

**Phillip Calvin McGraw** (born September 1, 1950), better known as **Dr. Phil**, is an American television personality and author who is best known for hosting the talk show *Dr. Phil*. He holds a doctorate in clinical psychology, though he ceased renewing his license to practice psychology in 2006.

McGraw rose to fame with appearances on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in the late 1990s. Oprah Winfrey then helped McGraw launch his own advice show, *Dr. Phil*, in September 2002.

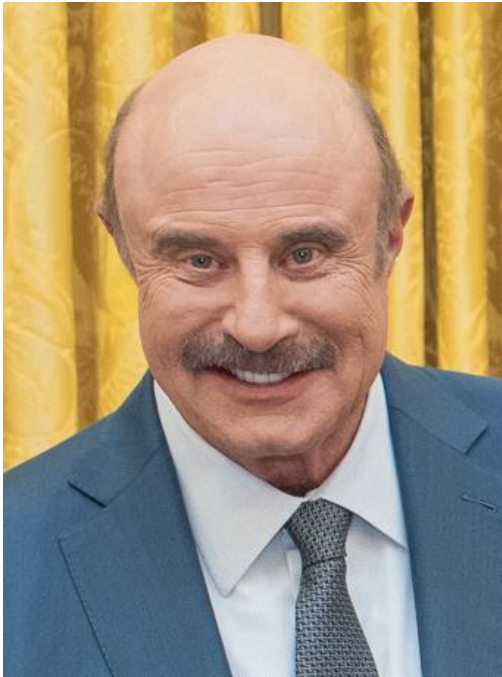
Early life and education

Phillip Calvin McGraw was born in Vinita, Oklahoma, on September 1, 1950, the son of Joseph J. McGraw Jr. (1924–1993)<sup>[1]</sup> and his wife Anne Geraldine "Jerry" (née Stevens; 1924–2011).<sup>[2][3][4]</sup> He grew up with two older sisters, Deana and Donna, and younger sister Brenda<sup>[5]</sup> in the oilfields of North Texas where his father was an equipment supplier. At age 13, he worked at an A&W Root Beer stand and a local chain called Pizza Planet in Oklahoma City.<sup>[6]</sup>

McGraw moved to Kansas with his father, who pursued his lifelong goal of becoming a psychologist. There, Phil attended Shawnee Mission North High School in Overland Park, Kansas. He played linebacker on the high school football team and, in 1968, earned a football scholarship to the University of Tulsa where he played middle linebacker under coach Glenn Dobbs.

He later transferred to Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas, where he graduated in 1975 with a B.A. in psychology. He went on to earn an M.A. in experimental psychology in 1976 and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology in 1979, both at North Texas State University (now the University of North Texas),<sup>[7]</sup> where his dissertation was titled "Rheumatoid Arthritis:"

Dr. Phil



McGraw in 2025

Born	Phillip Calvin McGraw September 1, 1950 <u>Vinita, Oklahoma, U.S.</u>
Education	<u>Midwestern State University (BA)</u> <u>North Texas State University (MA, PhD)</u>
Occupations	<u>Television host</u> · <u>author</u>
Spouses	<u>Debbie Higgins McCall</u> ( <u>m.</u> 1970; <u>ann.</u> 1973) <u>Robin Jameson</u> ( <u>m.</u> 1976)
Children	2, including <u>Jay McGraw</u>
Relatives	<u>Erica Dahm</u> (daughter-in-law)
Website	<u>drphil.com</u> ( <u>http://drphil.com</u> ) (personal) <u>meritstreetmedia.com</u> ( <u>http://meritstreetmedia.com</u> ) (TV network)

A Psychological Intervention."<sup>[8]</sup> He did a year of post-doctoral training in forensic psychology at the Wilmington Institute.<sup>[9]</sup> McGraw's doctoral advisor was Frank Lawlis, who later became the primary contributing psychologist for the *Dr. Phil* television show.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Early career

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After obtaining his doctorate, McGraw rejoined his father in Wichita Falls, Texas, where the elder McGraw had established his private psychology practice.<sup>[11]</sup>

