



Suggested Apps and Games For EARLY YEARS



Learning



FISH SCHOOL HD

This app teaches young children (age 2-5) about important things like letters, shapes, numbers and more, all set in a colourful underwater setting with adorable sea creatures. The basic idea has fish and sea creatures forming the shapes of letters, numbers etc that your little one can identify. Developers Duck Duck Moose have a lineage of creating family friendly apps and games with 21 top-selling apps since 2008. Fish School HD has over 50,000 downloads and offers a rounded package of activities, but many other apps by this developer are highly rated and offer a few twists on the formula. As always it's worth checking a few out to see which best suits your child's interests. Fish School HD is available for free on iOS and Android.



GREEN EGGS AND HAM - DR. SEUSS

The classic Dr. Seuss book has been reworked into an interactive adventure for modern day devices, with an emphasis on encouraging literacy learning in younger children. Within the app, there's a few different options on how to enjoy the story; you can read it aloud together, have the app read the book and follow along, or just play the story through automatically. You can even tap on words to hear them individually to practice vocabulary. While the app will set you back £3.79 on Android (£3.99 on iOS) it has an excellent rating and over 10,000 downloads, with many noting how much their young children have enjoyed the story. It speaks volumes about the quality of the work, too, that a book from 1960 can still be read and loved by children some two generations after its initial release.



TOCA LAB: ELEMENTS

Toca Lab is the app of choice in encouraging little scientists to get to grips with elements, our world and how physics and chemistry work. This one might be a little advanced for younger kids and, though it has a PEGI 3 rating, it does recommend ages 6-8 in the description. All 118 elements are present in Toca Labs and kids are encouraged to find and test them all. Experimenting with things like Gold, Neon, Hydrogen and more, it gives a better grasp of how everything in our universe is formed. Bear in mind though that it's not meant to be a scientifically accurate account of how elements react, but to build curiosity in young minds. The app is available on iOS and Android for £3.99.



BAREFOOT WORLD ATLAS

What's the next best thing to travelling the world? Well, for kids with access to an iPad or Apple phone, Barefoot World Atlas could be a close second. In this app available only on iOS for £4.99, kids and adults can explore the globe from the comfort of their own homes and learn all about our planet. The app, which is rated 4+, only appears on Apple devices but the sheer amount of information contained in here will keep curious kids busy for hours on end.



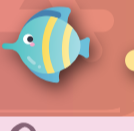
SKETCHBOOK - DRAW AND PAINT (AUTODESK SKETCHBOOK ON IOS)

Encouraging artistic ability at an early age can often be invaluable in letting kid's imaginations loose and there are many apps that allow them to unlock that passion. SketchBook comes highly recommended with over 300,000 reviews. Essentially, the app comprises a blank canvas and a host of "fast and powerful creative sketching tools" like pens, pencils and paint brushes to let those creative juices flow. SketchBook is rated PEGI 3 so even younger children should be able to get to grips with it. However, it could prove a little too complex for some and the large collection of tools and crisp graphics would suit a larger screen like an iPad, over a mobile phone. Despite this, the ability to simply mess around and doodle, coupled with more advanced accessibility later down the line, should make it a must own for all age ranges. The app is free to download on both Android and iOS.



National Online Safety

#WakeUpWednesday



Just for Fun



LITTLE FRIENDS: CATS & DOGS

If you're looking to introduce pets into the family home but aren't sure about how your children might react, a good way to get your younger ones acquainted with an animal before a big commitment is a game like Little Friends: Cats & Dogs. This Nintendo Switch game tasks players with feeding, playing with and loving their own virtual cat or dog. Much like Nintendogs or even Tamagotchi of the 90s, Little Friends is a fun way to build up confidence to owning a real animal. While only a 1 player game, Little Friends: Cats & Dogs is suitable for all ages and entirely offline, so there's nothing at all to worry about when they're enjoying it alone.



