CHILDREN, TECHNOLOGY, AND SEPARATION: NAVIGATING RIGHTS, RISKS, AND RESILIENCE

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, technology has become deeply embedded in the everyday lives of children, shaping how they communicate, learn, and form relationships. For children navigating the complexities of family separation, digital tools, ranging from smartphones and messaging apps to video calls and social media, can offer vital channels for maintaining contact with absent parents. Yet, these same tools can also introduce new risks, including exposure to cyberbullying, privacy breaches, and manipulation within high conflict parental dynamics.

As family structures evolve and digital communication becomes increasingly normalized, the intersection of children's rights, technology, and post separation parenting presents both opportunities and challenges. Technology can serve as a communication bridge across physical and emotional distance, enabling children to sustain meaningful relationships with both their parents and other significant members of a child's family structure. However, technology can also become a tool of coercive control, a means of surveillance and alienation, particularly in cases involving family violence or parental conflict. The duality of the use of technology in this context necessarily demands a nuanced, child focused approach that balances the benefits of digital connection with the imperative to safeguard children's wellbeing and autonomy.

This paper explores how technology functions as both a facilitator and disruptor in the lives of children experiencing family separation. Drawing on recent research, legal developments, and case law, it examines the ways in which digital communication can support or undermine children's rights to safety, privacy, and meaningful relationships. It also considers the role of courts, caregivers, and policymakers in navigating this complex terrain, with a focus on promoting resilience and protecting vulnerable children from harm.

Despite the increasing use and accessibility of smartphones and online communication technologies, there are still limited studies into the impact 'virtual' contact has on children and their parents after separation and divorce, and what the nature of this impact could be.

The analysis used in this paper is grounded in international human rights frameworks, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), UNICEF's Child Online Protection Guidelines and informed by Australian legislative developments such as the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024 (Parliament of Australia, 2024) and the Children's Online Privacy Code. Through this lens, the paper highlights the importance of legal and ethical safeguards that reflect the realities of children's digital lives while upholding their rights to participation, protection, and development.

Ultimately, this paper aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of how law, technology, and child welfare intersect in the context of family separation. It calls for a collaborative, interdisciplinary response that empowers children as digital citizens while ensuring that their best interests remain at the heart of all decisions affecting their lives.

2. THE DIGITAL CHILD IN A POST SEPARATION WORLD

The experience of family separation can be profoundly disruptive for children, affecting their emotional security, sense of identity, and daily routines. In this context, digital communication technologies have emerged as both a coping mechanism and a practical tool for maintaining parent-child relationships across households. From video calls and messaging apps to purpose-built parenting platforms, technology now plays a significant role in how children stay connected with their non-residential parent.

Navigating parenthood in the digital age is no easy task. Children's use of technology in post-separation contexts varies significantly depending on their age, developmental stage, and the level of parental conflict. For younger children, digital contact often requires adult facilitation. As Gollop (2024) notes, video calls with infants and toddlers demand active engagement from caregivers to scaffold interactions, maintain attention, and ensure emotional responsiveness. In these cases, the success of virtual contact is not merely a function of access to technology but of the quality of adult support and the sensitivity of the parent-child relationship.

For older children and adolescents, digital communication offers greater autonomy. Texting, social media, and video messaging can provide a sense of immediacy and continuity in relationships, allowing children to reach out to a parent when they need reassurance or simply want to share a moment. Studies have shown that such contact can foster emotional closeness and reinforce the child's sense of being cared for, even in the absence of physical proximity (Simpson, 2020; Castelain-Meunier & Libbrecht, 1997).

However, the benefits of digital contact are not evenly distributed. In high conflict separations, the use of technology can become fraught. Parents may interfere with or obstruct virtual contact, use children's devices to monitor the other parent, or manipulate communication to assert control. As Birnbaum (2019) and Saini & Polak (2018) observe, the potential for technology to support healthy relationships can be undermined in cases involving domestic violence, parental alienation, or entrenched hostility.

Further, social media platforms most commonly used by children, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat, are not designed with child-parent communication in mind. These apps often lack safeguards for younger users and may expose children to additional risks, including cyberbullying, privacy breaches, and exposure to inappropriate content.

Requiring children to engage and/or communicate with a parent via an App means that children can find themselves exposed to misleading or manipulative commercial practices. Personal data monetisation and misuse, exploitative digital marketing and 'dark' online platforms which manipulate users into doing things they did not mean to all pose risks to a child's right to protection.

