Together, we are helping our children to grow up healthy, smart, and kind in our increasingly immersive digital environment.
Every day, millions of children and teens worldwide log on through their smartphones, tablets, computers, and gaming systems.

There they find entire worlds that enable them to learn new skills, communicate with friends, play games, watch movies, and meet new people. This connectivity can support healthy social interaction and learning, but it also introduces a host of risks, including physical ailments, social challenges, and mental health issues.

After the COVID-19 pandemic locked us down, young adolescents reported using screens and interactive media nearly eight hours per day, a doubling of their reported pre-pandemic use. While these media were important to adolescents’ sense of connection and joy, we also know that depressive symptoms and suicide rates have been shown to increase in parallel with increased time engaging with interactive and screen-based media. When combined with the other stressors youth have experienced in recent years, it’s not surprising that young people are reporting higher rates of psychological distress.

8 HOURS
average amount of time kids are spending online each day, not including school hours
In the absence of comprehensive current research, the broader public debate over technology and wellness has become deeply and unproductively polarized.

On one side are those who focus almost exclusively on potential risks. On the other side are those who focus almost exclusively on potential benefits. Every parent, doctor, entrepreneur, and educator knows that the digital revolution isn’t all good or all bad. New technologies have improved our schools, workplaces, and homes in ways unimaginable even a few years ago – and with that transformation comes a new set of challenges that must be addressed.

By addressing children’s use of digital media from a values-based, “right vs wrong” perspective - rather than holistically, pragmatically, and with academic rigor – each participant feels their viewpoint must win and leaves the discourse dissatisfied and unchanged. Doctors, psychologists, and other healthcare providers lack the information they need to make sound recommendations regarding prevention and treatment of screen-related problems. Educators are excited by the potential of educational technology but have variable training in how to use technology effectively while avoiding problematic behaviors. Technology companies and content creators lack the information they need to build wellness into their products. Perhaps most importantly, parents and families are left feeling confused, overwhelmed, and guilty.

New technologies have transformed nearly every facet of our lives. Yet, decades after the start of this technology revolution, we still don’t really understand how our interactions with digital media affect our brains, bodies, and behaviors.
The Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children’s Hospital was created to answer two fundamental questions and develop research-based recommendations for those who create and use digital technology.

Can we develop technology that nurtures creativity, empathy, and wellbeing?

How can I best raise healthy, smart, kind children in our digital age?
FROM A MOTHER OF AN INTROVERTED TEENAGE BOY

**Interactive social media has been a blessing.** During the pandemic my son was able to engage with a group of friends for online gaming. He also used Tik Tok to find a daily workout routine and got himself more fit and healthy.

FROM THE SAME MOTHER OF AN EXTREMELY SOCIAL TEENAGE GIRL

**Interactive social media became more of a curse.** During the pandemic my daughter found herself engaging in multiple social groups with people I didn’t even know. At one point the online bullying became so bad that she attempted suicide on Instagram Live and ended up institutionalized for anxiety and depression.
We have an opportunity to change the conversation, to help our kids gain control of the screens they are growing up with and to harness them for healthy development and social engagement.

DR. MICHAEL RICH | Founder & Director, Digital Wellness Lab & Pediatrician, Boston Children's Hospital
# 2021 Impact Report

## Changing the Conversation

### What's Inside

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In 2019, we at the Center on Media and Child Health at Boston Children’s Hospital made the bold decision to broaden our focus to engage key stakeholders from academic research, healthcare, and corporate industry in an open collaboration designed to: deepen our understanding of the positive and negative effects of the media and technology young people use and how they use them; to use what we learn to empower caregivers, educators, and clinicians; and to make meaningful wellness-focused changes in the design of digital devices, applications, and content.

While the pandemic slowed us operationally, it functioned as an accelerant and amplifier of the issues we have been addressing for two decades. In Spring 2021, the Digital Wellness Lab was born, with a mandate to join forces with healthcare providers, scientists, and industry in order to transform the health of children, families, and society by fostering understanding of, innovation in, and humanization of the digital environment.