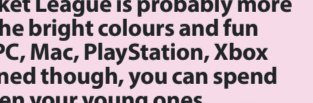
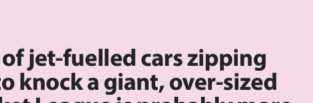
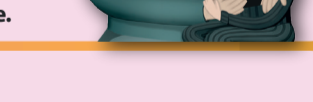
YOUTUBE KIDS

YouTube Kids takes the popular YouTube format and curates a more specialised environment for children to search through. While any age range can benefit from YouTube Kids, the 'Preschool' Mode is specifically designed for kids aged 4 and under. According to the app's description, 'Preschool' Mode promotes creativity, playfulness, learning and exploration through its channels. The inclusion of parental controls (limited screen-time, video blocking and flagging) and strict advert monitoring by YouTube means the experience is incredibly safe for younger kids. It should be noted that in the app description, YouTube say that some inappropriate content can slip through the cracks, but they're constantly implementing updates to stop these. A hugely popular app, YouTube Kids is available on iOS and Android with well over 100 million downloads.



BBC iPLAYER KIDS

This app is designed for kids and lets them watch all their favourite CBBC and CBeebies shows in one place. The simple presentation is super easy to navigate and the app itself is entirely free on both Android and iOS with no adverts whatsoever. BBC iPlayer Kids can download shows to your device's internal storage allowing you to take all the best bits with you when there's no WIFI and multiple profiles mean everybody gets straight to their favourites with minimal fuss. According to the app description, it will ask for your child's name and age to recommend other programmes it thinks they might like.



MARIO KART 8 DELUXE

Mario Kart has been a staple of Nintendo consoles since 1992. It has been a favourite of young and old alike for over 20 years and is always an incredibly fun experience. Now exclusively on the Nintendo Switch with Mario Kart 8, the bells and whistles may have changed, but the enjoyable core gameplay and challenge have not. Suitable for all ages, Mario Kart can be played alone, online or at home with up to 4 players on one screen. The ability to take the Switch out with you into the world and play wherever you like is a huge advantage over other games and means you can always be sure of some quick entertainment.



ROCKET LEAGUE

The concept behind Rocket League takes teams of jet-fuelled cars zipping around football-inspired pitches in an attempt to knock a giant, over-sized ball into nets. Rated PEGI 3, the challenge of Rocket League is probably more suited to those 5 and up, but anybody can enjoy the bright colours and fun gameplay. Rocket League is available on Windows PC, Mac, PlayStation, Xbox One and Nintendo Switch at various price points. Be warned though, you can spend money in the game for certain items so be sure you know when your young ones are playing and what they're buying.

Meet our expert

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for 5 years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the current gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world, UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGbible. Starting gaming from a young age with his siblings, he has a passion for understanding how games and tech work, but more importantly, how to make them safe and fun.





Suggested Apps and Games For 7-11 YEARS



Learning



MAGIC PIANO BY SMILE

While Magic Piano doesn't strictly teach you how to play the piano, it does teach hand-eye coordination and can help spark creativity in young minds. Users can play along to a variety of popular songs on a range of difficulty levels in an attempt to get through the song with as few mistakes as possible, increasing dexterity and reaction times. Free on iOS & Android, the game does contain some ads and in-app purchases, so be sure to check these out before letting younger players unleash their musical side. Magic Piano is PEGI 3 rated but requires slightly more nimble hands to master so older kids will get the most from this.



AZOOMEE

Azoomee houses over 1,000 games, videos and activities for kids of all ages to play, have fun and most importantly, develop their key skills in. The app is award winning, BAFTA nominated, supported by the NSPCC (according to the description on their app page) and comes with a suite of parental controls built in. As well as educational games, activities and kid's favourite TV shows, the app also has a built-in chat feature where they can talk to their friends safely. A nice little touch is that if you buy a subscription to Azoomee for unlimited premium content for £4.99 a month, a portion of the money raised goes towards supporting the NSPCC. The app is available on iOS, Android and Amazon.