While parenting some apps offer more structured and secure communication environments, their uptake remains limited, and their effectiveness depends heavily on parental cooperation.

The digital divide in our modern society also plays a role in shaping children's experiences. Unequal access to devices, internet connectivity, and digital literacy can exacerbate existing inequalities, leaving some children more isolated or excluded from meaningful contact with a parent or family member. This is particularly concerning in rural or low-income households, where technological resources may be limited or inconsistently available.

These challenges are further compounded by what Jonathan Haidt describes as the "great rewiring of childhood." According to Haidt, the period from 2010 to 2015 marked a dramatic shift from a play-based childhood to a technological (and particularly phone based) childhood, driven by the widespread adoption of smartphones, social media, and fast internet. This shift has coincided with a sharp rise in mental health issues among young people, particularly adolescent girls. Haidt argues that children are now overprotected in the physical world but underprotected online, where they are exposed to a constant stream of social comparison, algorithm driven content, and digital distractions.

The implications for children of separated families are significant. The erosion of unstructured, in person, face-to-face play, once a cornerstone of childhood development, has been replaced by screen-based interactions that may lack emotional depth and spontaneity. In the context of family separation, where children may already be grappling with feelings of instability or loss, reliance on digital communication can amplify feelings of isolation, anxiety, and emotional fragmentation.

Haidt also highlights the neurological impact of heavy screen use, particularly on the developing brain. The prefrontal cortex, responsible for attention, impulse control, and emotional regulation, is still maturing during adolescence. Constant exposure to variable rewards, social validation loops, and fragmented attention can disrupt healthy brain development and contribute to sleep deprivation, reduced focus, and mood instability all of which are risk factors for children already navigating the emotional complexities of family breakdown.

Ultimately, the role of technology in post separation parenting is shaped by a complex interplay of factors: the child's age and agency, the quality of the parent-child relationship, the level of parental conflict, and the broader socio-economic context of the family. While digital tools can offer valuable support for children navigating separation, they are not of themselves alone a solution. Their effectiveness depends on cooperative parental alignment, thoughtful implementation, appropriate safeguards, and a commitment to focusing upon the child's needs and rights in all decisions about communication and contact.

3. THE PARADOX OF DIGITAL PARENTING

Technology has transformed the way children experience and navigate family separation. It offers unprecedented opportunities for connection, continuity, and emotional support but can also introduce new and complex risks. This duality is particularly pronounced in the context of post separation parenting, where digital tools can either bridge or deepen divides between children and their parents.

The Benefits of Digital Connection

For many children, especially those living apart from one parent for a variety of reasons, including relationship breakdown and separation, technology provides a vital lifeline. Video calls, instant messaging, and shared digital spaces allow children to maintain a sense of contact, familiarity and routine with a non-resident parent. These interactions can help preserve emotional bonds, reduce feelings of abandonment, and reinforce the child's sense of being loved and remembered.

Research has shown that digital contact can be especially meaningful in situations where physical visitation is limited by geography, work schedules, or health concerns. In Simpson's (2020) study of young people in care, adolescents described their smartphones as essential tools for maintaining a "continuous connection" with loved ones. Similarly, Castelain-Meunier and Libbrecht (1997) found that non-resident fathers used telephone contact to reaffirm their parental role and express care, even when in person, face-to-face contact was infrequent.

Digital communication can also empower children by giving them more control over when and how they engage with each parent. This autonomy can be particularly valuable for adolescents, who may prefer asynchronous forms of contact such as texting or social media messaging. When used appropriately, these tools can support the child's developmental need for independence while still fostering secure attachments.

The Risks of Digital Exposure

However, the same technologies that enable connection can also expose children to significant risks. One of the most pressing concerns is cyberbullying. As Kwan and Skoric (2013) observed, social media platforms extend the reach of bullying beyond the schoolyard, allowing harmful interactions to follow children into their homes and private spaces. For children already dealing with the emotional strain of family separation, this added layer of stress can be particularly damaging.

Exposure to inappropriate content is another major concern. Algorithms on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube can quickly funnel children toward violent, sexual, or extremist material, sometimes after just a brief interaction. As noted in recent Australian parliamentary debate with regards to the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024, even one exposure can trigger a cascade of harmful content, reshaping a child's digital environment in ways that are difficult to reverse.