Over the last year, we have built impactful relationships with our dozen founding supporters, who have helped to ensure that the Lab’s initial start up phase is successful. Despite travel bans and the limitations of Zoom-based meetings, we have taken the Lab global, holding meetings with researchers in Singapore, Brazil, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, Sweden, Australia, Canada, and India; educators from Abu Dhabi to Alberta; and industry professionals in Peru and the United Kingdom. Our staff have delivered presentations and webinars to parents across the country and our researchers have designed and executed studies that provide actionable, evidence-based guidance for caregivers, educators, and clinicians.

Our team has grown and we look forward to growing it further in the coming year. We will need additional capacity to achieve all of the big, audacious goals and impact we have in store! I’m excited to share all that we’ve accomplished this year and all that we look forward to accomplishing in 2022 and beyond.

As we face the post-pandemic “next normal,” we have a heightened obligation to change how we engage with each other and with our screens and to support and nurture young people’s digital wellness as they dive more deeply into an ever-more immersive digital world. We are thrilled to be at the forefront of that opportunity and look forward to engaging with you on this work.

All my best,

Dr. Michael Rich
At the Digital Wellness Lab, we focus on topics of key importance for young people’s healthy development within a digitally immersive environment.

We conduct research on the influence of the screens youth use and how they use them on:

- Brain Development
- Social Connection & Belongingness
- Mental Health
- Screen Time vs. Green Time
- Digital Inequities
- Social Emotional Development
- Health Risk Behaviors
- Problematic Interactive Media Use (PIMU)
- Digital Literacy and Citizenship
- Technology in Education
- Cyberbullying
- Prosocial Media

How do we know how much screen time is too much? And how do we compete with an industry that specializes in algorithms we can’t even begin to understand? — PARENT, New Hampshire
2021 Highlights

We responded to the pandemic by producing:

5
webinars conducted with 20 expert panelists

35+
press mentions

27
resources released, including:
The Family Digital Wellness Guide, 5 additional toolkits, 20 articles, and 1 research repository
2021 Highlights

Officially launched Digital Wellness Lab

In March 2021, we launched the Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children’s Hospital as an evolution of the Center on Media and Child Health, originally founded in 2002. Instead of continuing the polarized discourse between those who advocate for children and those focused on digital innovation, the Lab brings together a team of rivals from technology, entertainment, education, and healthcare to bring their diverse skillsets to bear on the challenge of building a healthier, more humane digital environment.

“Digital wellness needs to be considered a critical part of overall health and wellbeing.”

KRISTELLE LAVALLEE Senior Content Strategist, Digital Wellness Lab
In March 2021, we published an updated *Family Digital Wellness Guide*, addressing “the next normal” as we all settled into life amidst a pandemic. Organized by developmental stage from infancy to adulthood, the guide examines key developmental tasks of each stage as they are affected by and reflected on the screens we use. The Guide offers caregivers recommendations for optimizing their children’s and teens’ online wellness.
2021 Highlights

RESOURCES

Media Health Effects research database

In October 2021, the Digital Wellness Lab launched Media Health Effects, a powerful and dynamic research tool for anyone interested in learning more about the scientific research evidence on the intersections of media, technology, and young people’s health. By reviewing over 30,000 articles from nearly 20 separate disciplines concerned with the influences of screen media on physical, mental, and social wellbeing, we populated the database with over 2,500 well-curated citations, with up-to-date citations added regularly. In the coming year, we will provide additional curated guidance to address the most pressing questions posed by caregivers seeking to support digital wellness for children and teens.

Media Health Effects is a curated resource for anyone—from caregivers to clinicians—seeking to support digital wellness for children and teens.
The Digital Wellness Lab’s Pulse Surveys asked parents about their child’s use of media and its impact on their wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2021 Highlights

### Pulse Reports

In March, September, and December, 2021, the Lab published three reports sharing out the results of an ongoing series of surveys that “take the pulse of the nation” on topics related to children’s and adolescents’ media use and their physical, mental, and social health. These surveys asked parents about their child’s use of media and its impact on their wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic, eliciting findings that were expected – kids’ total screen time rose dramatically during lockdown and remote schooling; unexpected – their screen time increased after lockdowns were lifted and remote schooling ended in the summer; and nuanced – both positive and negative mental and social health outcomes were observed.

