

Parents' Guide to Podcasts

Everything you need to know to download, stream, and listen to this trending -- and gloriously screen-free -- form of entertainment. By **Frannie Ucciferri**

Topics: **Healthy Media Habits, Learning with Technology, We Recommend**



What if something out there had your kid begging you to turn off the TV or tablet, put away the video games, and listen to a story? It seems practically impossible in today's media environment. But with podcasts, "no screens" becomes "no problem." Podcasts made for -- and even by -- kids are popping up all over the place. More and more people are tuning in, with a **48% increase in listeners from 2017 to 2019** among teens and young adults.

You may have already hopped on the podcast bus, thanks to popular but mature hits such as Serial and Radiolab. But thankfully, podcasters are starting to realize that kids love what they're doing as much as grown-ups. **Teachers are even using them in the classroom.** With exciting stories, fascinating facts, and lively sound effects to grab kids' interest, all you need for an entertaining family listening experience are some headphones or a set of speakers.

How to listen

It can be daunting for a first-timer to enter the world of podcasts, but digital tools have made it easier than ever to start listening. Podcasts are available to stream online or with a "podcatcher," an app you can download specifically for podcasts. Here are some popular options for listening:

- **Apple Podcasts.** The original podcast app (only available for Apple iOS).
- **Google Podcasts.** Google's free podcast app for Android users.
- **Kids Listen.** An online service that features kid-friendly podcasts.
- **Pocket Casts.** A mobile app with a sleek, easy-to-use interface.
- **SoundCloud.** An online audio-streaming platform for podcasts as well as music (also an app).
- **Spotify.** The music-streaming platform has a whole dedicated section for podcasts.



- **Stitcher.** "Stitch" together custom podcast playlists with this mobile app.
- Find plenty more on our list of [Podcast and Audio Apps](#).

Many of these apps also have associated skills or programs for [smart speakers like Amazon Echo or Google Home](#), so listening can be as easy as asking Alexa.

Once you have your favorite app or website, search its library by topic and start exploring everything from science to sports to movies and more. Or if searching is too overwhelming, check out our recommendations, including the [25 best podcasts for kids](#), the [best podcasts for little kids](#), and the [best podcasts for tweens and teens](#). And don't forget to subscribe! Subscribing lets the app push new episodes directly to your device as soon as they're available, so you'll always have the latest update at your fingertips.

Pros and cons of podcasts for kids

On the plus side, podcasts:

- **Boost learning.** With engaging hosts and compelling stories, podcasts can be great tools to teach kids about science, history, ethics, and more. Listening to stories helps kids [build vocabulary](#), improve [reading skills](#), and even [become more empathetic](#).
- **Reduce screen time.** With podcasts, families can enjoy the same level of engagement, entertainment, and education as screen-based activities without [worrying about staring at a screen](#).
- **Go anywhere.** Podcasts are completely portable. You can listen in the car, on the bus, or in a classroom or even while doing chores around the house.
- **Cost nothing.** Podcasts themselves don't have subscription or download fees, so anyone with internet access can listen and download for free. Most podcatcher apps are free, too (although some do have costs associated with them).
- **Get two thumbs up from kids!** Podcasts are designed to hook kids with music, jokes, compelling stories, and more. Some are designed in a serial format with cliffhangers at the end to get kids to tune back in.

On the downside, podcasts:

- **Play lots of ads.** Many podcasts run several minutes of ads at the beginning or end. Because they're often read by the podcast host, the [ads can feel like a hard sell](#).
- **Can be confusing.** Many podcasts update regularly, so you can jump right in and start listening. Others are styled like radio or TV shows, so the most recent episode is actually the end of a season. Check whether something is serialized or long-form before listening to the most recent update.
- **Vary in age-appropriateness.** The iTunes Store labels podcasts "Explicit" or "Clean," but even a "Clean" label doesn't guarantee kid-friendly content. When in doubt, listen first before sharing with your kids.

