

Center on Media and Child Health

Michael Rich, MD, MPH, Founder and Director

The media-saturated environment in which kids are growing up is arguably the most powerful and pervasive influence on their physical, mental, and social health – we strive to help families master media, using them in mindful, focused ways.

– Michael Rich MD, aka The Mediatician



Founded in 2002, the Center on Media and Child Health (CMCH) based at Boston Children's Hospital is dedicated to rigorously studying the positive and negative effects of the media children use on their development, to implementing findings to reduce risk and optimize health, and to working with young people's powerful engagement with technology to promote their present and future well-being.

It has been a year of renewed purpose and direction for CMCH. We have amplified our outreach to the children, parents, and child health providers we serve through increased presence in national and international press. We have engaged with the entertainment industry and the educational community to get our information and strategies to families across the US. We keynoted the American Academy of Pediatrics national meeting, motivating their 66,000 members to integrate media health into best practice child healthcare. Working with a consultancy firm, we have created a strategic plan that refines our focus, streamlines our workflow and will ensure our future.

A refined focus on child health practitioners and parents



While CMCH’s goal remains steadfast—to apply interdisciplinary scientific evidence to promote healthy child development by guiding children’s mindful use of media—our strategy is undergoing a change. We are now focusing on child health practitioners and parents as our main audience.

We aim to:

- provide information to child health practitioners so they understand the positive and negative effects of the media children use and how they use them—and give them tools to address media as a critical influence on child health and development;
- educate parents to actively guide their children’s media use and exposure, from birth, in parallel with their nutrition, physical activity, and safety needs;
- restructure our Board of Advisors to play a more active role, becoming an integral part of CMCH’s work. In reconceiving the Advisor role, we will be seeking insight and expertise from our collaborators and individuals, in the arenas of health insurance, entertainment, business, and communications.

Our collaborations

CMCH is collaborating with Hasbro Toys, entertainers Marlo Thomas and Ryan Seacrest, Comcast NBCUniversal, and Harvard Pilgrim Health Care on our largest projects. Our reach has grown from national to international and will continue to scale up over the coming years. Dr. Rich has traveled across the US and around the globe, sharing with professionals and parents the latest scientific evidence about optimal ways to raise healthy children in our media-saturated digital world. He keynoted the 2016 American Academy of Pediatrics national meeting, international meetings of adolescent health and communication professionals, and met with individuals and groups anxious to know more about the effects of media on the health and wellbeing of children, adolescents, and young adults.

Do today’s children have a “play deficit”?

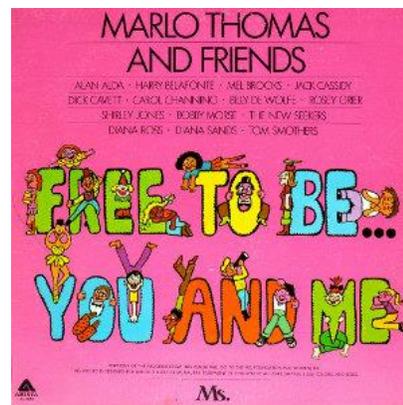


Screen media use has reduced unstructured outdoor free play by children, leading to concerns about a “play deficit.” CMCH has teamed up with Hasbro Toys, Bentley University and Anahuac University to better understand how children’s traditional and digital play in their daily lives may influence developmental outcomes. *More Play Today*, begun in late 2015, is studying 327 children in the US and Mexico aged two-and-a-half through seven. The team is using Measuring Childhood

Play Experiences (MCPE), an innovative, smartphone-based methodology developed by CMCH. MCPE signals parents’ smartphones at random moments to obtain real-time reports and video documentation of children’s activities, focusing on play and the contexts in which it happens. In four waves of data collection over two years, the children complete laboratory assessments of their social-emotional development, cognitive abilities, and executive functioning, followed by two weeks of monitoring their natural, everyday activities. This will help us understand children’s play patterns and associations with their cognitive and behavioral development over time.

Reimagining a children’s classic

With support from the Armstrong Angel Foundation and in partnership with the Joan Ganz Cooney Center (JGCC) at Sesame Workshop, CMCH has begun work with Marlo Thomas and Ryan Seacrest to revitalize and reimagine Ms. Thomas’ classic 1972 musical children’s television special *Free to Be... You and Me* as a multi-platform media production for today’s tweens. Like the original special, the new production will celebrate and encourage individuality, empathy, and comfort with one’s identity. CMCH convened experts from education, communication, gender and race studies, religion and economics, with creative leaders from film, television, music and digital games at the Harvard Graduate School of Education to build the curricular foundation for *Free to Be 2.0*. Following the convening, CMCH and JGCC launched a national research initiative aimed at understanding the most pressing issues facing today’s tweens. Utilizing this research, expert advice, and artistic insight, the team is developing the educational curriculum, television series, and social movement of *Free to Be*, aiming for a Fall 2017 debut.



“Ask the Mediatrician”



For the past 7 years, Comcast NBCUniversal has supported CMCH outreach through *Ask the Mediatrician*TM. Dr. Rich, aka The Mediatrician, offers the latest evidence about media and their effects on child health to parents and those who care for children, adolescents, and young adults through our online advice column, *Ask the Mediatrician*; our informative website, cmch.tv; our online video series *The Mediatrician Speaks*; social media outlets; and *Mediatrics*, our database of scientific research on the positive and negative health effects of media use.

With the support and collaboration of Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, CMCH has developed a Clinician Toolkit for pediatric providers to advise parents and assess patients for physical and mental health issues related to children’s and adolescents’ media use. The electronic Toolkit includes parent and patient media and health survey forms; age-based tip sheets for parents on topics including child media use, social skills, drugs and alcohol; and guidance sheets for pediatric providers. Physicians and parents will better understand the influence of media in a child’s life and learn to see its unmanaged consumption as a public health concern, taking greater strides towards mindful usage.

Looking to the future

As digital media continues to evolve and proliferate at lightning speed, parents, pediatricians and other child experts are increasingly concerned about the effect of technology use on children’s development. Thanks to you, our generous donors, we at the Center on Media and Child Health continue to build on our strong foundation of research and guidance, and we have a clear and actionable plan for the future. We will continue to update you on our progress and new initiatives. A heartfelt “thank you” for making this increasingly critical work possible.