POLY BRIDGE

While Poly Bridge could be easily enjoyed solely as a game, it's actually an incredibly clever way to learn critical thinking and engineering skills in a kid friendly way. It's set in a colourful, cartoony world and has extremely simple gameplay. In Poly Bridge, it's your task to get cars, buses, trucks, boats and more safely to their destination by designing bridges that are safe and practical. How those bridges are created is entirely up to you. With over 100 levels, a sandbox mode and almost infinite playability, Poly Bridge is available on PC, Android, iOS and Nintendo Switch at various price points, so be sure to check which is the best option for you.



CROSSWORD PUZZLES (WUBU APPS LTD)

Crossword puzzles might not immediately seem like a learning game for younger kids, but they're incredibly effective at building strong word skills and problem solving. This one by Wubu Apps Limited is exclusive to iOS and constantly changes its roster of daily crosswords and challenges, although there are a whole bunch of apps available out there which do similar things. The app is rated 4+ but would likely be suited to kids a little older as the crosswords are designed for adults as well. As mentioned, Crossword Puzzles is only available on iOS devices and is free to download but does contain in-app purchases.



SCRIBBLENAUTS UNLIMITED

Scribblenauts is a game like few others in that it actively encourages children to use their intuition to solve a variety of puzzles. Armed only with their imagination, players must complete levels by conjuring potentially useful items for main character Maxwell to collect the Starites and achieve his goal. The game helps create strong vocabulary and word association to a fun 2D backdrop. While any version of Scribblenauts is good, Unlimited is the most readily available, being released on Wii U, PC, Nintendo 3DS, iOS and Android devices, PS4, Xbox One and Nintendo Switch.



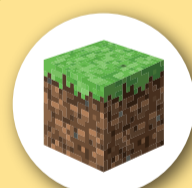
SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY

Widely regarded as one of the greatest games Nintendo have ever made, Super Mario Odyssey provides family friendly fun and a challenging environment for kids to learn new skills in a video game. Rated PEGI 7, Odyssey can be enjoyed by almost any age range, even those who are young at heart. The caveat is that the game is only available on Nintendo Switch, so some investment will need to be made, but the console boasts a host of other child-safe titles and the ability to play on the go as well as at home.



NETFLIX

As obvious as it may sound, Netflix's children's section is ideal for keeping young ones and toddlers out of trouble on long journeys or at home. The specific profile for kids allows them to only view content appropriate for younger audiences which lets you and them watch their favourite shows and movies anywhere, at any time. Curated playlists, easy navigation through TV series and movies, and no-hassle auto-play means a stress-free guarantee. The only downside to the app is that it requires a Netflix subscription in order to use it but if you're happy to pay the monthly cost, it's an absolute must for any parent.



MINECRAFT

Minecraft is one of those rare, timeless classics that can be enjoyed by every age group. Coming in both a console version and a pocket edition for mobile devices, the sandbox world-building fun in Minecraft can be an amazing place to let your imagination run wild. The game can be played online with friends and supports cross-play, meaning that no matter what device everybody has, it can be played together. While the game isn't free, it will undoubtedly provide hours and hours of fun for the whole family so it's worth the investment of a one-time purchase. As one of the most popular games ever released, it inspires critical thinking, problem solving and above all, fun.



LEGO MOVIE MAKER 2

The LEGO Movie Maker 2 app lets users create their own stop-motion movies and upload them for others to watch online. Kids can create a short LEGO movie in whatever genre they like using a range of easy to use tools and are able to add in sounds and visual effects to make the videos look super realistic. All movies are moderated before they make it online so you can be sure no sensitive information is uploaded or viewed by third parties. The app is free to download on both iOS and Android devices but does require creation of a LEGO account to upload videos. The only information needed for an account is the country you live in, your email address and date of birth. While it's rated for 4+, kids of 8 and up will get the most out of this one.



