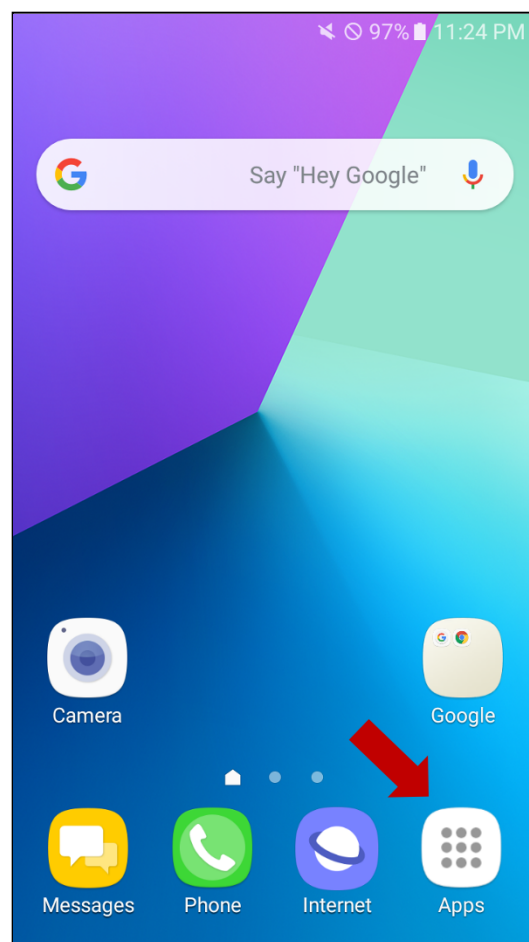
Images of the Android Mobile Operating System are included below for educational and research purposes only.

Step 1 - Open the Google Play Store app

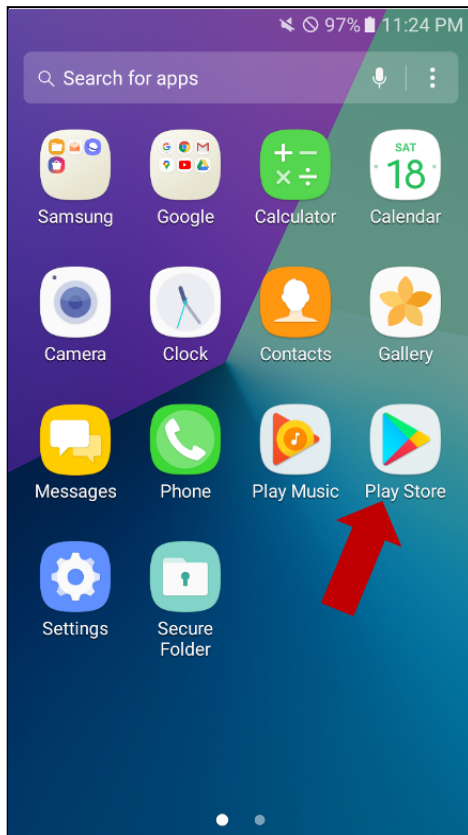
Open the Google Play Store app. This is the app's icon:



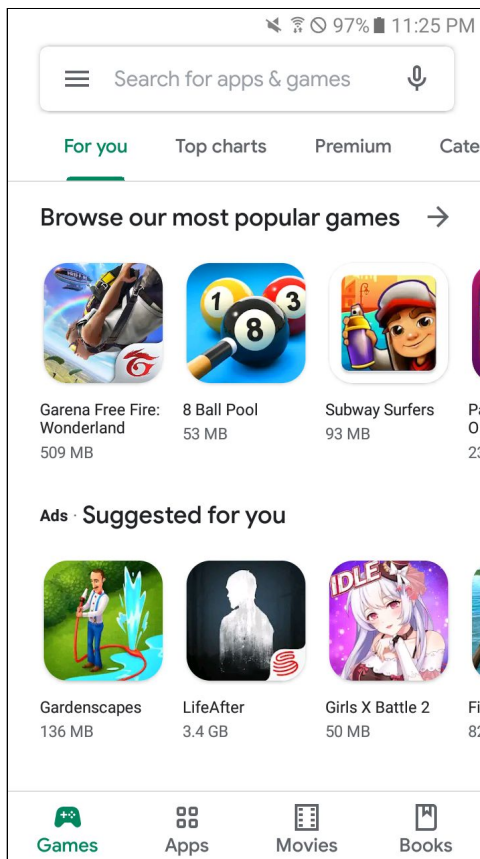
The Google Play Store app might be located in your **app drawer** (the section in your phone where your installed apps are displayed). One way to access the **app drawer** is by tapping on **Apps**:



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

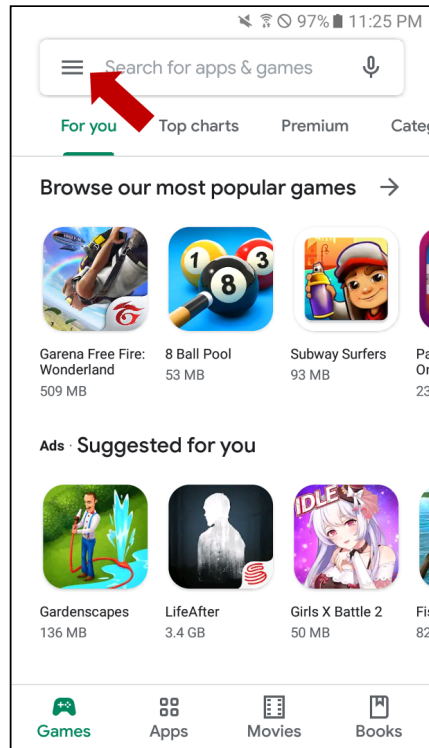


You will see a page like the following:

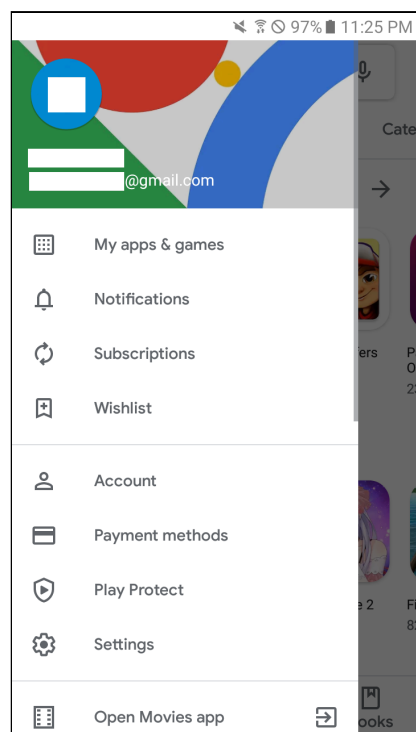


Step 2 - Go to *My apps & games*

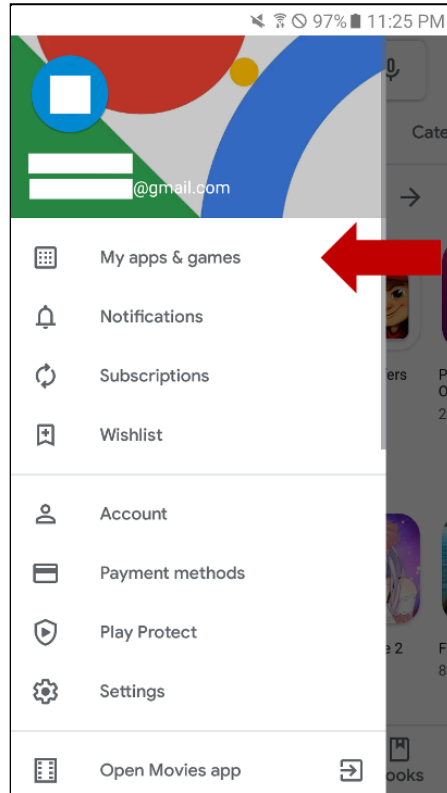
Tap on the button that appears on the top left corner (it has 3 horizontal lines):