**Children’s First Cell Phones**

Parents’ Perspectives on Risks and Benefits

**Parents’ Perspectives: Summer Media Use and the Return to School**

## Surveys

- **Parents’ Perspectives: Media Use & Remote Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Infographics**

- **Experience with Remote Learning**
  - **Helped**
  - **Hurt**
  - **Neither**

- **Skills and Academic Success**
  - **Reading Skills**
  - **Math Skills**
  - **Social Skills**

- **Family and Friend Connections**

- **Impact of Screen Media Use**
  - **Direct Texting**
  - **Multiplayer Games**
  - **Watch Short Videos**
  - **Learn New Skills**
  - **Find Information**

- **Pulse Reports**
  - **March ‘21**
  - **September ‘21**
  - **December ‘21**

- **RESOURCES**
  - **Digitalwellnesslab.org**
  - **Take the Pulse of the Nation**
  - **Three Reports**
  - **Published**
  - **Impact of Remote Learning**
  - **Positive and Negative Outcomes**
  - **Screen Time**
  - **COVID-19 Pandemic**
  - **Children’s Wellbeing**

- **Contact:**
  - **digitalwellnesslab@bch.harvard.edu**
  - **+1-617-732-6300**

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*Information on the methodology can be found on Page 7 of this report.*
2021 Highlights

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Course on Problematic Interactive Media Use (PIMU)

In October 2021, the Digital Wellness Lab sponsored the first-ever continuing medical education course on Problematic Interactive Media Use (PIMU). The course taught physicians, physician assistants, nurses, psychologists, and social workers to recognize, respond to, and prevent PIMU. On-demand access to the course is scheduled to go live in January 2022.

“Unlike a substance addiction, where abstinence from the substance is the treatment, the therapeutic goal for PIMU is self-regulation of a necessary resource.”

DR. MICHAEL RICH

Unlike a substance addiction, where abstinence from the substance is the treatment, the therapeutic goal for PIMU is self-regulation of a necessary resource.

Michael Rich, MD, MPH
David Bickham, PhD
Kristelle Lavallee, MA

Michael Tsappis, MD
Lauren Mendoza, LCSW
Tarek Aly, MD, MPH

Isdin Oke, MD

Phil McRae, PhD
2021 Financials

REVENUE SOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted Gifts</td>
<td>$1,660,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted Gifts</td>
<td>$121,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,781,000</strong></td>
</tr>
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USE OF FUNDS RAISED

- **Research**: 40%
- **Outreach**: 40%
- **Lab Launch**: 20%
Digital Wellness Lab Supporters

Our work is made possible through the generosity of individuals, foundations, and corporate supporters.

"We’re proud to partner with the Digital Wellness Lab in our ongoing effort to support families and encourage positive digital habits. TRACY ELIZABETH Global Minor Safety Policy Lead, TikTok"
Donors & Grants

GRANTS

Technology and Adolescent Mental Wellness
University of Wisconsin & Media Power Youth

Dr. David Bickham, the Lab’s Lead Research Scientist, led a collaboration with Media Power Youth (MPY) - a digital literacy organization based in Manchester, NH - on a grant provided by the University of Wisconsin to evaluate MPY’s Screenshots curriculum in shaping constructive media usage and stimulating the behaviors that lead to positive social connections and resilience.

Identifying the Unique Characteristics of a Clinical Sample of Patients with Media-Use Disorders: Building Towards a Research-Based Clinical Trial
McCarthy Family Foundation

Dr. David Bickham served as Principal Investigator on a McCarthy Family Foundation-funded project employing a chart review of patients from the Clinic on Interactive Media and Internet Disorders (CIMAID) in order to identify behavioral patterns and emotional problems that increase the risk of developing Problematic Interactive Media Use (PIMU).

Digital Wellness Lab Parent Resources
Anonymous

Kristelle Lavallee led a project funded by a large media company to develop a set of science-based resources designed to provide parents and other caregivers with evidence-based information, strategies, and tools to support them in raising healthy, smart, and kind children in a digitally saturated world.