Privacy breaches are also a growing issue. Children may inadvertently share personal information or be monitored by others without their knowledge. In high conflict separations, one parent may use a child's device to surveil the other parent, undermining trust and safety. The WESNET (2020) survey found that nearly 70% of practitioners had seen cases where children were deliberately given devices to facilitate monitoring or harassment of the other parent.

The Erosion of Boundaries

Perhaps one of the most insidious effects of technology in post-separation contexts is the erosion of boundaries, both physical and emotional. Constant messaging between a child and one parent can intrude on the other parent's time, disrupting routines and creating tension. Unmonitored video calls may allow one parent to observe the other's home environment, potentially using this information in legal disputes or to exert control.

Children may also experience blurred boundaries around their own autonomy and privacy. Shared devices, lack of secure passwords, or pressure to share account access can leave children feeling exposed and disempowered. As Haidt (2024) argues in The Anxious Generation, the shift from a play-based to phone-based childhood has fundamentally altered the developmental landscape. Children are now overprotected in the physical world but underprotected online, where their privacy, attention, and emotional wellbeing are constantly at risk.

Mental Health Implications

The mental health consequences of this digital shift are increasingly evident. Haidt's research highlights a dramatic rise in anxiety, depression, and psychological distress among adolescents since the early 2010s, particularly among girls. Heavy use of social media has been linked to sleep deprivation, attention fragmentation, and reduced face-to-face interaction, all of which can impair emotional regulation and resilience.

For children of separated families, who may already be vulnerable due to instability or conflict, these effects can be magnified. The constant connectivity of digital life can create a sense of surveillance, pressure, or emotional overload. Without appropriate boundaries and support, technology can become a source of stress rather than comfort.

A Need for Balance

The challenge, then, is not to reject technology outright but to use it wisely. Digital tools can play a valuable role in supporting children through family separation. The use of digital tools though must be guided by principles of safety, respect, and the best interests of the child. This requires cooperation between parents, clear expectations around communication, and an awareness of the child's developmental needs and digital literacy.

Courts and practitioners also have a role to play. Parenting orders should consider not only the frequency of digital contact, but the platforms used, the supervision required, and the potential for misuse. Education for parents and children about online safety, privacy, and healthy digital habits is essential.

In summary, technology and its use by children and separated parents should not be viewed as inherently good nor bad, it is but a tool. Its impact upon children navigating family separation depends on how it is used, by whom, and in what context. Recognition of the duality technology presents is the first step toward harnessing its benefits while mitigating its harms.

4. TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED COERCIVE CONTROL AND ABUSE

While technology can serve as a bridge between children and separated parents, it can also become a tool of manipulation, surveillance, and abuse particularly in high conflict separations or where there is a history of family violence. This darker side of digital communication is increasingly recognised in both academic literature and family law practice, where the term "technology-facilitated coercive control" has gained prominence.

Children as Instruments of Control

One of the most concerning developments in post separation dynamics is the use of children's devices as instruments of coercive control. Perpetrators may provide children with phones or tablets not to support their wellbeing, but to monitor the other parent's household, extract information, or maintain a presence in the victim's life. According to the Second WESTNET Survey conducted by Curtain University into Technology Abuse and Domestic Violence in Australia, nearly 70% of surveyed practitioners reported seeing children deliberately given devices for the purpose of monitoring or contacting the other parent, most often (but not always) the mother.

This form of indirect surveillance can be deeply destabilising. Children may be pressured to share passwords, allow access to their accounts, or carry devices embedded with tracking software. In some cases, children are used to transport devices or items between households that enable ongoing monitoring. The study "What's Mum's Password?" (Dragiewicz, Woodlock, Salter, & Harris, 2022) found that mothers and children were often victims of this form of abuse, with children's digital autonomy compromised in ways that blurred the lines between communication and control.

Manipulation Through Communication

Technology also enables more subtle forms of manipulation. Parents may interfere with scheduled virtual contact by claiming technical issues, making the child unavailable, or failing to facilitate the interaction. As Saini and Polak (2018) note, electronic visits can be easily undermined with excuses such as "the internet isn't working" or "the kids don't want to talk." These tactics can be used to alienate the child from the other parent or to assert dominance in the co-parenting relationship.