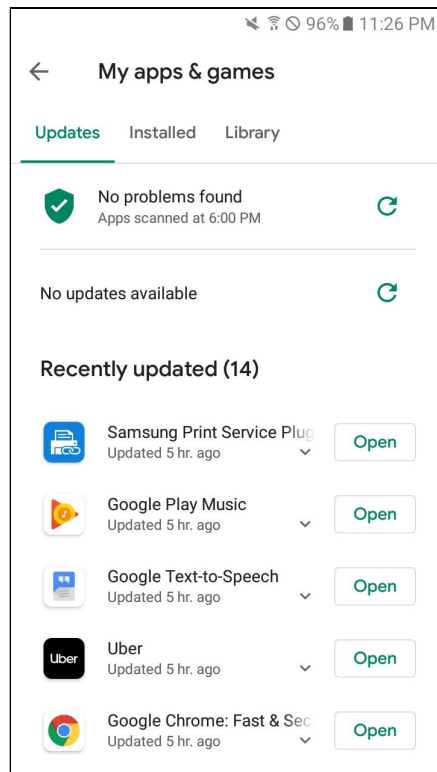
The following will appear:



Tap on **My apps & games**:

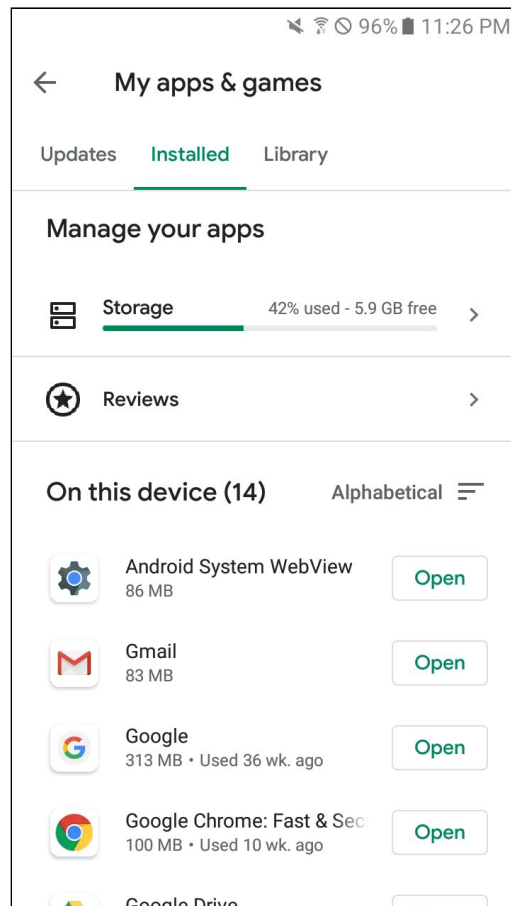


The following screen will appear:



Step 3 - Check the list of apps you have installed

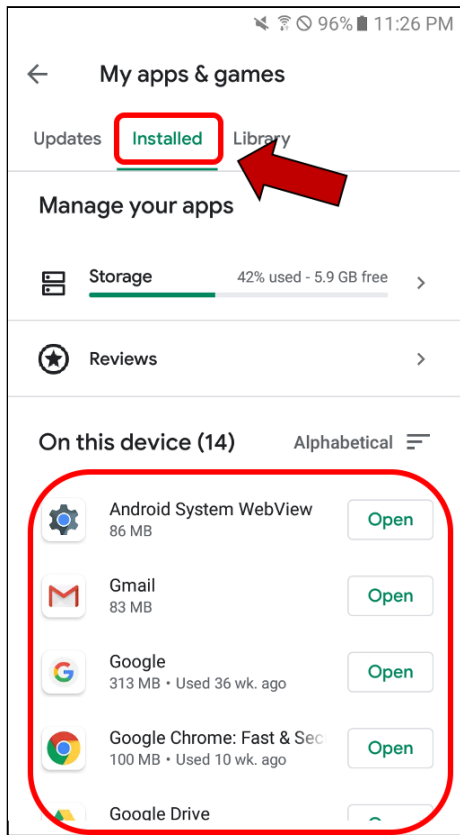
Tap on the tab called **Installed**. The list that appears will show you the apps that are currently installed on your device, and that were installed using the Google Play Store:



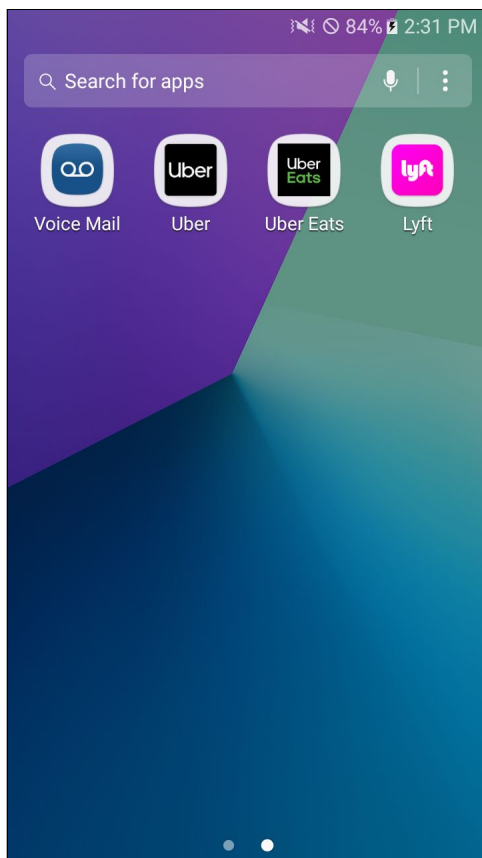
Step 4 - Deleting a side-loaded app

Side-loaded apps

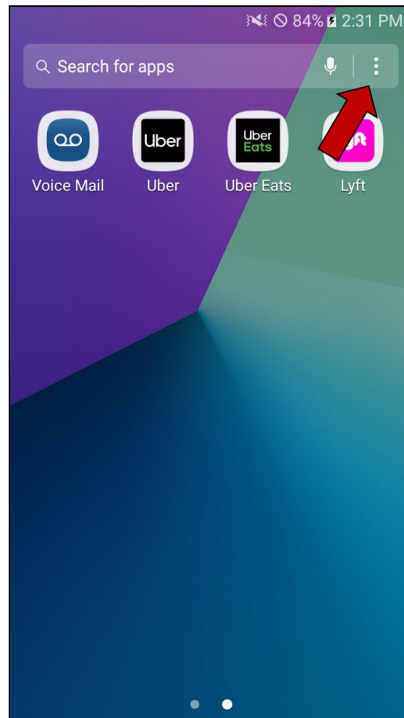
If you see an app in your **app drawer** but do not see it in the **Installed apps list**, there is a high probability that it was installed from an unofficial app store:



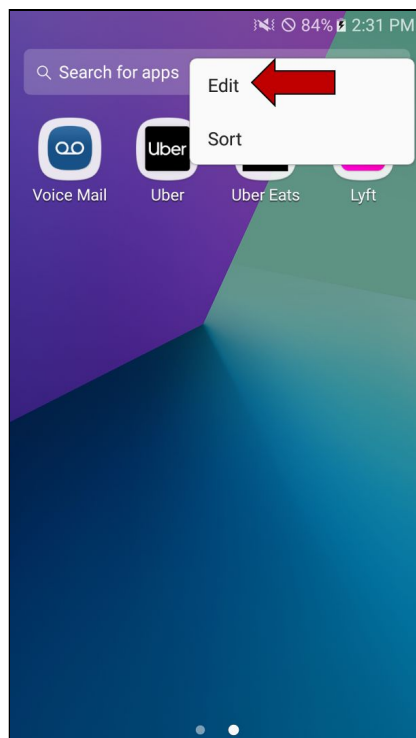
If you want to delete a side-loaded app, go to the **app drawer**:



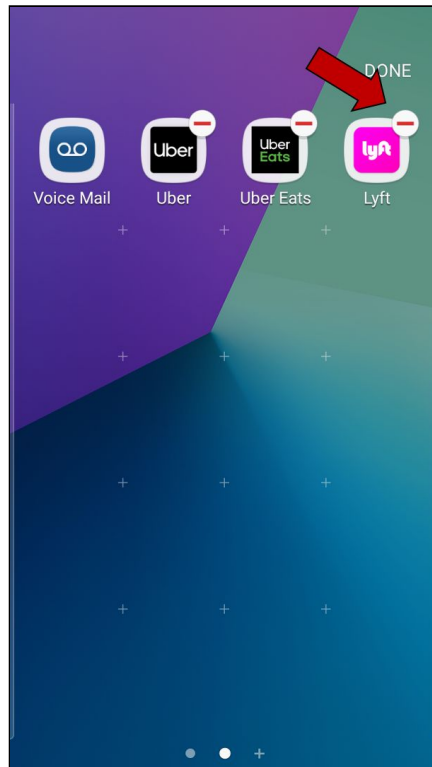
Tap on the **three dots** at the top-right corner (alternatively hold press an app icon and then click on app info):



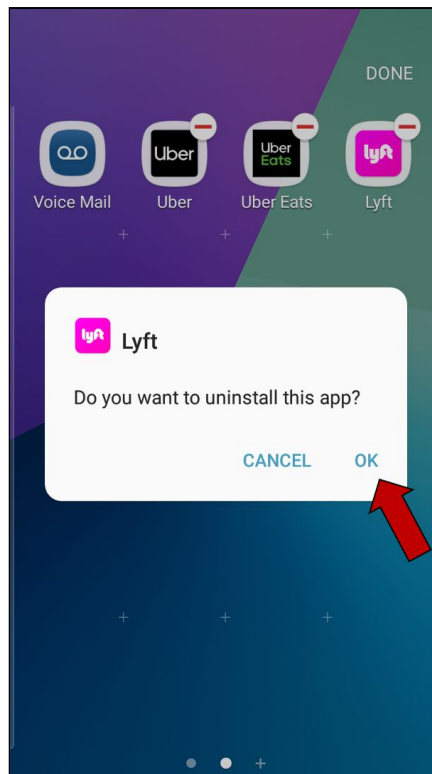
Now, tap on **Edit**:



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:

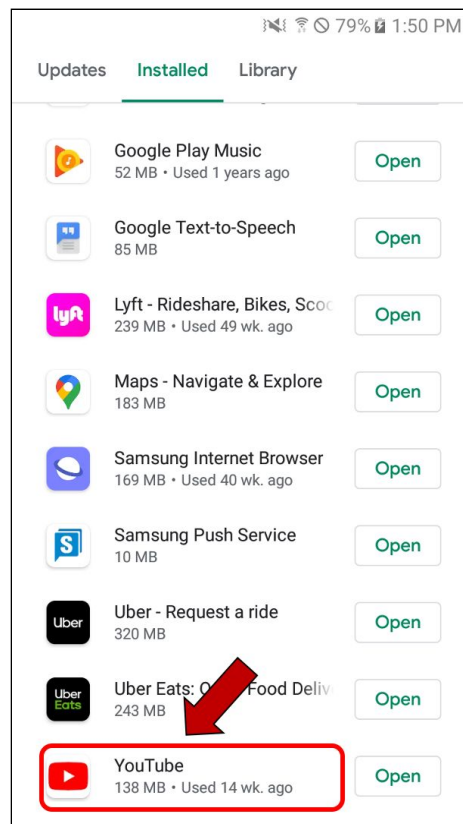


Step 5 - Deleting a hidden app

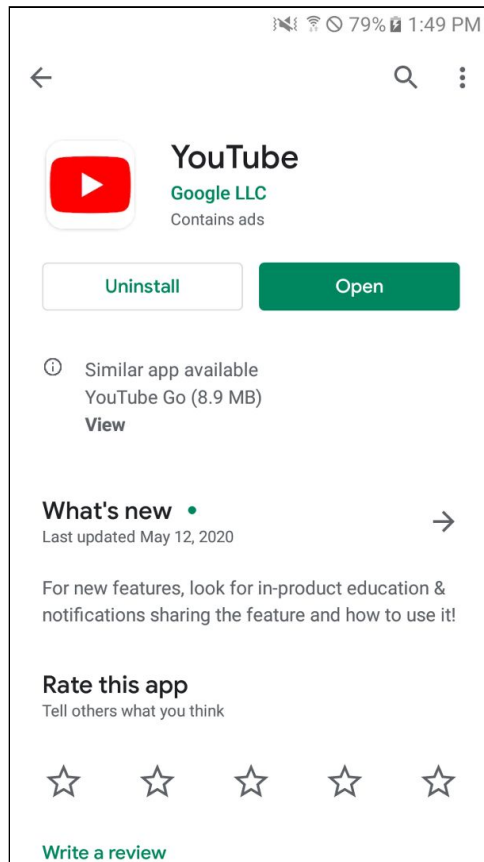
Hidden apps

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

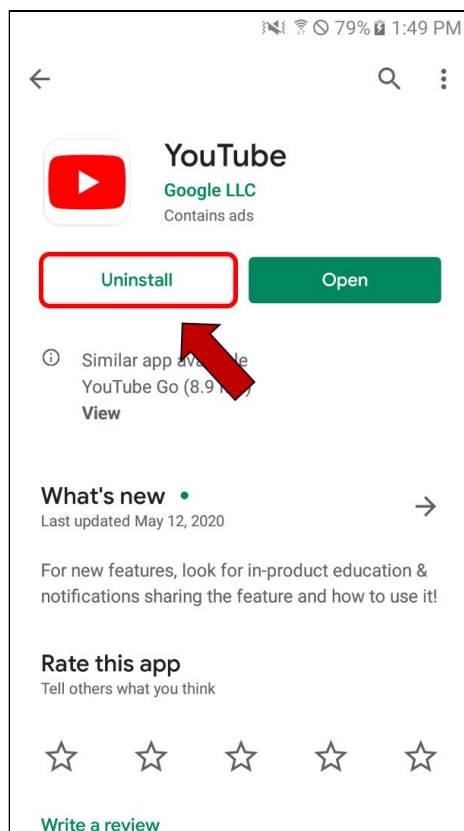
If you want to delete an app that appears on the **Installed** list, tap on its name:

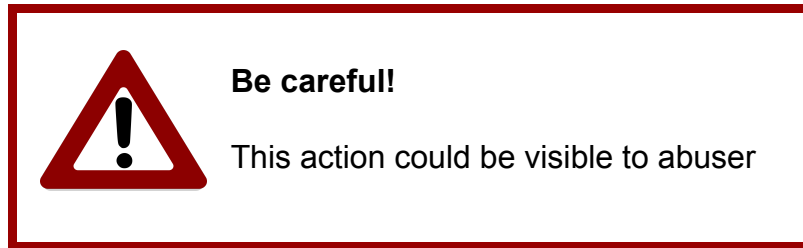


You will see something like this:



