

# How Tablets and Technology Can Help Kids With Autism Learn and Play

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*“Tablets can motivate kids of all abilities to interact, and give them a common ground for communicating. But as social skills are multi-faceted, and since different kids need support in specific areas, I am grateful for the variety of apps that allow me to turn my son Leo's iPad into a custom social skills springboard.”<sup>1</sup>*

## **Tablets: Tools, Not Miracles**

- My initial response to seeing my autistic son kick butt using a tablet was elation, because he was instantly able to learn and entertain himself independently<sup>2</sup>
- However, tablets are not for everyone. Evaluate tablets and apps before buying
- Tablets encourage **presuming competence** by enabling visual and alternative communication & learning
- Competence expressed and recognized increases self-confidence

## **Benefits: Accessibility and Convenience**

- No cursor analogy – direct touch screen
- Fine motor ease – stylus/mouse not required (and switch accessories now available)
- So *very* portable (but invest in a good case)
- Can replace backpacks – and cupboards – of activities
- App content is not static, contents updates are often free

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<sup>1</sup> Rosa, Shannon Des Roches. “How Apps Can Support Your Child’s Social Skills.” *BlogHer.com*. <http://www.blogher.com/how-apps-can-support-social-skills>.

<sup>2</sup> Rosa, Shannon Des Roches. “The iPad: A Near-Miracle for My Son With Autism.” *BlogHer.com*. <http://www.blogher.com/ipad-nearmiracle-my-son-autism>.



### Benefits: Learning

- So much more than an AAC device! (Sometimes an issue, less so with Guided Access)
- Screen is big enough to be digital parallel to paper or books
- Keyboard and screen are in same space, most kids aren't touch typists, child doesn't have to move eyes from screen to keyboard<sup>3</sup>
- Apps are organized, accessible, predictable framework
- Apps break learning down into discrete chunks, topic areas
- Learn without needing to read, including read-aloud books
- Learn independently or with support (but always supervised)
- Incidental learning opportunities abound

### Benefits: Social and Play

- iPads are cool, they attract other kids – including siblings
- Can support social skills, formally and informally
- Custom story apps allow preparing for transitions, routines, meeting new people – or re-experiencing said scenarios
- Face-blindness (common in autism): labeling and other photo-content apps can enable associating names and characteristics with people
- Independent leisure time: Learning activities, games, videos

### Best Practices

- Evaluate thoroughly before buying: Tablets are expensive, apps are expensive
- Get professional evaluation for AAC apps
  - Different systems work for different users
  - If long-term AAC use is expected, do not want to re-learn communication system
- Get fully informed before upgrading, e.g., iOS 6 deleted YouTube app

### Overuse and Abuse?

- What about study: “Autistic Kids Obsess Over Screen Technology”?<sup>4</sup>
  - Autistic adults say “Yes, we’re visual and very focused, why not explore how to harness these traits productively.”
- Savvy kids can be experts, help other kids, mentor them.
- Makes me laugh, for kids like Leo, for whom independent is good!
- Valid concern for kids who crave screen time (so ... Screen Time app)

<sup>3</sup> Shap, Jacqui. “It was one of those ‘Oh Wow’ Moments.” *iPods, iPhones, & iPads in Education*.  
<http://ipodsiphonesineducation.wikispaces.com>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://psychcentral.com/news/2012/01/26/autistic-kids-obsess-over-screen-technology/34118.html>

## Autism & Tablets & Apps Resources

- See **my attached iPad Apps for Autism spreadsheet** – a collaborative effort with an SLP (Jordan Sadler) & an autistic adult (Corina Becker):  
<http://www.squidalicious.com/2011/01/ipad-apps-for-autism-spreadsheet-of.html>
- **My iPad Resource page:**  
<http://www.squidalicious.com/p/on-ipads.html>
  
- **Autistic Adult App Project**  
<http://autisticapp.blogspot.com>
- **Communication Therapy Blog**  
<http://communicationtherapy.wordpress.com>
- **Eric Saliers, Speech Language Pathologist**  
<http://ericsailers.com>
- **GeekSLP TV**  
<http://www.youtube.com/user/GeekSlp?feature=watch>
- **IEAR: I Educational Apps Review**  
<http://www.iear.org>
- **Moms With Apps**  
<http://momswithapps.com>
- **Smart Apps for Kids**  
<http://www.smartappsforkids.com>
- **Surprisingly Educational Apps**  
<http://list.ly/list/1Ge-surprisingly-educational-apps?feature=mylist>
- **Tech in Special Ed**  
<http://techinspecial.com>

