Be Web Smart - For the Analog Parent in a Digital World
App Ratings – What they mean and how to Restrict by Rating

One of the parental control features on the iPod touch (and iPad and iPhone) is **restriction by content rating**. Today I want to specifically focus on **app restrictions**. Apps have ratings similar to movie ratings — G, PG, PG-13 and R. You can decide which apps your kids can download from the App store or iTunes based on their rating.

WHAT ARE THE RATINGS?

Here are descriptions of the ratings, straight out of iTunes.

4+ Applications in this category contain no objectionable material.

9+ Applications in this category may contain mild or infrequent occurrences of cartoon, fantasy or realistic violence, and infrequent or mild mature, suggestive, or horror-themed content which may not be suitable for children under the age of 9.

12+ Applications in this category may also contain infrequent mild language, frequent or intense cartoon, fantasy or realistic violence, and mild or infrequent mature or suggestive themes, and simulated gambling which may not be suitable for children under the age of 12.

17+ You must be at least 17 years old to purchase this application. Applications in this category may also contain frequent and intense offensive language; frequent and intense cartoon, fantasy or realistic violence; and frequent and intense mature, horror, and suggestive themes; plus sexual content, nudity, alcohol, tobacco, and drugs which may not be suitable for children under the age of 17.

HOW DO APPS GET THEIR CONTENT RATINGS?

Based on my research it seems that the app developer fills out a form describing their application. The rating is then generated based on that description. The most recent information I could find about this is from 2009. I also posed this question to the members at Moms with Apps, a group of app developers who promote quality apps for kids and families. Member Eugene Stolin of Mind Vitamins confirmed that this is still the way it works. Lorraine Akemann, one of the founding members, also noted that "things are changing all the time, especially with the FTC scrutiny on the mobile privacy space". The FTC scrutiny refers to a recent report which raises privacy questions about mobile apps for kids.

### HOW DO I RESTRICT APPS BY CONTENT RATING?

Here are the steps that will prevent your child from downloading apps based on their rating. Note that they will still be able to SEE all the apps in the App store; but the option to download or buy them will be disabled if the rating is higher than what you allow.

1. From the child's iDevice, go to **Settings** > **General** > **Restrictions**.

2. If you've already set up restrictions, you'll be prompted for the passcode. If not, choose **Enable Restrictions** and enter a passcode. Be sure to use a **4-digit passcode that you will remember** and your kids will not guess.

3. Scroll down to the heading "**Allowed Content**". Click on **Apps**.
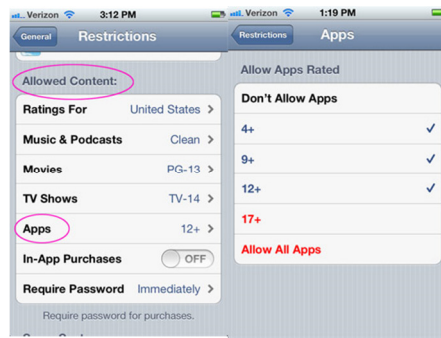
4. On the "**Allow Apps Rated**" screen, click the highest rating that you want to allow. For example, in the screenshot above where it is set to 12+, I would click on 9+ to remove the check mark from 12+. The ratings shown in **red** will not be allowed. At this point you may want to refer to the rating descriptions. Your child's age and what you are comfortable with will help you decide which to choose. For example even the 9+ rating allows for "mild realistic violence", so if you are not comfortable with that for your child, choose 4+.

(While you are in restriction settings, you may want to turn off In-App Purchases too.)

5. Once you've made your changes, return to the home screen. You may find (and your child will most *certainly* find) that some apps they had previously loaded are nowhere to be found! If they had previously installed a game rated 9+ and you set restrictions for 4+, that game is no longer accessible.

BEYOND THE RESTRICTION SETTINGS

Even with the restrictions in place, for younger children it's a good idea to review each app that your child wants to download or at least review it after-the-fact. As you can see from the rating descriptions, even an app rated 4+ may not be what you want your children to use. For example, my daughter enjoys a game called Bakery Story, where she can build a virtual bakery shop. As soon as she opens the app, a chat screen is displayed. There are a multitude of ads for other apps by the same company. There is also a social area where she can write on other player's "walls", and invite friends to play. There is even a Facebook connect button, which makes no sense at all. Facebook doesn't allow users under 13, yet this game rated 4+ allows connection to Facebook!

OTHER SOURCES FOR FINDING APPS FOR KIDS

If you are in doubt about whether an app is right for your child, check online for a review. I'll be reviewing apps here on Be Web Smart. Here are a few other sites you can try.

Common Sense Media App Reviews– Common Sense media is a very helpful site for, well, common sense reviews! Their app reviews suggest an appropriate age range as well as a quality rating. I didn't find a review for Bakery Story, but did find a review of Fashion Story, by the same developer. While Fashion story is rated 4+ in the App store, Common Sense recommends it for age 9 and older.

Moms with Apps – On the Moms with Apps website, they list a number of app review sites on their Appreciation page.

SUMMARY

With over 500,000 apps available in the App store it can be tricky for parents to decide which ones are okay for their children. Now that you know what the app ratings mean, and how you can restrict apps by rating, you can help your kids navigate the App store with a bit more confidence. What are your kids' favorite apps? Will you be setting restrictions?

http://www.bewebsmart.com/ipod-ipad-iphone/how-to-restrict-apps-by-rating/