In 1985,<sup>[12][13]</sup> McGraw and his father partnered with Thelma Box, a Texas businesswoman, in presenting "Pathways" self-help seminars.<sup>[14]</sup> In October 1991, six years after joining Box, the younger McGraw sold his share in the company for \$325,000.<sup>[13]</sup>

In 1990, McGraw co-founded Courtroom Sciences, Inc. (CSI), a trial consulting firm, with lawyer Gary Dobbs. CSI would perform "dry runs" of court cases in simulated courtrooms, and McGraw would offer advice about what parts of the lawyer's case worked and what parts did not.<sup>[13]</sup> McGraw is no longer an officer or director of the company.<sup>[15]</sup> The TV show *Bull* is based on McGraw's experience as a trial consultant, and he is credited as one of the creators of the series.<sup>[16]</sup> McGraw began working with Oprah Winfrey through CSI.<sup>[17][13][18]</sup>

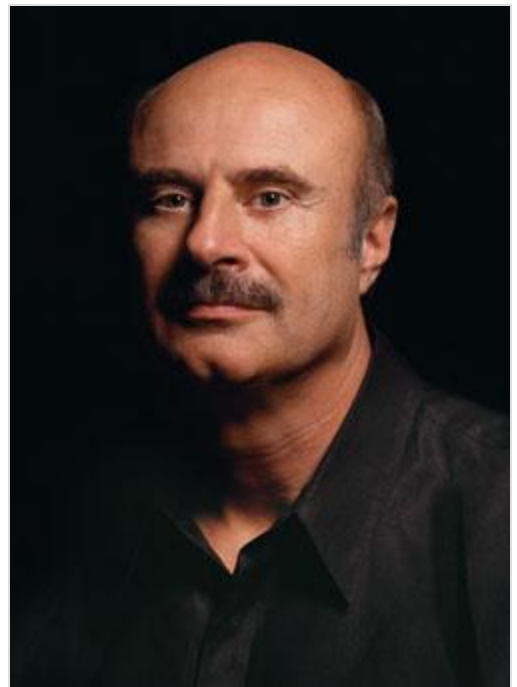
## Television career

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### Oprah Winfrey and the *Dr. Phil* show

In 1995, Oprah Winfrey hired McGraw's legal consulting firm CSI to prepare her for the Amarillo Texas beef trial. Winfrey was so impressed with McGraw that she thanked him for her victory in that case, which ended in 1998. Soon after, she invited him to appear on her show. His appearance proved so successful that he began appearing weekly as a relationship and life strategy expert on Tuesdays, starting in April 1998.<sup>[19][20]</sup>

In September 2002, McGraw formed Peteski Productions<sup>[21]</sup> and launched his own syndicated daily television show, *Dr. Phil*, produced by Winfrey's Harpo Studios. *Dr. Phil* is an advice show in which McGraw tackles a different topic each show, offering advice to his guests. He signed a five-year extension of his syndication deal with his show's distributors, King World Productions, Inc. The deal was to pay McGraw \$15 million per year<sup>[22]</sup> and keep the show in production through the 2013–2014 television season.<sup>[23]</sup>



McGraw photographed for the cover of *Newsweek* magazine by Jerry Avenaim in 2001

In 2007, McGraw was named 30th on the *Forbes* Celebrity 100 list. On May 21, 2007, *Dr. Phil* was ranked fourth by Nielsen Media Research, with 6.69 million viewers. On May 12, 2008, almost one year later, the show was ranked sixth with 5.69 million viewers.<sup>[24][25]</sup> At that time, the only talk show more popular than *Dr. Phil* was *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.<sup>[26]</sup> On December 11, 2018, *Dr. Phil* was the top syndicated show with a "2.9 live-plus-same-day" national Nielsen rating, ranking first among talk shows for the 117th consecutive week.<sup>[27]</sup> His ranking improved, and by 2020, he was in the 22nd spot on the aforementioned *Forbes* list with earnings of \$65.5 million.<sup>[28]</sup>

## Spin-off shows

In 2005, Phil and Jay McGraw, Phil's eldest son, formed Stage 29 Productions,<sup>[29]</sup> and a week later, announced a new show called *Moochers* (similar to ABC's *Kicked Out*).<sup>[30]</sup> Ultimately, the show was not produced.