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

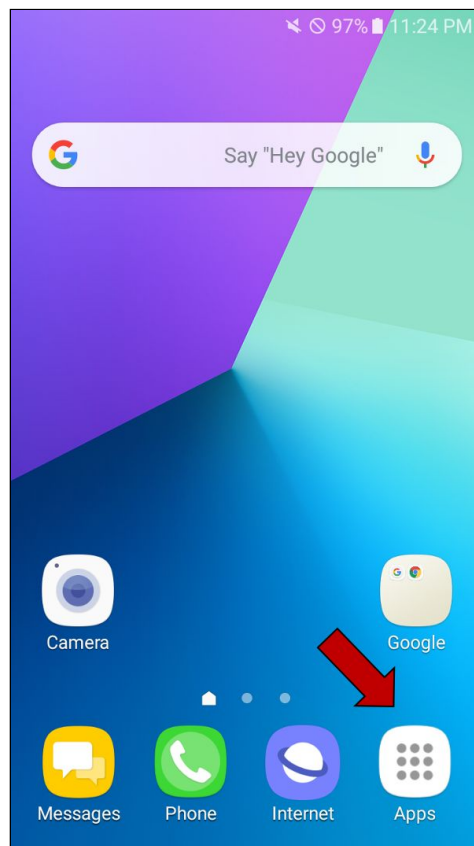


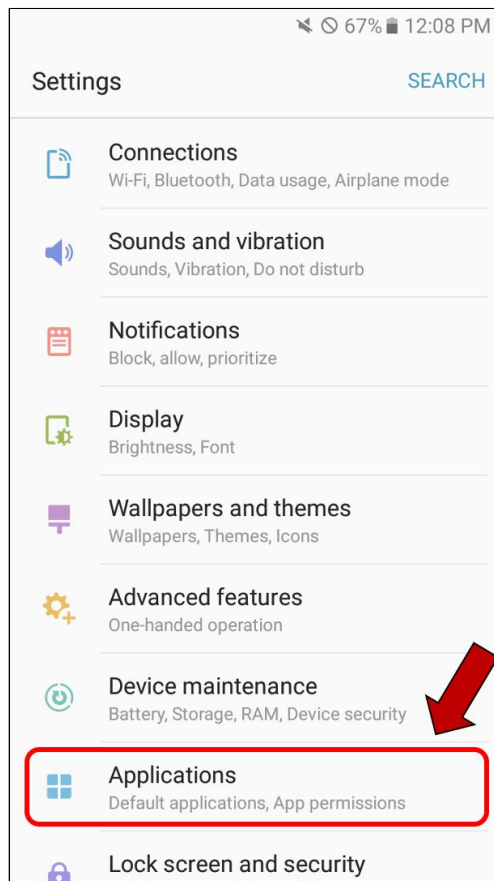
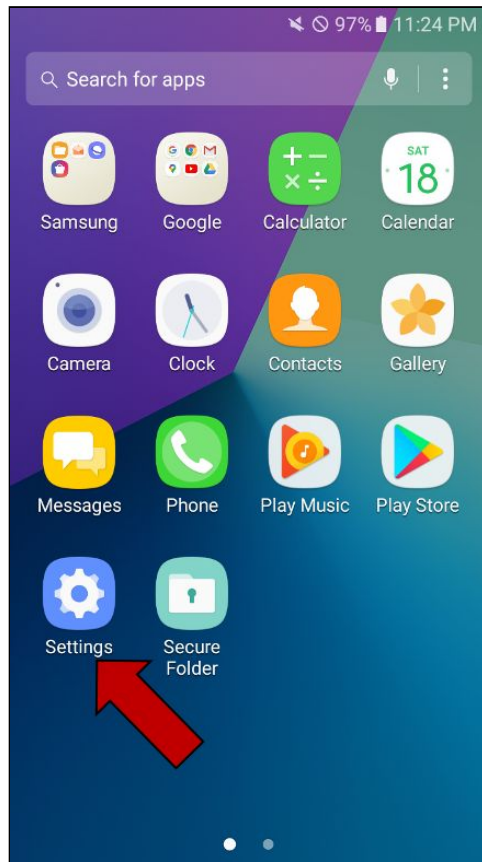


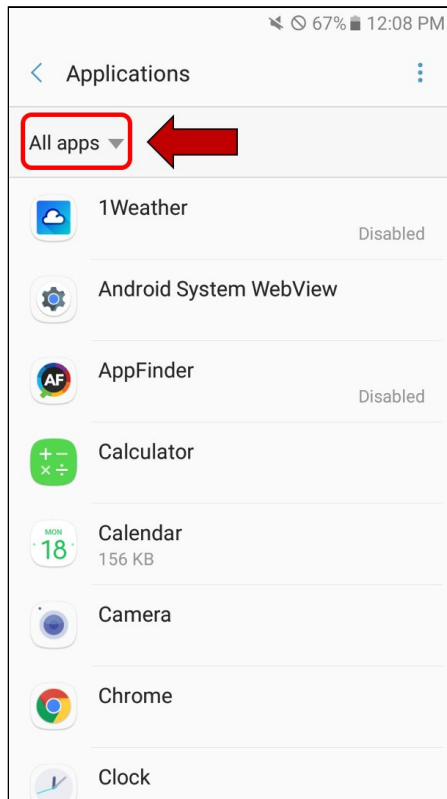
If the abuser has installed and is using an app to get information about you, they may know right away if you remove it because they would stop receiving that information.

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.

