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## **The iPad - friend or foe? Apps that can benefit your child.**

There's so much talk today about the use of iPads to help children learn and develop. Although this is exciting it can also be confusing for parents and care-givers. Quite honestly my own kids know more about iPad apps than I do. In fact I don't know any child, if offered, that wouldn't want to play on one. And for some of us parents, this can become a love/hate relationship!

Are they truly beneficial? How will they encourage my child's development? What good apps are available? These are some of the questions parents ask me when considering an iPad for their child. As a therapist I am fairly discriminating when it comes to "tech time" for children. If you are considering such a purchase, educate yourself to what is out there.

### **How will an iPad encourage my child's development?**

Most children tend to have a particular strength in their *visual learning skills* and this is particularly true for children with special needs. For example many children with Autism have shown that they learn better with a visual prompt such as a visual timer or picture schedule. The iPad helps utilize this visual strength to develop various skills such as writing, visual motor, visual perceptual and fine motor skills.

The iPad is a different way to keep children motivated to engage in activities that they may otherwise find challenging or have become bored of.

Keep in mind that the iPad and apps alone cannot specifically teach interaction or play skills, however if utilized in the right way it can be used as a motivator to begin addressing these developmental skills.

### **How do I introduce the use of an iPad with my child?**

Remember to set boundaries and limits when introducing the iPad to your child. To ensure your child is not getting too much 'screen time' and missing out on developing valuable skills through physical play time, try to introduce the following limits.

**Accessibility** – try not to allow your child easy access to the iPad. Store it somewhere they cannot access it whenever they want, having to request permission to use it.

**Screen time** – too much screen time, can have negative effects on children's attention and overall health. It can take time away from other things that they typically might be doing such as playing with

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their peers, reading, or engaging in social and physical activities.

- Try to limit your child's overall screen time to 1 hour or less a day.
- Use visual timers to help them understand how long they can play
- Ensure you are monitoring and helping them engage appropriately when using apps.

### Apps to Consider

The apps reviewed below are some examples of apps Occupational Therapists use with children and the skills they help develop.



I'm sure in your hunt for apps you will be able to discover many more of similar content.



### LetterSchool

This app teaches letter formation by encouraging children to tap, trace and draw letters. It provides auditory and visual feedback while also working on letter pronunciation and sounds. It also has a choice of three different handwriting programs for letter formation, allowing you to follow through on the program your therapist or school may be using with your child.



### Dexterity

This is an app for children aged 4 to 10 years that targets skills such as finger isolation, fine motor control, pincer grasps, visual motor and letter formation. Some of the exercises can also be used as a warm up activity prior to handwriting.

**Dexterity Jr.** is also available for pre-schoolers' fine motor development.

**\*TIP:** Introduce the use of a stylus to encourage appropriate pencil grasp when playing with certain apps.



### BrainWorks

BrainWorks is a tool for therapists teachers and parents to maintain sensory diets for their children. It can be used to teach children about their sensory systems and to encourage independence in sensory modulation depending on the child's abilities. It is a very visual app, especially useful for children with limited expressive language. It contains an extensive list of sensory activities. The app can also be personalized with the function of uploading pictures of your child, or adding your own sensory activities to the list. The activities in the app also change according to the setting your child is in and what would be available to them at that time!



### Find It-Match It

This is an app that works on visual motor skills such as scanning, short term memory, figure ground and visual discrimination. It also targets motor skills such as eye hand coordination. The app can be used with children as young as 2 years and can be made more challenging as your child masters each level.



### Toy Balls

This app is great for children needing practice with visual scanning, eye hand coordination, matching and planning skills. There are 98 levels increasing with difficulty to ensure your child is always challenged and never bored.

There are many more apps available that address skills in other everyday areas e.g. self-help skills incorporating concepts like visual schedules, emotional charts and timers.



The iPad can be very beneficial for a child's development if you actively plan for how it will be used. Careful management of the way in which the iPad fits into your child's daily life can ensure the device will be of great benefit, rather than becoming simply a 'baby-sitting' tool or a device just to 'keep busy'.



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She has taught workshops in the US and Asia and is a published author. Her upcoming book "The Whole Spectrum of Social, Motor and Sensory Games" is scheduled to be released in June of 2013.

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