In 2006, the *Dr. Phil House* (similar to CBS's *Big Brother*) began airing as part of the *Dr. Phil* television show. Following a protest by neighbors, the house in Los Angeles was shut down, and production resumed on a sound stage on a studio back lot.<sup>[31]</sup>

Stage 29 launched *Decision House* in September 2007. It was executive produced by Jay McGraw,<sup>[32]</sup> and featured Judge Lynn Toler (from *Divorce Court*) on MyNetworkTV.<sup>[33]</sup> The show produced 13 episodes during its only season, which ran until May 24, 2008.<sup>[34]</sup>

Late in 2007, McGraw began promoting the *Dr. Phil Show* spinoff series *The Doctors*.<sup>[35]</sup> The show, which first aired in September 2008 and ended in August 2022, was hosted by television personality and ER physician Travis Stork;<sup>[36]</sup> Jay was executive producer of the show. On September 8, 2008, *The Doctors* debuted and, as of November 10, had a 2.0 rating.<sup>[37]</sup> The show won a *Daytime Emmy Award* as Outstanding Talk Show/Informative in 2010, and was nominated eight times between 2009 and 2013.<sup>[38][39][40]</sup>

*Daily Mail TV*, executive produced by Phil and Jay McGraw, along with producers Martin Clarke, Carla Pennington, and Jeffrey Wilson, won the Daytime Emmy Award for Outstanding News Program in 2019.<sup>[41][42]</sup>

In August 2021, the reality television series *House Calls with Dr. Phil* aired on CBS.<sup>[43]</sup> In the series, McGraw visits various families at home and offers advice on their home life.<sup>[44]</sup> The series ended after six episodes in September 2021.

## Merit Street

In November 2023, McGraw announced Merit Street Media, a new Fort Worth-based media company and television network he planned to launch in 2024. The network would be devoted primarily to news and true crime programming, and be anchored by *Dr. Phil Primetime*—a successor to the syndicated *Dr. Phil* series.<sup>[45][46]</sup> Merit Street launched on April 2, 2024.<sup>[47]</sup> Just more than a year later, Merit Street filed for bankruptcy, alleging that *Trinity Broadcasting Network*, its broadcast partner, reneged on its obligations.<sup>[48][49]</sup>

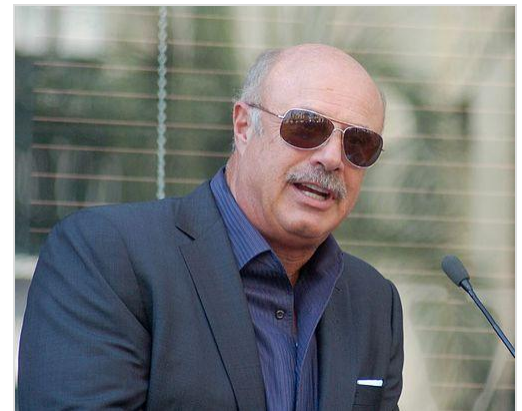
## Doctor on Demand

In 2012, McGraw founded the telehealth company Doctor On Demand, an online platform that allows individuals to schedule virtual appointments with a network of physicians and therapists.<sup>[50]</sup> The company launched a web and mobile service in 2014.<sup>[51]</sup> The platform focuses on services related to preventative care, medication management, wellness, and mental health.<sup>[52]</sup> According to ABC News, the company had a network of around 11,000 board-certified physicians as of 2015.<sup>[53]</sup> In March 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the company expanded its bandwidth and increased its pool of therapists to deal with the increasing volume of patients seeking virtual consultations and care.<sup>[54]</sup>

## Approach to psychology

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McGraw's advice and methods have drawn criticism from fellow psychotherapists and non-experts. McGraw's critics regard advice given by him to be, at best, simplistic and, at worst, ineffective or harmful.<sup>[55]</sup> The National Alliance on Mental Illness called McGraw's conduct in one episode of his television show "unethical" and "incredibly irresponsible".<sup>[56]</sup> McGraw said in a 2001 *Chicago Tribune* interview that he never liked traditional one-on-one counseling, and that "I'm not the Hush-Puppies, pipe and 'Let's talk about your mother' kind of psychologist."<sup>[57]</sup>



