

## Where Children Discover Their Inner Child



Marilyn K. Yee/The New York Times

Interactive exhibits in "EatSleepPlay: Building Health Every Day" at the Children's Museum of Manhattan.

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WHAT would you think if you visited a public restroom, and the toilet began to talk — in a female voice with a British accent no less — about the bodily function you'd just performed?

No such bathroom exists in New York City, but "The Royal Flush," among more than 70 interactive exhibits in "EatSleepPlay: Building Health Every Day," the new show at the Children's Museum of Manhattan, does something similar. When little visitors pull this fake toilet's handle, it responds with images and explains, in the warm but slightly brisk tones of a no-nonsense nanny, that what we excrete provides clues to our well-being.

That Mary Poppins voice "adds a sense of decorum to a topic that could otherwise be misconstrued," Tom Quaranta, the museum's director of exhibition services and operations, said in an interview. But while some staff members initially recoiled, "The Royal Flush" ultimately won approval as an ideal expression of this 3,500-square-foot exhibition's mission: to teach children about health in ways that can be vivid and visceral but also playful, memorable and easy to understand.

"It's a huge arts installation," said Andrew S. Ackerman, the museum's executive director, as finishing touches were applied last week. "We want it to be at the heart of behavior change, the way a great movie can be or a great book can be."



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A talking toilet at the Children's Museum of Manhattan.

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