Digital Wellness Lab Launch
Ruderman Family Foundation

The Ruderman Family Foundation provided seed funding to support the evolution of the Center on Media and Child Health (CMCH) to the Digital Wellness Lab, to help enable the team to lay the foundation for the new Lab and to create resources for parents and other caregivers over the course of the year.
Looking Ahead

Over the next 3-5 years, we are focusing our efforts on:

Deepening our shared understanding of what digital wellness looks like in practice and how to foster it within existing and emerging technologies;

Designing and disseminating impactful evidence-based guidance to empower young people in building and maintaining a healthy engagement with the digital world;

Working collaboratively with relevant industries to support their building wellness into the foundational design of existing and emerging technologies, applications, and supports; and

Building the sustainability and profile of the Digital Wellness Lab for impact, reach, and longevity.

This strategy is intentionally flexible to enable us to shift nimbly with the pace of technological innovation and environmental changes (such as we experienced with the COVID-19 pandemic).

We will continue to produce research-informed resources, webinars, and presentations for caregivers and to engage in research on young people’s digital wellness. The Lab continues to maintain a close relationship with the Clinic for Interactive Media and Internet Disorders (CIMAID), enabling us to derive clinical insights and develop and evaluate therapeutic interventions and prevention strategies.

“

Our K-12 school administrators are devoting an average of 10-20 hours per week to some aspect of social media’s influence, ranging from the distribution of inappropriate photos and videos to bullying and threats.  

SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADER, Massachusetts
Looking Ahead

In addition to our ongoing efforts, key new projects in 2022 will include:

Expanding the [Media Health Effects](#) database to include more cross-functional research citations, research guides, an insights column written by collaborating researchers, and spotlights on exciting new research on the intersections of media, technology, and young people’s health.

Convening a [Youth Advisory Board](#) of geographically and demographically diverse youth to share their pressing questions and insights, express hopes and concerns, and review the Digital Wellness Lab’s analyses and recommendations for relevance and feasibility for young people.

Launching a [monthly newsletter](#) summarizing the latest highlights and happenings from the Lab.

Releasing a [podcast series](#) featuring experts from a variety of tech-related fields who will address some of the most provocative, yet common caregiver and educator concerns regarding digital wellness.

Engaging in formalized [collaborative partnerships](#) with leading researchers globally to increase the capacity and speed at which we can deepen our understanding of digital wellness, particularly as it relates to emerging technologies.
Get Involved

The Digital Wellness Lab is made up of a dynamic and collaborative team of experts and thought leaders from health sciences, tech, academics and entertainment. We are ever-evolving and interested in others becoming part of our mission. Here are some opportunities on how you can become involved in the Lab’s work:

JOIN OUR TEAM

The Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children’s Hospital, the country’s top pediatric hospital, is a mission-driven organization dedicated to understanding and promoting wellness in the digital age. We maintain a lean team but anticipate hiring for a number of roles in the coming year. If you are interested in joining the Lab, you can learn more on our Hiring page.

BECOME A SUPPORTER

The Digital Wellness Lab convenes supporters from healthcare, technology, media, and entertainment to deepen our understanding and address the future of young people’s healthy engagement with media and technology. Our supporters meet regularly to discuss shared issues of importance related to digital wellness. If your organization is interested in becoming involved as a financial supporter, please email Cori Stott to discuss further.

REQUEST FOR TALKS OR EXPERT PANELISTS

The Digital Wellness Lab has a wealth and breadth of knowledge about topics related to health, development, and interactive media use in the digital age. We would be happy to engage with your organization and stakeholders to present information of relevance to you through training, keynote speeches, and presentations. Please submit requests via our website. If you have questions, please email Cori Stott.

VISITING SCHOLAR AND INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The Digital Wellness Lab can host graduate students and post-doctoral researchers who are interested in learning more about digital wellness topics while leveraging their academic expertise to strengthen our global impact. If you are interested in joining us as a visiting scholar or intern, please email Cori Stott with your CV and area of academic interest.

To stay informed on our latest work, sign up for our newsletter.