McGraw in 2013

McGraw frequently advises individuals to seek professional help, particularly psychotherapy. A 2016 study at The Ohio State University found that viewers were more likely to seek professional mental health care for themselves and their children after seeing McGraw deal with similar issues on the *Dr. Phil* show.<sup>[58]</sup> The study attributed this phenomenon to viewers' tendency to form a parasocial bond with McGraw through watching the show, and have increased belief in their ability to seek help.<sup>[59]</sup>

## Controversies and lawsuits

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### 1970s

In 1971, McGraw lived in Topeka, Kansas, and ran the Grecian Health Spa alongside his father and two friends.<sup>[60]</sup> McGraw abruptly closed the business, filed for bankruptcy and moved out of state in September 1973.<sup>[61]</sup> McGraw had sold the lifetime membership contracts customers had signed to another company, resulting in customers being still legally responsible for the membership even though the spa was closed. McGraw and his business partners were investigated by the state's Attorney General office.<sup>[62]</sup> Lead investigator Emory Goad said "McGraw had been pulling off a textbook example of a membership scam. He was signing up hundreds of customers to long, expensive contracts, then turning around and selling the contracts to a financial institution for a percentage of the total value up front in cash. He then simply shut down the spa at some point after collecting that

money and left town. It was a total rip-off because the customers would still be liable for the contract payments, only now to the financial institution."<sup>[63]</sup> McGraw was sued by several Topeka banks for \$41,000 they claimed he owed, but the lawsuits and investigation stalled when he left the state.<sup>[63]</sup>

## 2000s

McGraw stopped renewing his Texas license to practice psychology in 2006;<sup>[64]</sup> he has never had a license in California, where his show is taped. In 2002, the California Board of Psychology determined that, because McGraw's television show was more about entertainment than psychology, McGraw did not need a license.<sup>[65]</sup>

In 2003, McGraw lent his name and image to a line of nutritional supplements, including vitamin packets, meal replacement drinks, and power bars under the brand name Shape Up, under a licensing agreement with CSA Nutraceuticals, a Texas start-up. The deal stipulated that a certain percentage of sales would be given to the Dr. Phil Foundation, a Dallas charity that works on issues like childhood obesity.<sup>[19]</sup> CSA Nutraceuticals stopped producing the supplements in 2004 after the Federal Trade Commission began investigating it for false advertising.<sup>[66]</sup> Three disappointed consumers filed a lawsuit in 2004, claiming that it made false or unproven claims.<sup>[67]</sup> In 2006, a \$10.5 million settlement was reached.<sup>[68]</sup>

In 2003, *The Making of Dr. Phil*, an unauthorized biography by Sophia Dembling and Lisa Gutierrez, was published by John Wiley & Sons.<sup>[69]</sup> The book covers McGraw's personal and professional life, including allegations of abuse and unethical practices, with interviews from his childhood friends and former classmates.<sup>[70]</sup>

In 2006, McGraw was named a co-defendant, along with Paramount, CBS Television, and others, in a 2006 lawsuit filed concerning the disappearance of Natalee Holloway.<sup>[71]</sup> The lawsuit was filed by Deepak Kalpoe and his brother Satish Kalpoe, who claimed that an interview they did with McGraw, aired in September 2005, was "manipulated and later broadcast as being accurate, and which portrays Deepak Kalpoe and Satish Kalpoe 'as engaging in criminal activity against Natalee Holloway and constitutes defamation.'"<sup>[71]</sup> On March 17, 2015, the lawsuit against McGraw and CBS was dismissed.<sup>[72]</sup> The court records disclosed the lawsuit by Deepak and Satish Kalpoe was rejected one week before the civil trial was set to begin.<sup>[73][74]</sup>