In some cases, perpetrators use video calls not to support the child's relationship with the other parent, but to gather intelligence about the household. Dragiewicz et al. (2022) found that abusers often used video calls with children to observe the home environment, monitor routines, or indirectly intimidate the other parent. This practice leaves children and their caregivers with a constricted sense of safety and freedom, even in their own homes.

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The Psychological Toll on Children

Children caught in these dynamics often experience confusion, guilt, and divided loyalties. They may feel responsible for managing the emotional needs of both parents and/or be drawn into adult conflicts through digital channels. This can lead to emotional dysregulation, anxiety, and a diminished sense of personal agency.

Children who seemly reject one parent without legitimate justification are particularly vulnerable. As Fidler and Bala (2010) note, such children may exhibit poor reality testing, low self-esteem, and distorted interpersonal perceptions. When technology is used to reinforce these dynamics, through manipulation, surveillance, or exclusion, it can exacerbate the child's psychological distress and hinder their ability to form healthy relationships.

Judicial and Policy Responses

Courts are increasingly aware of the potential for technology to be misused in family law contexts. In some recent Australian and New Zealand family law cases, judicial officers have made Orders for virtual contact but have provided guidelines within those same orders which reflect a growing recognition that digital boundaries must be respected in the same way as physical ones. Courts must consider not only the frequency and mode of contact but also the potential for misuse, the child's age and preferences, and the broader context of the parental relationship.

Policy responses in Australia are also evolving. The Online Safety Amendment Bill 2024 and the Children's Online Privacy Code (Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, 2024) are commonwealth legislative amendments aimed to strengthen protections for children in digital spaces. However, these frameworks must be complemented by family law practices that recognise the unique vulnerabilities of children in post separation contexts, particularly when technology can used as a conduit for coercive control.

A Trauma Informed Approach

Addressing technology facilitated abuse requires a trauma informed, child focused approach. Practitioners must be alert to the ways in which digital tools can be used to perpetuate harm, and courts must be equipped to assess the intent and impact of digital communication. Parenting orders should include clear guidelines around the use of technology, including platform choice, supervision, and boundaries.

Importantly, children must be supported in developing digital literacy and autonomy. They need to understand their rights to privacy and safety, and to have trusted adults they can turn to when those rights are threatened. Education, counselling, and age-appropriate resources can help children navigate the digital landscape with confidence and resilience.

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5. LEGAL AND ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS

The intersection of children's digital lives and family separation raises complex legal and ethical questions. As technology becomes increasingly embedded in the way children communicate, learn, and form relationships, legal systems must evolve to ensure that children's rights are protected both online and offline. This section explores the international and domestic legal frameworks that govern children's digital rights, with a focus on privacy, safety, and participation in the context of family law.

International Human Rights Instruments

The foundational international instrument in this space is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which sets out a comprehensive framework for the protection and promotion of children's rights. Several articles are particularly relevant to the digital context:

- Article 3: The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children.

- Article 12: Children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, with those views given due weight.

- Article 13: Children have the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information.

- Article 16: Children have the right to privacy, including protection from arbitrary interference with their correspondence.

- Article 17: States must ensure children have access to information from diverse sources and protect them from harmful content.

- Article 31: Children have the right to rest, leisure, and play, including participation in cultural and artistic life.

These rights are not absolute and must be balanced against one another. For example, a child's right to express themselves online must be weighed against their right to protection from harm or exploitation. In the context of family separation, this balancing act becomes even more delicate, particularly when digital communication is used to facilitate or undermine parent-child relationships.

The Role of the ICCPR and ICESCR

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) also provide important protections for children and parents. The ICCPR enshrines the right to privacy (Article 17), freedom of expression (Article 19), and protection of the family (Article 23). The ICESCR affirms the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (Article 12), which is increasingly relevant in light of the mental health impacts of digital overexposure.

These instruments collectively underscore the need for legal systems to protect children's digital rights while ensuring that technology is used in ways that support, rather than undermine, their development and wellbeing.

Australian Legal and Policy Developments

Australia has taken steps to address the challenges of children's digital engagement through both legislative reform and regulatory initiatives. Two recent developments are particularly noteworthy:

1. Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024

This legislation amends the current Commonwealth Online Safety Act to introduce a minimum age for social media use, reflecting growing concern about the impact of digital platforms on children's mental health and safety. During parliamentary debate, supporters cited research showing that early exposure to social media is linked to increased anxiety, depression, and exposure to harmful content. Critics, however, warned that strict age restrictions could drive children to less regulated corners of the internet, increasing their vulnerability.