For more information, please contact Cori Stott, Administrative Director, at dwl@childrens.harvard.edu
Our Team

Michael Rich, MD, MPH
DIRECTOR, FOUNDER, PEDIATRICIAN

David Bickham, PhD
RESEARCH SCIENTIST LEAD

Cori Stott, MBA, EdM
ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR

Kristelle Lavallee Collins, MA
SENIOR CONTENT STRATEGIST

Libby Hunt, MA
CLINICAL RESEARCH SPECIALIST

Jill R. Kavanaugh, MLIS, AHIP
KNOWLEDGE PROGRAM LIBRARIAN

Brian Keller
WEB DEVELOPER
Expert Advisors

ASSOCIATES

Associates of the Digital Wellness Lab are individuals who contribute unique knowledge or skills to the Lab, typically on a time-bound basis as volunteers, visiting scholars, or hourly supports. Associates strengthen our collective efforts, increase our impact, and add capacity in targeted ways based on their specific areas of expertise and interest.

Tarek Aly, MD, MPH
Benoit Bediou, PhD*
Yuxuan (Eleanor) Dong*
Lisa Hurwitz, PhD
Isobel McEwen*
Summer Moukalled
Peter Raffalli, MD
Keneisha Sinclair-McBride, PhD
Ron Slaby, PhD
Nick Woolf, MA

*Visiting Scholar or Intern

ADVISORS

Our talented advisors support the growth of the Digital Wellness Lab by offering their expert guidance as we work to make a difference in how young people engage with digital media.

Daphne Bavelier, PhD
Katy Giffault
Alicia Haywood
Steve Horowitz
Heather Inyart
Ramy Katrib
Philip McRae, PhD
Yuhyun Park, PhD
Michael Preston, PhD
Jordan Shlain, MD
Tiffany Shlain
Kimberly Voll, PhD
Our Visiting Scholars & Interns

**Benoît (Ben) Bediou, PhD**  
*Senior Research Associate*  
UNIVERSITY OF GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Dr. Bediou is spending the academic year with the Digital Wellness Lab conducting advanced analyses on collected data; collaborating on current and future research; and helping develop new research questions, methods, and experimental designs that incorporate cognitive and affective measures. Ben adds new perspectives from his research focusing on specific types of media uses and outcomes by combining cross-sectional data with experimental research designs in adult populations. Ben is helping us grow internationally by transporting Digital Wellness Lab research to Europe, allowing us to increase research sample sizes and examine cultural differences in media effects.

**Isobel McEwen**  
*Candidate for Master of Science, Epidemiology*  
HARVARD T.H. CHAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Isobel is spending the academic year supporting the Digital Wellness Lab’s research efforts, with a particular focus on deepening our understanding of the hallmarks of problematic interactive media use (PIMU). In collaboration with the Lab’s research team and clinicians from Boston Children’s Hospital’s Clinic for Interactive Media and Internet Disorders (CIMAID), Isobel is working to identify patterns in environmental and relational circumstances that may serve as predictors of PIMU for children and adolescents. This work will be integral in designing early interventions and therapeutic approaches for Problematic Interactive Media Use (PIMU).

**Yuxuan (Eleanor) Dong**  
*Candidate for Master of Education, Human Development and Education*  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Eleanor is spending the academic year supporting the Digital Wellness Lab’s outreach and engagement efforts, with a particular focus on building educators’ understanding of digital wellness. In collaboration with the Lab’s content and research teams, Eleanor is creating evidence-based, clinically-informed content focused on supporting parents and educators in fostering their young people’s healthy, productive engagement with digital media. This work will increase the Lab’s ability to translate research to actionable guidance for caregivers.
Selected Press

**Reuters**  
NOV 2021  
Researchers study TikTok videos as unexplained tics appear in teens

**USA Today**  
NOV 2021  
Screen time among teenagers during COVID more than doubled outside of virtual school, study finds