Another contentious case arose in January 2008, when McGraw visited pop star Britney Spears in her hospital room.<sup>[75]</sup> The visit by McGraw drew criticism from the Spears family and mental health professionals; it appeared to be part of an attempt at getting Spears and her parents to participate in an "intervention" on the *Dr. Phil* television show.<sup>[76]</sup> Immediately after the visit, McGraw issued public statements<sup>[77][78]</sup> about Spears' situation that the Spears' family spokeswoman Lou Taylor said violated their family's trust in McGraw. "This is another example of a trust being betrayed", Taylor told *Today* co-host Meredith Vieira. "Rather than helping the family's situation, the celebrity psychologist caused additional damage".<sup>[79]</sup> Several mental health care professionals criticized McGraw for his actions, but fellow television psychologist Joyce Brothers defended McGraw.<sup>[80]</sup> It was reported that a psychologist filed a complaint with the California Board of Psychology (BOP), alleging that McGraw had practiced psychology without a license and had violated doctor-patient privilege by discussing Spears' case with the media.<sup>[81]</sup> A copy of the complaint appeared in the



media,<sup>[81]</sup> but there is no way to verify whether or not it was submitted to BOP as it does not disclose that information unless an investigation is opened.<sup>[82]</sup> Martin Greenberg, a former BOP president, said on the *Today Show* that this incident was not a matter that the law covers or would be concerned about.<sup>[82]</sup>

Later that year, McGraw was sued by Thomas Riccio, the memorabilia collector responsible for taping the Las Vegas robbery that led to O. J. Simpson's conviction. Riccio sued McGraw in Los Angeles Superior Court for defamation and other complaints, stemming from an interview he did on the *Dr. Phil Show* which aired on October 8, 2008.<sup>[83]</sup> The claims were dismissed, with the judge finding that it was protected speech under the First Amendment.<sup>[84]</sup>

## 2010s

In 2016, McGraw and his wife filed a \$250 million defamation lawsuit against American Media, Inc., a publishing company that owns the *National Enquirer* and Radar Online, due primarily to their publishing an interview from a former patient<sup>[85]</sup> who had accused McGraw of sexually assaulting her in the 1980s while under his care.<sup>[86]</sup> McGraw had denied the sexual abuse allegations since they were first made against him in 2003.<sup>[87]</sup> The lawsuit was later dropped on mutual terms.<sup>[88]</sup>

McGraw was criticized for an interview featuring actress Shelley Duvall, which aired in 2016. Vivian Kubrick described McGraw's behavior towards Duvall as "exploitative" and "appallingly cruel" and called for a boycott of the show.<sup>[89][90][91]</sup>

## 2020s

In February 2022, around a dozen current and former employees of *Dr. Phil* alleged that they experienced "verbal abuse in a workplace that fosters fear, intimidation, and racism."<sup>[92][93]</sup> Seven current employees also claimed that the show's guests are often manipulated and treated unethically.<sup>[92]</sup> Attorneys for McGraw and his co-producer, Carla Pennington, categorically denied every allegation.<sup>[92][94]</sup>

A former guest who appeared on *Dr. Phil* in 2016, Danielle Bregoli, also known as "Bhad Bhabie", criticized the methods of Turn-About Ranch, an Escalante, Utah-based therapeutic horse ranch for troubled youth that McGraw had endorsed. In 2022, McGraw, Viacom and CBS were sued by Bregoli and Hannah Archuleta, another former guest, for recommending their parents send them to Turn-About Ranch. Afterward, McGraw stopped recommending Turn-About Ranch on *Dr. Phil*.<sup>[95][96][97][98][99]</sup>

## Writing career

In 1999, McGraw published his first book, *Life Strategies*. In the following six years, McGraw published three additional relationship books, *Relationship Rescue*, *Self Matters*, and *Family First*.<sup>[100]</sup> Since 2022, McGraw and physician John Whyte have co-written a series of columns for WebMD and *USA Today*.<sup>[101][102]</sup> The former has also written op-eds for *Sportico* and *The Hill*.<sup>[103][104]</sup>

## Selected works

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## Awards and recognition

McGraw was inducted into the Broadcasting & Cable Hall of Fame in 2015.<sup>[105]</sup> In 2020, he received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.<sup>[106]</sup> McGraw was invited to give the presidential address at the 2006 annual convention of the American Psychological Association, where he received the APA's Presidential Citation for "highlighting mental health issues" to "more Americans than any other living psychologist."<sup>[107][108]</sup>