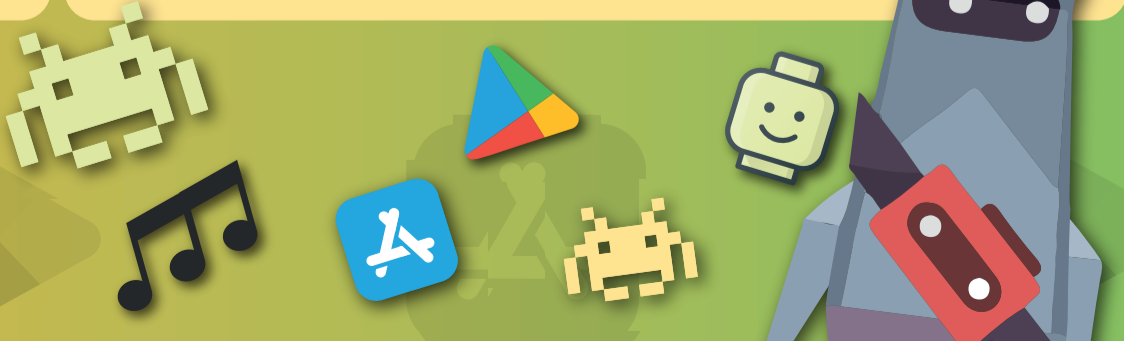
ADVENTURES OF POCO ECO: LOST SOUNDS

If something more slow-paced and chilled out is on your radar, Adventures of Poco Eco should be able to scratch that itch. With an emphasis on creating a rich and inviting musical soundscape over hardcore gameplay, the puzzle action is perfect for unwinding young minds, as opposed to challenging them. The single-player game is available on all iOS and Android devices, as well as the Amazon Kindle Store and you can also nab yourself a free copy of the soundtrack with the purchase.



Meet our expert

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Suggested Apps and Games For 11-14 YEARS



Learning

EVERNOTE



If keeping track of things like homework, links, images or basically anything is an issue, then Evernote could be your new best friend. While not strictly a learning app, Evernote does make organising learning so much easier. Used by both professionals and students, this app helps facilitate keeping on top of executive functioning skills, with online planners and notebooks made available across all your devices and computers. With over 1.5 million downloads, Evernote is one of the most popular organisational apps in the world, and is free to download on iOS, Android and the Amazon Store.

DRAGONBOX



DragonBox isn't one singular app, but a series of educational and learning games designed to teach the fundamentals of Mathematics. There are 5 apps in total for learning Algebra, Geometry, Numbers, Big Numbers and Elements. Each app contains a number of mini-games to get kids thinking about getting a head start on the daunting numerical subject, backed by bright and charming visuals. Each app comes in at between £3.99 and £5.99 on iOS and Android making it one of the more pricier investments. However, once you've paid the upfront cost, the entire app is unlocked and free to explore. It should also be pointed out that because most of the DragonBox collection is recommended for children between 6 and 12 year's old, older kids with a decent grasp on Maths might find this a little beneath their skill level.

NSF SCIENCE ZONE



Apps about our world don't come much more official than being created by the National Science Foundation, which is exactly where NSF Science Zone comes in. Featuring a wide array of videos and high-resolution pictures focusing on everything from the far reaches of space to the microscopic organisms that inhabit our planet and everything in between, this is perfect for anybody curious about nature and the world. The app is 100% free on iOS and Android and would be perfect as a visual encyclopedia for anybody doing any science related study. All the information on the Science Zone app has been provided by scientists and universities around the globe so you can be confident of it being the highest possible standard to teach your young ones.

GUITAR COACH CHORDS TUNER TABS



Learning instruments like the guitar has never been simpler thanks to all the modern technology at our fingertips. Learning visually can often be the difference between giving up and persevering to acquire a truly sought-after skill. HD videos, animated fretboards, chord diagrams and more make this app a one stop shop for getting to grips with the basics. Guitar Coach Chords Tuner Tabs is available for a free trial or monthly subscription for unlimited access on both iOS and Android, essentially acting as a pocket tutor for the stringed instrument. If time and money are a factor in taking the plunge into learning guitar, it makes sense that an app like this can help start you on the right path.