## iPad Apps for Autism and Special Needs

Compiled by a parent, an autistic adult, and an SLP

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[www.squidalicious.com](http://www.squidalicious.com)  
**Corina Becker** [autisticapp.blogspot.com](http://autisticapp.blogspot.com)  
[nostereotypeshere.blogspot.com](http://nostereotypeshere.blogspot.com)  
**Jordan Sadler, SLP** [communicationtherapy.net](http://communicationtherapy.net)  
[communicationtherapy.wordpress.com](http://communicationtherapy.wordpress.com)

App	Function	Price
<b>Advocacy</b>		
iAdvocate	Strategies, simulations, & resources to build parent advocacy skills & knowledge.	Free
<b>Art</b>		
Art of Glow	Make lovely glowing patterns to play and stare at. Soothing, sensory.	0.99
DrawFree	Magnadoodle-like simple drawing	Free
Draw With Stars	Animated drawing & methodical erasing	0.99
FacesiMake	Fun, free-form collage making	1.99
Zen Brush	Simple, elegant ink brush painting, drawing, and writing	2.99
<b>Books</b>		
Andrew Answers	"Seriously silly," supports language building through word play, repetition, and cheekiness.	2.99
Dr. Seuss's ABC (or any Oceanhouse Media Dr. Seuss book)	Great Interactivity - click each word to hear, or use autoplay. Supports sight reading. Can now record own voice!	3.99
Little Bella: I Close My Eyes	Silly and lovely animated book. Good for kids with fine motor challenges.	0.99
The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore	Beautifully animated interactive book. Delightful to kids and adults! Comes with the story and a video short. Designed by ex-Pixar character designer William Joyce.	4.99
The Monster at the End of This Book	Lovable, Furry old Grover! Animation/interactivity, dynamic word highlighting	4.99
Tacky the Penguin	A penguin who doesn't fit in earns the affections of his group. Different modes support pre-readers & early readers.	2.99
The Three Little Pigs	Lushly illustrated & animated, fully interactive version of the classic story	7.99
Zanny - Born to Run	Interactive, rhythmic story about a boy who just can't stop! Comes with a game that targets facial expression identification.	2.99
<b>Communication</b>		
GraceApp	Simple picture exchange system developed by & for non-verbal people	37.99
iComm	Picture and voice communication aid for children	Free
iCommunicate for iPad	An AAC app: create icons with custom text, audio, and voice-over, incorporate them into storyboards	49.99

<b>iPrompts</b>	AAC app; easily create & modify visual schedules, show child countdown timer with a picture to aid with transitions. In-app VideoPrompts purchases demonstrate appropriate behaviors.	49.99
<b>LAMP Words for Life</b>	AAC app; combines PRC Unity® language system & Language Acquisition through Motor Planning (LAMP™) principles & strategies.	299.99
<b>NeoPaul</b>	Natural-sounding text to speech (male voice)	Free
<b>ProloQuo2go</b>	Full-featured augmentative & alternative communication solution for people who have difficulty speaking	189.99
<b>SoundingBoard</b>	User-friendly app for creation of individualized picture communication boards (1-9 pics per page) with natural voice recording.	49.99
<b>TalkAssist</b>	Alternative speech speech aid; provides a voice through text-to-speech software	Free
<b>Tap Speak Button</b>	Record messages, use switch-function button to play them back	14.99
<b>TouchChat</b>	Full-featured augmentative & alternative communication solution for people who have difficulty speaking; in-app vocabulary purchases optional	149.99
<b>Earliest Learning</b>		
<b>SoundTouch</b>	Touch cartoons of animals, vehicles, etc. to see real-life photos & sounds	2.99
<b>File Sharing</b>		
<b>DropBox</b>	Cloud-based real-time file sharing b/t computer & iPad (for worksheets, etc.)	Free
<b>Games</b>		
<b>Angry Birds</b>	Experiment with slingshot trajectories, using birds to take out pigs.	0.99
<b>Fruit Ninja</b>	Because our kids deserve to play! Fun, very simple swipe-based interface	4.99
<b>Fruit Memory</b>	Concentration, turn taking. Multi- or single player, choose number of tiles. Fun, cute!	0.99
<b>Leaf Jam</b>	Open-ended musical playground. Tap the screen to make the leaves fall.	0.99
<b>My Underwear</b>	Play with your underwear! Several activities: Paint it, catch it, change it!	2.99
<b>Poke Me</b>	Play, poke, feed, & guide a cute purple monster in several environments	Free
<b>Scoops</b>	Catch the falling ice cream scoops on your cone.	Free
<b>Spot the Dot</b>	Find a colored dot in increasingly complicated visual fields. Encourages bystander commentary.	3.99
<b>Toca Tea Party</b>	Play tea party! Set up, serve, and clean up.	2.99
<b>General Development</b>		
<b>Injini: Childhood Development Game Suite</b>	Expert-developed, extensive meaningful play suite for children with cognitive, language, and fine motor delays.	49.99
<b>Geography</b>		
<b>US Puzzle Map</b>	Click-and-drag states into place; state names said out loud for non-readers.	2.99