The bill engages several rights under international law, including:

- The right to protection from exploitation (CRC Articles 32 and 34).

- The right to privacy and family life (ICCPR Article 17).

- The right to access information (CRC Article 17).

- The right to non-discrimination (CRC Article 2).

This highlights the tension between protective and participatory rights in digital regulation.

2. Children's Online Privacy Code (2024)

Mandated by the Privacy and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2024, this code places children at the centre of Australia's privacy protections. It requires online service providers to comply with the Australian Privacy Principles in ways that are tailored to the needs and vulnerabilities of children. The code draws on international best practices and aligns with the CRC's emphasis on privacy, autonomy, and protection from harm.

The code is particularly relevant in family law contexts where children's data may be accessed or misused by one parent to monitor or control the other. It reinforces the principle that children are not merely passive users of technology but that they also hold their own digital rights that must be safeguarded.

Ethical Considerations

Beyond legal compliance, ethical considerations must guide the use of technology in post-separation parenting. There is a need to respect the child's autonomy and right to be heard. It is also important that any digital contact with a child supports, rather than disrupts, that child's emotional development. Technology and digital communication must not be used as a means of surveillance or coercion. We also need to encourage and facilitate digital literacy and resilience in children and their caregivers.

A rights based, trauma informed approach is essential. Legal practitioners, judges, and policymakers must be equipped to navigate the ethical complexities of children's digital lives, particularly in the emotionally charged context of family separation.

6. HIGH CONFLICT VS LOW CONFLICT PARENTING CONTEXTS

The role of technology in post separation parenting is not uniform; it is profoundly shaped by the level of conflict between parents. In low conflict separations, digital tools can enhance communication, support co-parenting, and provide children with a stable and reassuring, instant connection to both parents. In contrast, high conflict separations often see technology being weaponised and used to control, manipulate, or alienate a parent from a child, undermining the very relationships it is meant to support.

Technology in Low Conflict Parenting

In amicable separations, parents are more likely to collaborate on the use of technology to support their children's wellbeing. They may agree on the timing, frequency, and platform for digital contact, and work together to ensure that communication is age appropriate and emotionally supportive. Parenting apps can be particularly effective in these contexts, offering structured communication, shared calendars, and documentation features that reduce misunderstandings and promote transparency.

Children in low conflict families are more likely to benefit from the autonomy and immediacy that digital communication provides. They can reach out to a parent when they need comfort or want to share a moment, without fear of reprisal or surveillance. This fosters emotional security and reinforces the child's sense of being loved and supported by both parents.

Technology in High Conflict Parenting

In high conflict separations, however, the same technologies can become tools of coercion and control. Parents may use children's devices to monitor the other household, interfere with scheduled contact, or manipulate the child's

perception of the other parent. As noted in the research by Saini and Polak (2018), electronic contact is frequently undermined in these cases, with one parent making excuses to avoid facilitating communication or using the child's reluctance as justification for non-compliance.

Dragiewicz et al. (2022) found that in high conflict families, video calls were sometimes used by abusive parents to gather information about the other parent's home or to maintain a presence in the victim's life. This form of digital intrusion can be deeply unsettling for both the child and the targeted parent, eroding trust and creating a sense of constant surveillance.

Children in these environments may also be drawn into adult conflicts, either directly, by being asked to report on the other parent, or indirectly, by witnessing hostile exchanges or being exposed to derogatory messages. This can lead to emotional dysregulation, anxiety, and divided loyalties, particularly when children feel pressured to take sides.

Conclusion

Understanding conflict is key to assessing how technology impacts post-separation parenting—supporting connection in low conflict but risking harm in high conflict—so responses must protect children's rights and emotional wellbeing.

7. POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

As digital technologies continue to reshape the landscape of childhood and family life, there is an urgent need for coordinated policy and practice responses that protect children's rights while supporting their relationships and resilience in the context of family separation. The following recommendations are grounded in the research and case law discussed throughout this paper and are intended to guide legal practitioners, policymakers, courts, and caregivers.

Embed Digital Safeguards in Parenting Orders

The Court system should routinely consider the role of technology in parenting arrangements. In this context, parenting Orders should specify:

• The platform(s) to be used for digital contact (e.g., video calls, messaging apps).

