

What Parents and Carers Need to Know about iPads

At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many devices which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, tips and links for adults.

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 editions) come with rugged shock-proof cases, iPads aren't built for rough and tumble. They're also more expensive than most other tablets, and any damage to your child's iPad 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 too long 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 visit 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 go 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, toggle the 'Ask Siri' function 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, as this lets you utilise the parental controls to manage exactly how your child is able to use the device. You can do this fairly easily by going into the iPad's settings and ensuring you 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.

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 request to approve (or deny) it. This option only becomes available if you've set up Family Sharing.

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.

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 mislaid, as well as giving you the option to lock a missing iPad that you suspect has been stolen.

Meet Our Expert

Clarity Meyer is an experienced technology journalist with a track record of more than 10 years in the industry. Previously the editor of tech website The Register, Clarity is now a freelance technology journalist, editor and consultant.

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It hasn't *quite* made the sociocultural splash of the Mac or the iPhone, but Apple's iPad has undeniably been a colossal critical and commercial success for the American tech giants. The device truly changed the game: before the iPad, comparatively few tablets existed – and they certainly weren't adaptable enough to find a niche in the home as well as the workplace.

In the intervening 13 years, Apple's sleek tablet has become a familiar sight in homes around the world – with children being wholehearted fans of having a portable, easy-to-use gateway to learning and entertainment on tap. Are iPads completely safe for young users, however? And if not, what do trusted adults need to be aware of? Our #WakeUpWednesday guide has the details.

"We have no plans to make a tablet. It turns out people want keyboards," Steve Jobs famously shrugged back in 2003. Roughly seven years (and presumably some censorious meetings with his market research team) later, the Apple CEO was happily eating humble pie as the iPad became a near-instant commercial phenomenon – selling almost a million units in its first month of release.

Just over a decade after its introduction, there are approximately 500 million iPad owners worldwide, many of them children and young people. With that in mind, Apple's parental controls and online safeguards are reassuringly thorough – if trusted adults choose to set them up. This week, our #WakeUpWednesday series turns its eye onto iPads.

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