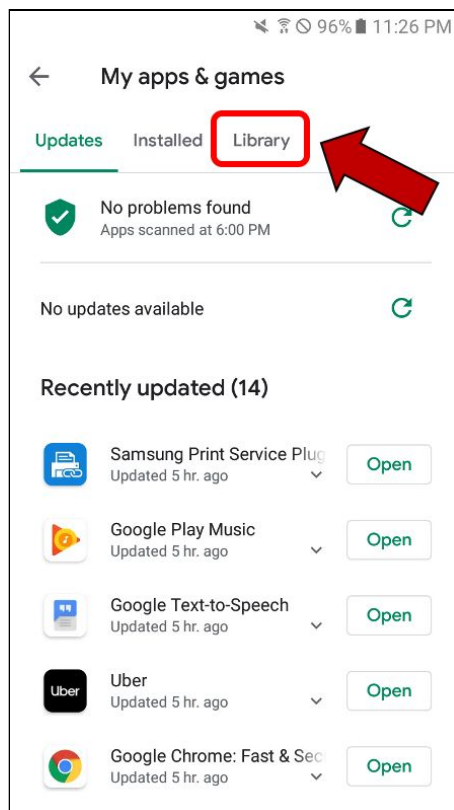
Another way to check for **hidden apps** is by going to **Settings > Applications** (or **Apps & notifications**) and selecting **All apps**:

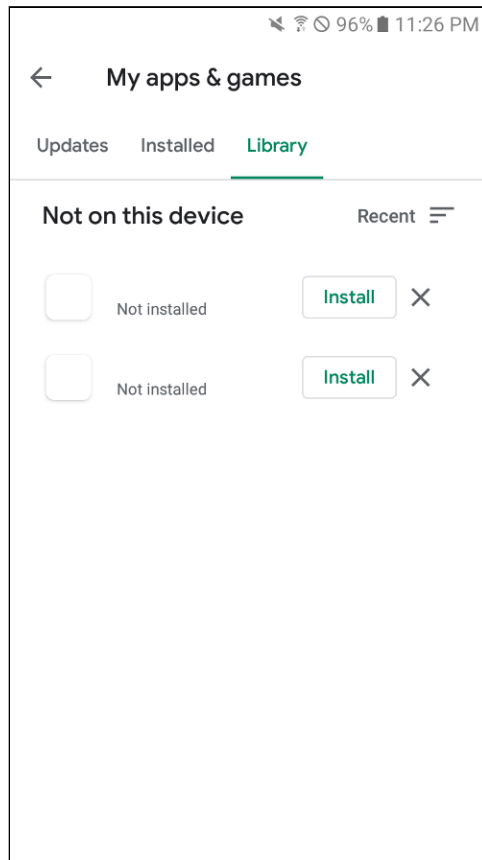




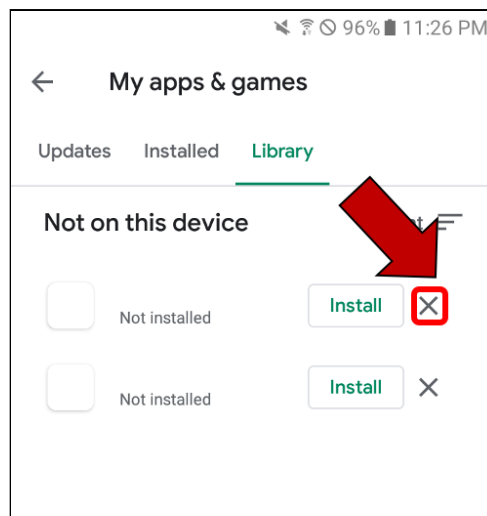


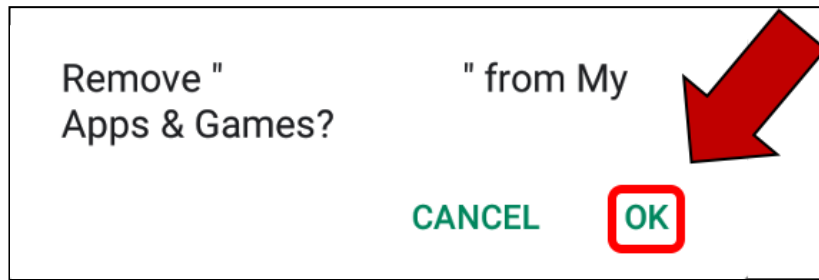
Finally, if you tap on the **Library** tab, a list with all the apps you have ever downloaded on all the devices associated with your Google account will appear:





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:





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