<b>Stack the Countries</b>	Learn about the countries of the world via shape-matching and a stacking game. Non-readers will need support.	1.99
<b>Stack the States</b>	Learn 50 US states trivia via shape-matching and a stacking game. Non-readers will need support. Fun.	0.99
<b>History</b>		
<b>BrainPop Featured Movie</b>	New animated movie about science or history, every day. With quiz afterward.	Free
<b>Presidents vs Aliens</b>	Learn U.S. Presidential History facts and faces, with alien battle interludes	0.99
<b>Labeling &amp; Identifying</b>		
<b>ABA Flashcards</b>	A suite of free flashcard apps for identifying labels, from Actions to Zoo animals. From Kindergarten.com	Free
<b>All About Me</b>	Store & practice learning personal information. Useful for those challenged by giving personal information verbally.	0.99
<b>Word SLAPs</b>	Create & identify 1, 2, or 3 audio-labeled photo icons (instantly, with an iPad2). SLP-created. Excellent for discrete trials.	2.99
<b>Language</b>		
<b>Conversation Builder</b>	Pragmatics: Discriminate between subtle differences which can negatively or positively impact a conversation.	5.99
<b>Milo: Interactive Storybook</b>	Build language skills by listening to Milo's story, or recording your own version.	1.99
<b>Puppet Pals</b>	Create your own unique shows with animation and audio in real time!	Free
<b>Question Builder</b>	Learn to answer abstract questions and create responses based on inference. For readers.	3.99
<b>Sentence Builder</b>	Learn how to build grammatically correct sentences. For readers.	3.99
<b>Speech With Milo: Prepositions</b>	Learn prepositions through animated examples and text reinforcement	1.99
<b>Speech with Milo: Sequencing</b>	Animated 3-scene sequences; kids can put pictures in correct order and then watch a short video of the scene created.	2.99
<b>Speech With Milo: Verbs</b>	Learn verbs through animated examples and text reinforcement	2.99
<b>Story Builder</b>	1) Improve paragraph formation; 2) Improve integration of ideas; and 3) Improve higher level abstractions by inference. For readers.	3.99
<b>That's Silly</b>	Absurd pictures entertain young kids while building language & cognitive skills.	0.99
<b>Toontastic</b>	Kids develop an understanding of narrative elements while creating their own animated cartoon story. Many applications for communication development.	Free
<b>Math and Pre-Math</b>		
<b>Arthmaroo</b>	Counting: associating numbers with amounts	1.99
<b>Count TV</b>	Sesame Street's The Count introduces videos about the numbers 1 through 9	2.99
<b>Dot to Dot Number Whiz</b>	Counting in sequence	1.99
<b>Rosita's Jump Count</b>	Shake the iPad to count Rosita's jumps - in English and Spanish	1.99
<b>Silly Numbers</b>	1:1 correspondence and counting numbers 1 - 12, great design & interactivity	3.99
<b>Splish Splash Inn</b>	Counting in English, Spanish, & French	0.99

<b>TallyTots</b>	Counting 1 - 20 through various activities. Motivating, well-designed, easy to use.	1.99
<b>Whizzit 1-2-3</b>	Practice 1:1 correspondence/counting, with fun balloon-popping breaks	0.99
<b>Multiple Activities/Suites</b>		
<b>Alien Buddies</b>	Varied visual and "listening" matching, dot-to-dot, and sticker fun.	1.99
<b>Bugs and Buttons</b>	Eighteen different learning and play activities, plus a bug "stamp collection"	2.99
<b>Fish School</b>	Letters, numbers, shapes, colors, matching, and more. Leo-approved.	1.99
<b>Go Go Kiddo</b>	"Vitamin fortified fun" Letter & number tracing, spelling, piano, much more.	1.99
<b>Monkey Preschool Lunchbox</b>	Concentration, matching, sorting, color identification, first-letter correspondence	0.99
<b>Thomas Game Pack</b>	Thomas the Tank Engine & his friends. Matching games, puzzles and mazes.	2.99
<b>Zoo Train</b>	Matching, puzzles, spelling, music, and make-your-own trains. Engaging.	1.99
<b>Music</b>		
<b>Dropophone</b>	Free-form play with a field of raindrops that cycle in various tones.	Free
<b>Hand Drums</b>	Drums are a logical step for the touch-based iPad interface. Big, realistic-looking drums.	0.99
<b>Itsy Bitsy Spider</b>	Interact with a much-loved children's song via fun animations & verse repetition	0.99
<b>Moozart</b>	Play, explore, and experiment with favorite songs, & the basics of music reading.	1.99
<b>PianoBall</b>	Using spinning balls to change a keyboard's features & do musical free play.	1.99
<b>Singing Fingers</b>	Finger paint with sound!	Free
<b>Songify</b>	Turns spoken words into music (dance tracks, etc.) Motivating!	Free
<b>Tappy Tunes</b>	Tap out favorite songs in the rhythm of your choosing	1.99
<b>Toca Band</b>	Musical free play with multiple characters, rhythms, beats, tunes	1.99
<b>Toddler Sing &amp; Learn</b>	Puzzle, color, and sing along with eight favorite songs.	1.99
<b>Twinkle Twinkle Storybook Piano</b>	Learn to play songs by following the colored keys on a keyboard	0.99
<b>Navigation</b>		
<b>FastMall</b>	navigate any mall map without the need for GPS or WIFI.	Free
<b>Productivity</b>		
<b>Epic Win</b>	Streamlined to-do list, with a role-playing spin.	2.99
<b>iEarnedThat</b>	A puzzle-based reward system that uses custom images	1.99
<b>iReward</b>	Fun, interactive reward tracking system. Can also use as a token board.	4.99
<b>Puzzles</b>		
<b>My First Tangrams</b>	An adaptation for kids of the famous Tangram game.	1.99
<b>ShapeBuilder</b>	An errorless click-and-drag puzzle game, reinforces sight reading	0.99
<b>US Puzzle Map</b>	Click-and-drag states into place; state names said out loud for non-readers.	2.99