## Personal life

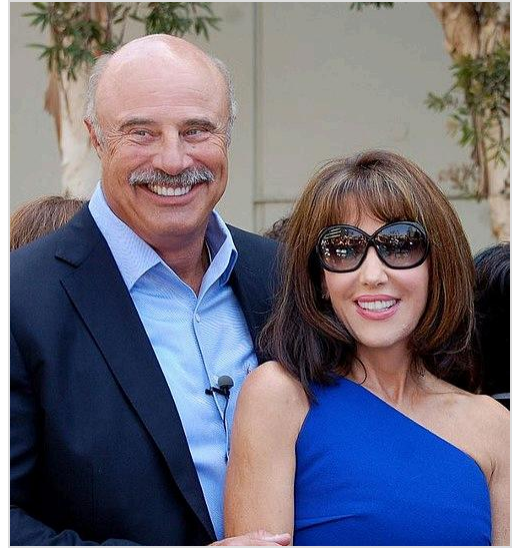
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McGraw married his first wife, Debbie Higgins McCall, in 1970, when he was 20 years old.<sup>[11]</sup> According to her, McGraw was domineering and would not allow her to participate in the family business. She claimed that she was confined to domestic duties and instructed to begin lifting weights to improve her bustline.<sup>[109]</sup> McCall also claimed that infidelity had ended their marriage.<sup>[110]</sup>

While annulling the marriage in 1973, McGraw met and began dating Robin Jo Jameson, whom he married in 1976.<sup>[111]</sup> The couple have two children together, Jay McGraw and Jordan McGraw.<sup>[112]</sup>

McGraw is a private pilot, with an instrument rating, flying single-engine airplanes.<sup>[113]</sup> He is a Christian.<sup>[114]</sup> He launched a Dr. Phil Foundation charity in October 2003.<sup>[115][116][117]</sup>

McGraw endorsed Donald Trump in the 2024 United States presidential election.<sup>[118]</sup> In January 2025, McGraw accompanied ICE officers to a raid in Chicago, coinciding with deportations under the second Trump administration.<sup>[119][120][121]</sup>



McGraw with wife Robin in May 2013



# Filmography

Year	Title	Role	Notes
2003	<i>Frasier</i>	Himself	Episode: <i>The Devil and Dr. Phil</i> <sup>[122]</sup>
2004	<i>Sesame Street</i>		2 episodes <sup>[123]</sup>
2006	<i>Scary Movie 4</i>		Film; Cameo appearance <sup>[124]</sup>
2006	<i>The Simpsons</i>	Himself (voice)	Episode: <i>Treehouse of Horror XVII</i> <sup>[125]</sup>
2009	<i>Madea Goes to Jail</i>	Himself	Film; Cameo appearance <sup>[126]</sup>
2009	<i>Curb Your Enthusiasm</i>		Episode: <i>Vehicular Fellatio</i> <sup>[127]</sup>
2010	<i>Hannah Montana</i>		Episode: <i>I'll Always Remember You</i> <sup>[128]</sup>
2016	<i>WWE Raw</i>		Episode: April 11, 2016 <sup>[129]</sup>
2017	<i>A Crooked Somebody</i>		Film; Cameo appearance <sup>[130]</sup>
2019	<i>PewDiePie's Meme Review</i>		Episode: "Dr Phil hosts Meme Review" <sup>[131]</sup>
2020	<i>Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?</i>		Episode: "In The Hot Seat: Catherine O'Hara & Dr. Phil" <sup>[132]</sup>
	<i>Sketchy Times with Lilly Singh</i>	Himself (cameo)	First episode <sup>[133]</sup>

# Discography

## Guest appearances

Title	Year	Peak chart positions			Album
		US <sup>[134]</sup>	US R&B/HH <sup>[135]</sup>	CAN <sup>[136]</sup>	
"Cash Me Outside" <div>(with <u>Bhad Bhabie</u>, featured by <u>DJ Suede the Remix God</u>)</div>	2017	72	30	79	Non-album single

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