**WBUR**  
NOV 2021  
Teens’ screen time doubled to 8 hours a day during the pandemic - not counting schoolwork

**Time Magazine**  
NOV 2021  
How Ryan Kaji became the most popular 10-year-old in the world

**National Geographic**  
OCT 2021  
Pandemic myths are all over social media - and they’re dangerous for kids

**ConnectSafely**  
SEP 2021  
Protecting Mental Health on Instagram

**Wall Street Journal**  
SEP 2021  
China sets weekday ban on kids’ videogame play. Should you do that too?

**HuffPost**  
AUG 2021  
How do we move away from all the screen time our kids are used to now?

**TechCrunch**  
JUL 2021  
Instagram to default young teens to private accounts, restrict ads and unwanted adult contact

**Mother Jones**  
JUN 2021  
Stop the Freakout Over Kids’ Screen Time

**NBC News**  
APR 2021  
Study shows some students benefiting from remote learning

**Psychology Today**  
APR 2021  
What does summer screen-time balance mean in 2021?

**United Nations Social Development Network**  
APR 2021  
Harnessing digital technologies for maternal health and parenting
Selected Presentations

Family Online Safety Institute Annual Conference
NOV 2021 | K. LAVALLEE
Talking to Parents About Screen Time and Digital Overload

Family Online Safety Institute Annual Conference
NOV 2021 | M. RICH
Technology’s Positive Role in Child Development

International Association for Adolescent Health 12th World Congress
NOV 2021 | M. RICH
Plenary Debate: Is Social Media Good or Bad for Adolescents?

Teachers College, Columbia University
NOV 2021 | M. RICH (panelist)
Pedagogies of Possibility: Exploring Culturally Responsive Education During COVID-19

Technology, Mind, and Society 2021 Conference
NOV 2021 | D. BICKHAM
Young People’s Media Use and Remote Schooling Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry Annual Meeting
OCT 2021 | M. RICH
Debate: Are Problematic Screen Habits a Behavioral Addiction?

Fairfax County Public Schools
OCT 2021 | K. LAVALLEE
Family Digital Wellness: When is the Internet a Problem?

Penn Medicine Princeton Health Grand Rounds
OCT 2021 | D. BICKHAM
From Instagram to Internet Addiction: Adolescent Mental Health in the Digital Age

Technology and Adolescent Mental Wellness 2021 Colloquium
SEP 2021 | D. BICKHAM
Youth-to-Youth Curriculum Design: The evolution of Screenshots, A School-Based Media Literacy Program

EuroDIG (European Dialogue on Internet Governance)
JUN 2021 | K. LAVALLEE & J. KAVANAUGH
Researchers study TikTok videos as unexplained tics appear in teens

Society for Research on Child Development 2021 Conference
JUN 2021 | D. BICKHAM
Investigating Reading in Children’s Daily Lives: The Role of Screen Media, Parental Presence and Location

Pediatric Academic Societies 2021 Conference
MAY 2021 | D. BICKHAM
Behavioral Health Problems Underlying Problematic Interactive Media Use
Selected Academic Publications

**American Academy of Pediatrics**
An Internet quiz game intervention reduced alcohol drinking among 7,792 Hong Kong adolescents: A cluster randomised controlled trial

OCT 20, 2021 | BICKHAM DS, MOUKALLED S, RICH M
Young People’s Media Use and Remote Schooling Experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry**
2021 OCT 1;60(10):S39 | RICH M
Parenting the Digital Native as Mentor and Mentee

**JMIR Mental Health**
2021 SEPT; 8(9); E261971 | BICKHAM DS, MOUKALLED S, INYART HK, ZLOKOWER R
Evaluating a Middle-School Digital Citizenship Curriculum (Screenshots): Quasi-Experimental Study

**Health Quality of Life Outcomes**
Impact of sleep duration, physical activity, and screen time on health-related quality of life in children and adolescents

**Current Pediatrics Reports**
2021 MARCH; 9; 1-10 | BICKHAM DS
Current research and viewpoints on internet addiction in adolescents

**Journal of Adolescent Health**
FEB 2021 | BICKHAM DS, YU Y, MOUKALLED S, TSAPPIS M, RICH M
96. Identifying Behavioral and Emotional Characteristics of Problematic Interactive Media Use Patients
End Notes


The Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children’s Hospital seeks to understand and promote wellness in the digital age.