• The frequency and duration of contact.

• Supervision requirements, particularly having regard to high conflict or family violence contexts.

• Prohibitions on using children's devices for surveillance or manipulation.

Judicial awareness of technology-facilitated abuse is essential; courts can and should impose boundaries on digital contact to protect children's emotional safety and the integrity of each parent's time.

Promote the Use of Secure Parenting Communication Tools

Parenting apps can offer structured, secure environments for co-parenting communication. These tools:

• Reduce opportunities for conflict and miscommunication.

• Provide a record of interactions that can be reviewed by courts if necessary.

• Help parents coordinate schedules, share documents, and manage expenses.

While these apps are most effective in low conflict situations, they can also serve as accountability tools in high conflict cases. Courts and practitioners should encourage their use where appropriate and provide guidance on their implementation.

Support Digital Literacy and Resilience in Children

Children need support to navigate the digital world safely and confidently. This includes:

• Education on privacy, consent, and online safety.

• Age-appropriate guidance on managing digital relationships.

• Encouragement to set boundaries and seek help when needed.

Schools, family support services, and legal professionals all have a role to play in promoting digital literacy. Programs should be trauma-informed and tailored to be age and developmentally appropriate to the child.

Recognise and Respond to Technology-Facilitated Coercive Control

Legal and support services must be equipped to identify and address technology-facilitated abuse. This includes:

• Training for family law professionals on digital forms of coercive control.

• Risk assessments that include questions about technology use and surveillance.

• Safety planning that addresses digital risks, including device security and communication boundaries.

Children should be recognised as potentially vicarious victims in these scenarios. Their experiences and vulnerabilities must be taken seriously in both legal and therapeutic settings.

Align Domestic Law with International Children's Rights Standards

Broader national strategies should be considered to create safer digital spaces for children and young people, particularly in light of growing evidence linking early social media use to mental health challenges. Legal policy should continue to evolve in line with international human rights instruments, including the CRC and the ICCPR. This includes adapting and enacting legislation which:

• Upholds children's rights to privacy, participation, and protection from harm.

• Ensures that digital regulation reflects the realities of children's lives in separated families.

• Balancing protective measures (e.g., age restrictions) with respect for children's autonomy and access to information.

Foster Cross-Sector Collaboration

Addressing the challenges of children, technology, and separation requires collaboration across legal, educational, health, and social service sectors. Key actions include:

• Developing interdisciplinary guidelines for digital contact in family law.

• Sharing best practices and case studies across jurisdictions.

• Investing in research on the long-term impacts of digital communication in post-separation families.

8. CONCLUSION

The digital transformation of childhood has introduced both profound opportunities and unprecedented challenges. These challenges are more acute for children, navigating the emotional and relational complexities of family separation. Technology has the potential to support children's resilience, maintain meaningful connections with both parents, and provide emotional continuity in times of change. Yet, as this paper has shown, it can also be a conduit for coercive control, surveillance, and psychological harm.

The shift from play-based to phone-based childhood, as described by Haidt (2024), has fundamentally altered the developmental landscape. Children are now growing up in environments where their attention, privacy, and emotional wellbeing are shaped by algorithms, screen time, and digital interactions. For children of separated families, these dynamics are further complicated by the relational tensions and legal structures that define their daily lives.

This paper has explored the dual nature of technology in post-separation parenting, its capacity to connect and to divide, to empower and to exploit. It has examined how digital tools can be used to support healthy parent-child relationships, but also how they can be weaponised in high conflict situations. It highlighted the psychological toll of technology aided abuse, the erosion of boundaries, and the risks of overexposure to harmful content.

Legal and policy frameworks are beginning to respond. However, these measures must be complemented by family law practices that are trauma informed, child focused, and digitally literate.

Courts, practitioners, and caregivers all have a role to play in ensuring that technology is used in ways that uphold children's rights and promote their wellbeing. This includes embedding digital safeguards in parenting orders, supporting children's digital literacy, and recognising the signs of technology-facilitated coercive control. It also requires a commitment to listening to children's voices and respecting their evolving capacities in the digital age.

Ultimately, the goal is not to eliminate technology from children's lives, but to ensure that it serves their best interests. This means creating digital spaces that are safe, respectful, and enriching and ensuring that children are not only protected, but empowered, as they navigate the complex terrain of family, identity, and connection in a wired world.

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