

Tablets: the new digital chalkboard

Is your child pestering you for a tablet? Are you wondering if it's worth the cost? Do you really want *another* digital device? Tablets can be so much more than a means by which to watch videos or play games. They can be powerful learning tools for kids of all ages.

A learning tool for the very young

Often toddlers can operate a tablet with ease; all they have to do is touch the screen! Many different tablets are now on the market that have been designed and manufactured specifically for young children. Most are brightly coloured, durable, easy to use, and pre-loaded with games, paint tools, cameras, and kid-friendly app stores. They can also have built-in parental controls that make it easy to manage what your child can access.

Tablets are small, light, portable, and often have brilliant screen resolution, making them a fun “toy” for the very young – and a parent’s salvation on long car trips. Playing with toys is how children learn and educators quickly recognized the enormous educational potential of tablets. Over the past few years, they have worked with software developers to create dozens of educational activities and games to let very young children learn and practice:

- fine motor skills
- hand-eye coordination
- spatial awareness
- reading
- writing
- numeracy
- visual thinking
- problem solving
- letter, number, shape and colour recognition
- basic computer skills
- and much more

For school-age children, there are a multitude of applications that let them discover music, art, the earth, the stars, and history. Whatever they're interested in, there's an app for it! Apps can take a child's imagination and creativity as far as it wants to go.

How to use a tablet as a teaching tool for your children

Many schools and universities have begun using tablets as teaching tools. Students can conduct research, write essays, take pictures and videos, create presentations and spreadsheets and download books then send, receive, and share information with classmates and teachers – from anywhere, at any time, with a device no bigger than a notebook.

Here are some ways you can use a tablet to teach your children:

- **Read together on your tablet.** A tablet is a great way to read to your kids while introducing them to technology. They can save you time and money by allowing immediate downloading of e-books for your child. Many libraries offer free downloading of ebooks in their collection.

- **Encourage creativity.** Tablets allow children to explore their interests, whether that's drawing, writing, playing music, or exploring the world. Whatever their passion – there's an app to fire their imagination.
- **Adjust the learning to your child.** How does your child learn? Does he or she prefer to figure things out on his or her own? Does he or she like to listen to stories? Is he or she a visual learner? Psychologically, children do better when they are offered choices. They feel a sense of empowerment when they are given autonomy over their own learning. For example, if a child is having difficulties learning multiplication, there are many different games that can help. If one doesn't help, he or she can try another. With the variety of games and activities on the market, you'll soon discover how your child likes to learn.
- **Learn with your child.** Be involved in what he or she is interested in. Don't just download appropriate apps for your child – play with him or her on the tablet. Learn how to play piano or how the heart works, take an interactive journey to the moon, make a movie or write a story – the possibilities are endless.

Ten reasons why tablets are powerful learning tools

1. **Mobile learning.** Tablets free children from classrooms, allowing them to learn anywhere, at any time at their own pace. The virtual classroom never closes.
2. **Learning through games.** While younger children can learn through play, older kids can refine their problem-solving skills, hand-eye co-ordination, and collaborative abilities through digital games. Thanks to the digital revolution, this generation of children will possess cutting edge technological skills when they enter the workforce.
3. **Incredible apps.** The number of incredible apps grows daily. There are simulations that take the user on a trip through the Milky Way or back to pioneer days. There are also programs that allow kids to record their own music or make their own movie, and apps to help improve their hockey skills.
4. **Easy access to books.** It's simple and fast to find and download books either through online stores or local libraries. Hundreds of books can be digitally stored in a tablet, which can lighten the load in your child's backpack.
5. **Encourages teamwork and collaboration.** Since so many apps have built-in social media potential, kids are increasingly able to share and collaborate online. It's now easy to work on projects together and this teaches collaborative, social and problem-solving skills – which are vital to success in the working world.
6. **Personalizes learning.** Tablets allow children to learn in the way easiest for them, whether that's reading, watching videos, listening or figuring things out for themselves. There are also apps that can help engage a child who has ADHD, for instance. Some apps have been created specifically for the visually impaired and others have been developed to help children who have learning disabilities.
7. **Provides accessible research for school projects.** Tablets, smartphones and laptops can give students access to the largest knowledge repository online with the tap of a finger from the convenience of home.

Looking for additional support? Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) can help. You can receive support through a variety of resources. Call your EFAP at 1 800 387-4765 or visit workhealthlife.com.

8. **Explores new interests and develops talents.** Whether your child is musical, artistic, or athletic, tablets can help them develop their gifts. Do you have a budding scientist or mathematician at home? There are some spectacular apps on the market that even make the periodic table fun to learn. Not sure what special talent your child possesses? Observe the games and activities he or she likes to play and go from there.
9. **Encourages environmentalism.** Paper waste is eliminated, along with the unnecessary time of collating, copying, and printing out documents that may likely be destined for the trash anyway. Imagine the amount of paper saved if a child went through 12 or more years of schooling using a tablet for all of his or her books, reports, papers, projects, and studies? That is a lot of paper! Eventually you may no longer require your tablets and other electronics. When this happens, please be sure to keep E-waste out of landfill sites by ensuring these items are either recycled or safely disposed of.
10. **Evolves computer skills.** The future workforce will require people with outstanding technological skills – no matter what field they enter. The introduction to tablets and digital devices at a young age can make the beginning of their technological journey fun and exciting. They will likely continue to be excited with technology and easily embrace new concepts.

Overall, tablets let children understand the world around them. Older kids can check out news from around the world – and you are able to engage them in discussions and debates about current affairs. This all can start at a young age, by introducing concepts through these digital chalkboards.

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