What Parents & Carers Need to Know about iPads

Apple debuted the first iPad in 2010, kickstarting the tablet market, and it remains the best-selling tablet to this day. Although Apple doesn’t offer a child-specific version, iPads are hugely popular with youngsters due to their ease of use and endless choice of apps. There’s a selection of models, with different-sized screens and distinct features – including the standard iPad, the iPad Air, the iPad Pro, and the iPad mini. Thankfully, they all offer parental controls so you can regulate how your child uses the device and how long they spend on it.

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS?**

**PHYSICAL DAMAGE**
While some tablets (such as the Amazon Fire Kids edition) come with rugged shock-absorbing covers, they aren’t built for rough and tumble. They’re also more expensive than most other tablets, and any damage your child’s iPad suffers could be costly to repair. Buying a child-friendly case and screen protector for the device could be a wise move, especially if it’s being used by younger ones.

**SCREEN ADDICTION**
Like most digital devices, tablets have the potential to become quite addictive. You might find your child spending less time staring at their iPad, which could lead to irritability, mood swings, and a loss of interest in more important tasks. If this happens, be sure to set the built-in screen time settings and ensure you limit how long they’re able to spend on the device each day.

**INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT**
Even if it would never occur to your child to searching online for age-inappropriate sites, apps or information, there’s always a possibility that something unexpected – perhaps a video that auto-plays or content incorrectly suggested by an algorithm – could appear on their tablet and upset them. You can help prevent this by adjusting the content settings (see our ‘top tips’ section below).

**SIRI SUGGESTIONS**
The parental controls built into iOS (the fundamental operating system of Apple devices) enable you to block access to most age-inappropriate content – but your child could potentially still bypass these restrictions (either accidentally or deliberately) by using Siri, Apple’s voice-activated digital assistant. To avoid this, try to replace the Ask Siri functions to ‘off’ in the iPad’s settings menu.

**Advice for Parents & Carers**

**ENABLE FAMILY SHARING**
Before letting little ones loose on an iPad, it’s a good idea to set up Family Sharing. This lets you control exactly how your child is able to use the device. You can do this fairly easily by going to the iPad settings once there, you’ll be able to add an existing Apple account (if your child already has one) or set one up from scratch.

**APPLY SOME LIMITS**
The ‘Downtime’ function allows you to tell the iPad to lock itself at certain periods (at mealtimes or before bed, for instance), while ‘App Limits’ removes access to certain apps once they’ve been used for a specified length of time each day. The iPad can display a reminder when these limits have nearly been reached, letting your child mentally prepare for the end of their gaming or viewing time.

**SET CONTENT AND PRIVACY RESTRICTIONS**
The parental controls can stop the iPad from displaying explicit or age-inappropriate content (in apps like iTunes and Safari, for instance) when your child is signed into their account. You’ll also be able to restrict the capacity to download and install apps, and you can specify permissions which prevent children from changing the iPad’s privacy settings once you’ve selected them.

**STOP ACCIDENTAL SPENDING**
To empower your child with an increased sense of freedom on their device (without giving yourself something else to worry about in the process) you could enable the iPad’s Ask to Buy feature. Whenever your child tries to download or buy an app, game or product, the iPad sends you a prompt to approve (or deny) it. This option only becomes available if you’ve set up Family Sharing.

**TRACK IT DOWN**
Just like the iPhone, Apple’s iPads have ‘Find My’ software to help you locate your child’s iPad – or indeed, any linked Apple devices that have gone AWOL, including phones, watches and AirPods. If you enable ‘Find My’ in the settings menu, it will display the last known location of an iPad that’s been misplaced, as well as giving you the option to lock a missing iPad that you suspect has been stolen.

**Meet Our Expert**
Carly Fregia is an experienced technology journalist with a track record of covering digital media and the internet industry. Originally a user of tech tablets like Kindle, Carly is now a freelance technology journalist, editor and commentator.

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