<b>Reading &amp; Spelling</b>		
<b>BOB Books #1: Reading Magic</b>	Build and read sentences through drag-letters-into-place word building and animated picture prompts.	1.99
<b>FirstWords Deluxe</b>	Drag tiles to spell words in an error-free environment, reading	4.99
<b>Mr. Thorne Does Phonics - Letters and Sounds</b>	Extensive video phonics demonstrations for early readers (note: British spellings)	7.99
<b>Word Magic</b>	Sight word-based spelling and reading via fill-in-the-blank letters.	0.99
<b>Word Wagon</b>	Drag letters to spell words in a playful Paris scene. Uses sight reading & phonics.	1.99
<b>Science</b>		
<b>BrainPop Featured Movie</b>	New animated movie about science or history, every day. With quiz afterward.	Free
<b>Khan Academy</b>	"Khan Academy allows you to learn almost anything for free." View Khan Academy's complete library of over 3,200 videos.	Free
<b>Self-Care</b>		
<b>iDress for Weather</b>	Pick appropriate clothes for current weather conditions. For individuals with disabilities, an educational tool for children, or just for fun.	1.99
<b>Social Skills</b>		
<b>Hidden Curriculum - Kids</b>	A guide and practice resource for society's unwritten social rules.	1.99
<b>QuickCues</b>	Social scripts that help people on the autism spectrum handle new situations & learn new skills	4.99
<b>Social Skills Builder</b>	Video modeling of social skills reinforced by post-video Q&A. *App is free but most content must be purchased.	Free*
<b>Social Media</b>		
<b>FlipBoard</b>	Read Twitter, Facebook, and RSS feeds in less-overwhelming magazine layout	Free
<b>Social Stories</b>		
<b>Comic Strip - CS</b>	Quickly create one-page comic strips using photos, speech bubbles, captions.	0.99
<b>ModelMe Kids: Going Places</b>	Helping learn to navigate challenging community locations through slide shows of children modeling appropriate behavior.	Free
<b>Pictello</b>	Create high quality talking photo albums and talking books. Excellent for social stories.	18.99
<b>Speech</b>		
<b>ArtikPiks</b>	Practice sounds targeted in speech therapy with flashcards, memory games. Pictures are line drawings. Child can record own voice and listen. Buy for \$29.99 loaded with sounds or free and add sounds as child is ready.	29.99 / Free
<b>Articulate It</b>	Track data for many students at once, with option to email data, notes, and even child's recorded voice to parents and other team members. Therapist has option to target specific phonemes, phonological processes, or modes of articulation. Target words are real photos.	49.99



<b>Visual Schedules</b>		
<b>Choiceworks</b>	Visual Support System with Schedule, Feelings, & Waiting Picture Boards for Special Education and Autism Support	9.99
<b>First Then Visual Schedule</b>	Create digital visual schedules with several format options	9.99
<b>Routinely</b>	Build visual schedules on your iPhone, iPod Touch, or iPad	4.99
<b>Writing and Fine Motor</b>		
<b>iWriteWords</b>	Guided handwriting with a really fun, reinforcing interface	2.99
<b>Penultimate</b>	Free-form writing/drawing app with lined/graph paper options & notebook functionality for storage. Great with stylus.	1.99
<b>SuperNova</b>	Practicing pinch-and-expand motions	0.99
<b>Write My Name</b>	Practice tracing individual letters or words; option to create your own content/words	1.99