

Kid Proofing a Mac With Parental Controls

By Nick Santilli Jan. 13, 2009, 9:23am PT [60 Comments](#)

If you've got young children, chances are they're already quite adept at using the computer. This is a new generation of wired little ones, and we've got our work cut out for us as we attempt to stay ahead of them.

I'll wager that you're more concerned with protecting your children from the sketchy dangers of the internet, but equally important is protecting your Mac from your children! Luckily, if you've got a Mac, OS X comes with some great Parental Controls built right into the operating system which will help you combat both of these situations.

This post should serve as a quick guide to get you started in locking down your Mac, making it safe for your kiddos to use without your direct supervision. The process is quite simple (as is standard operating procedure with all things Apple), but I realize you may be starting from one of two different scenarios.

1. **Children's Account does not yet exist**

Starting from scratch is easy. Open System Preferences (under the Apple icon) and choose **Accounts**. Click the "+" button to create a new account profile. The very top line is a drop down menu — from that drop down, select "Managed with Parental Controls." Create the rest of the account as usual. As soon as you finish that screen, the new account is visible with a button at the bottom to take you to the Parental Controls Preference Pane.

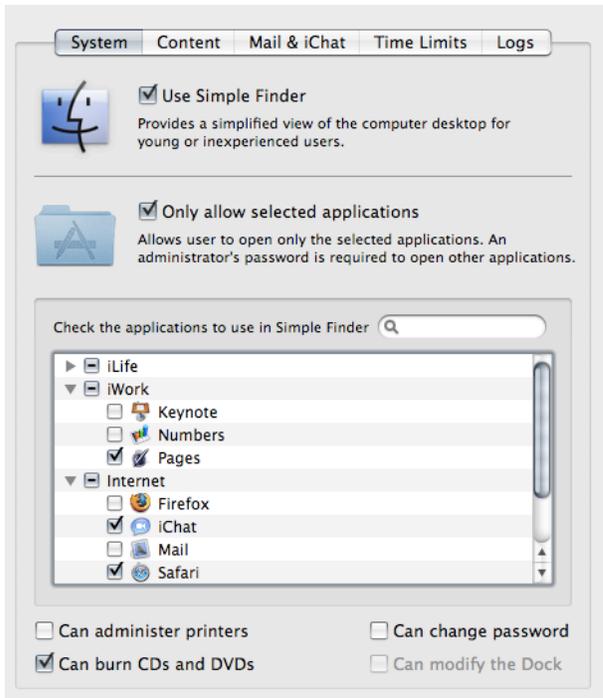
2. **Children's Account already exists**

Converting a pre-existing account is just as easy to convert for use with Parental Controls. From within the Accounts Pane of System Preferences, select the account you want to change to Parental Controls. At the bottom of that profile page, all you need to do is check the box that reads "Enable Parental Controls" and then click the button to open that Preference Pane for configuration.

Alrighty, regardless of where you began (above), we should all be on the same page now – or Parental Control Preference Pane, as it were. To get started setting the controls for this account, you'll need to select the account from the list (if there is more than one available to be managed). If when you click on it your Mac beeps at you, you'll need to unlock these settings by clicking the padlock icon below (at which point you'll need to enter your password). It's probably easiest to run through each of the high level features one at a time, so let's take a closer look.

System

The System tab is where you decide what they will be able to use and what (if any) privileges you allow them. If this account is indeed for children, the Simple Finder may be a good choice. You can also go through all of the applications installed on your machine and only put check marks next to the apps you want them to be able to use. Last, there are some items that you can give them access to administer or not with their account.



Content

Protect your little ones from inappropriate content in this tab. Limit the Dictionary to not show profane entries, for instance. The other, more important option is how they will be allowed to browse the web. There's an unrestricted option, a best effort to determine bad websites option, and the one that I like best, where you only set the websites you want them to be able to see. This last option gives the most control, but can also require more administrative overhead — but at least you know they're only on the pages you deem to be appropriate.

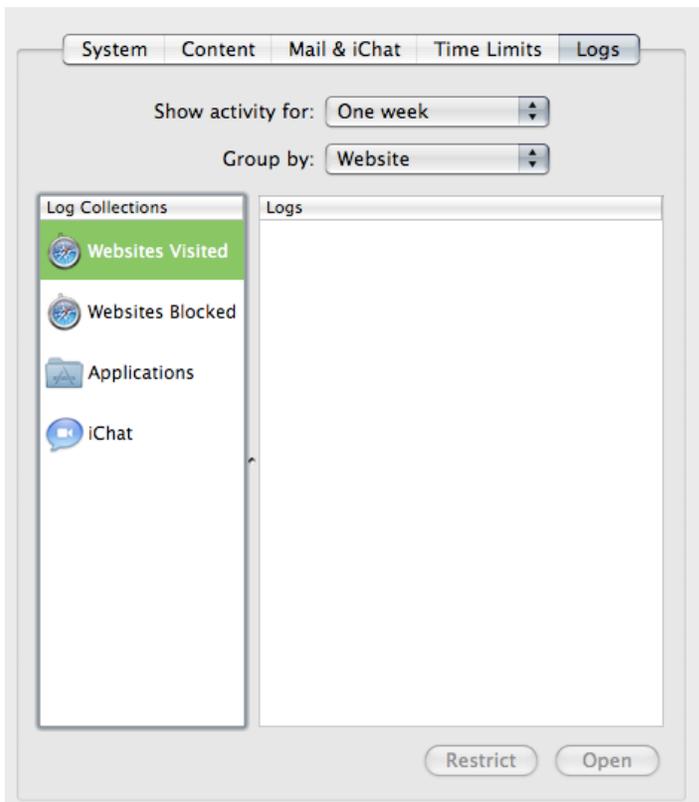


Mail & iChat

If you've allowed them access to the Mail application and iChat, you can limit their communications within those apps, from here. Enter the names of the users they can email and chat with in this tab. If you set a permission request email address (it would most likely be your own), that address will get a request email anytime your kid tries to email an address that you have not yet approved.

Logs

Get an accounting of the websites they have visited, the websites they've tried that have been blocked, iChat transcripts, and applications they've used. There are different methods of organizing this data (like the length of time Logs are kept, and then grouped by Date or Content/Contact). These Logs are probably more important if you've left more control to the user, but either way, is good peace of mind. (As a side note, I think it would be great if you could have these Logs emailed to you on a periodic basis, but that's not available...yet.)



As always, the beauty of the Mac — and more specifically in this case, OS X — is the power available in such a simple package. With a few quick settings you've made your child's computer-using experience that much safer from the outside world, while also protecting your machine from random clicking that could do some real damage.

Of course, your Parental Controls may need some care and feeding, as their web browsing interests change (or as is the case in my home, new commercials advertise websites they want to try). It's a good point to make that some changes to the Managed account can be made from within that account, if the Administrator Password (yours) is entered. But overall, some solid controls have been implemented, and allow you to track just what they're doing and when, while using your Macintosh computer.