

## *'Toddlers and Tech': Policy Implications for Families and Parenting in the Digital Age*

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### *Abstract*

Policy making for digital parenting, particularly with regard to younger children, is still at a very early stage of development. To date, policy makers have been content to rely on experts such as paediatricians and psychologists when it comes to formulating guidance on children's access to technology. However, given the pace of technological change, this may be insufficient or inadequate for the many issues now facing parents in regard to mediating the role technology plays in the lives of their children. In order to survey the dilemmas for policy makers as well as the gaps in current policy making in relation to technology in the lives of younger children (0-8 years old), this paper addresses three main issues from a European policy perspective. Firstly, how appropriate or effective is the approach of self-regulation when it comes to managing technology risks facing parents and younger children? How does this square, for example, in the banning of some smart toys for children? Secondly, how adequate and / or realistic is the emphasis given to effective digital parenting as a solution towards managing digital risks? Parents, we are told – at least from a practical point of view – are best placed to guide and oversee their children's technology use. Yet, are parents adequately supported to undertake this important role. And thirdly, is the emergent regime on data protection regulation an indicator of a different approach that will shape families' digital experiences in a different or better way? These three areas of policy debate combine to suggest a realm of policy thinking at a crossroads where the role of regulation in managing key parameters of digital experience for all users is being re-assessed. Arguably, the regulation of privacy is now arguably pre-eminent in this field and while particular attention has been given to the 'digital age of consent' (for children 13 years and over), connected technologies will shape all families' digital participation, presenting ever-more challenging dilemmas for policy.