DUOLINGO



What's better than mastering one language? Mastering all the languages! Duolingo is world renowned for being able to teach anybody a new language with its fun and easy to use app. Ideal for kids picking up a second language at school, Duolingo offers a variety of languages including French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Italian, Irish and more, all for free. You simply choose which language you want to learn, what kind of commitment you can give per day and away you go. The best part about Duolingo is that it is completely free to download and use and will even send you helpful notification reminders when it's time to learn some new words and phrases. It should be pointed out that there are some in-app purchases, but they're strictly optional and transparent throughout, so no sneaky accidental payments can be made.



Just for Fun

TERRARIA



Much like Minecraft, Terraria has a focus on building and creating anything kids can put their imagination to. Whether they're digging into the earth to seek out treasures, or creating their own kingdoms out of stone, however your young ones like to play, there's guaranteed to be something to keep them busy for hours on end. There are a couple of slight caveats with Terraria though. As the game is so big, it does require more modern (2014 or up) devices to play on. There's also the cost which stands at £4.59 on Android and £4.99 on iOS devices. Arguably though, the game is worth its weight in gold when it comes to creating an engaging world to lose yourself in. It even has multiplayer for up to 7 friends over local wi-fi or online. If that doesn't seal it, nothing will!

THE ROOM THREE



The Room games are all about critical thinking and puzzle solving, offset by a rich atmosphere that has been prevalent throughout the series. The Room Three is the latest in the mobile favourite apps and offers up a uniquely challenging experience for those wishing to flex their logical muscles. The BAFTA award winning series hits its peak with the third entry feeling more like a full-blown adventure game than a mere mobile app. The Room Three is available on iOS and Android for £3.99 and would be well suited to older kids looking for a more challenging game. Be aware though that while the rating is PEGI 7, younger audiences might find the eerie themes a little unsettling. If this sounds like something you or a loved one might enjoy, the whole series of Room games offer much the same experience so there's plenty to get stuck into.

THOMAS WAS ALONE



Thomas is a curious triangle. His curiosity is satisfied simply by exploring his intriguing world and tackling the 100 award winning levels of puzzle solving, head on. Kids can guide Thomas around his world by jumping, and making friends, while the BAFTA award winning game also comes with an enchanting story narrated by comedian and writer Danny Wallace. Perhaps the best things about Thomas Was Alone are its simple control scheme allowing it to be picked up and played by almost anybody, and the fact that it's available on a wide variety of consoles and devices including iOS, Android, PS4, Xbox One and Nintendo Switch. Prices vary though, so be sure to check it out on your preferred medium.

THE SIMS FREEPLAY



Create your Sim and help them live their life the way you want in The Sims FreePlay. Based on the wildly popular games, this mobile version brings all the fun of The Sims into the palm of your hands, while losing none of the charm of the originals. As anybody who's ever played a Sims game will tell you, hours melt into minutes once you start playing this lifestyle simulator and with good reason - it's incredibly addictive fun. While the game is, as the name suggests, free to play on iOS, Android and Amazon, please be aware that in-app purchases can be made of up to £99.99 so it's essential you keep an eye on whoever is playing and set strict boundaries if necessary. Over 10 million downloads of this game can't be wrong though - The Sims is back, and it's better than ever.

HEADS UP!



Heads Up! is an incredibly fun game that the whole family can play together. The basic premise is that one person holds the phone to their forehead with a character, place, object, etc on screen and tries to guess it from the clues the rest of the players give them. There's a whole host of categories to choose from so it never gets dull and there's even the option to record the other players trying to give clues, so you can watch it back later for more laughs. Rated PEGI 3, it's suitable for pretty much everyone but can really help hone quick thinking and reaction times in more developed kids. The game comes in at 99p on iOS and free on Android devices but does offer in-app purchases from between 58p and £9.49 per item for things like extra categories.

Meet our expert

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for 5 years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the current gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world, UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGbible. Starting gaming from a young age with his siblings, he has a passion for understanding how games and tech work, but more importantly, how to make them safe and fun.

