



# MYTHOS

A play therapy game for children with trauma

# Overview

Lost in the strange, desolate world of Mythos, adopted children and children with trauma role-play as a stuffed bear where they use the tools of their choice to find their way home.

Similar to a digital version of Adventure Games or Clue Escape Room and armed with the play therapist's toolbox, children explore their new world to locate magical objects and overcome obstacles, while picking up valuable skills along the way. Over the course of their journey, they will come to realize that home is more than what they think.



# Therapy goals

- Mirrors experiences often faced by adopted children and children with trauma.
- Used as a tool by play therapists in concert with therapy.
- Flexible so it can accommodate varying treatment goals, based on the situation and child.
- Mimics the environment and flexibility of the playroom, with no timer or rules. In a safe space, children can choose how they progress through the game.
- Key focus on teaching children life skills and strategies, such as identifying their feelings or learning coping skills.
- Can played anywhere by anyone, regardless of age, background, physical/mental status, education, or skill.

Where does Rada feel scared?



NEXT →

**Target audience:** Adopted children and children with trauma, ages 8-12

**Ultimate treatment goal:** Termination of self-defeating acting out behaviors and acceptance of self as loved and loveable within a family

# Game pillars

**Role-play:** Children participate in the game as a stuffed animal, allowing them to experience their emotions and make the trauma journey using an outside lens.

**Player-directed:** As a digital point and click game, with no timer or rules, children utilize the play therapist's toolbox (constructive, sensory, functional, creative, dramatic, and social) to progress through the game. There is no right or wrong way to achieve the goal.

**Action adventure:** To advance the game, children locate and collect objects, solve puzzles, overcome obstacles and challenges, and pick up a variety of skills, such as identifying their feelings, learning coping skills, understanding loss, and others.

**No experience required:** Due to the neurodiversity of this group, the game should be able to be played by anyone, regardless of age, background, physical/mental status, education, or skill level.

# Game objectives

**Collection.** Players can collect items and view them in their inventory. Each item has a specific purpose, and it is up to the player to determine how to use them.

**Solve.** As an action-adventure game, players work to solve puzzles and challenges, which can consist of using an inventory item, harnessing their superpower, employing a stress reaction, or employing the play therapist's toolbox.

**Escape.** At the start of the game, players find themselves stuck in a dilapidated cabin. From there, they work to work their way through the world of Mythos and find their way back home.

# Dramatic elements

## Characters

Children participate in the game as a stuffed bear. They can customize the bear's name, age, color and choose a superpower.

NPCs, most often shown as talking animals, serve as key context. The player must interact with other characters to learn information and advance the game.

## Setting

Mythos is a cold, desolate, dystopian world with ruins and fantasy underpinnings:

- Mythical beasts (fairies, gigantic spiders, talking animals, dragons, unicorns, trolls, etc.)
- Magical objects (wands, potions, spells, books, etc.)
- Magical powers (teleporting, invisibility, flying, shapeshifting, etc.)

## Story & Plot

The story begins with a tragedy, where their bear finds themselves far from home and lost in the desolate, fantasy-like land of Mythos.

Children explore their new world to locate magical objects and overcome obstacles, while picking up valuable skills along the way.

## Super Story

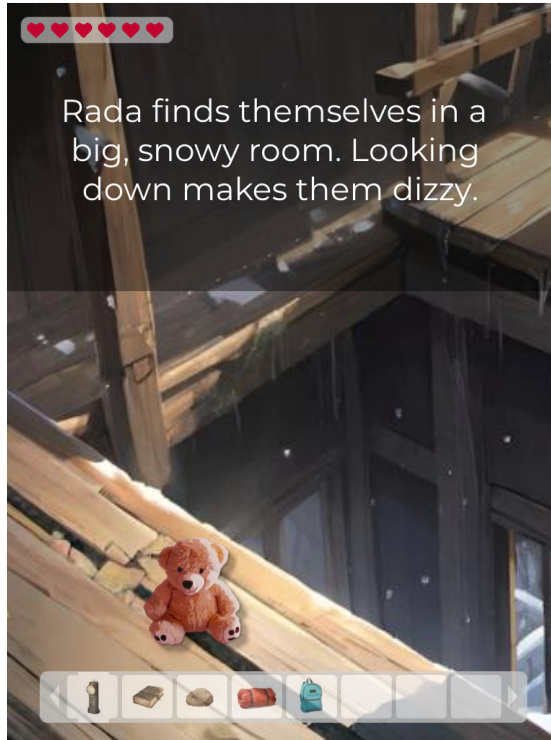
The game uses the 12-step hero quest to mimic the process often used in trauma and recovery programs.

In concert with their therapist, the story uses a character-based narrative to take child players through the stuffed bear's trauma journey and enable some type of character transformation.

# Visual target

Mythos is a cold, snowy, dystopian world with ruins and fantasy underpinnings. It uses an anime illustration style to keep things light and fun.

The game visually depicts how trauma can upend one's world from a happy place to a one where everything is scary and falling apart. The game's focus is on helping these children work through these emotions, come to terms with what's happened, and then make it out the other side.



The background features a large blue gradient on the right side. On the left, there are two vertical panels with abstract, colorful patterns. The top panel shows a mix of purple, pink, and yellow, while the bottom panel shows yellow, blue, and purple. A horizontal light blue bar with a dark blue shadow underneath spans across the middle of the image, containing the text.

# Core Mechanics



# Core game loop

As an action-adventure game, players interact with their environment to achieve the objective for each location and unlock the next level. In this first iteration, I used basic materials and will incorporate the stuffed bear avatar and anime style in the next phase.

## Solving challenges

Players explore their environment to collect objects and clues.



## Unlocking new areas

For this iteration, players are required to collect all the objects in a room before they can proceed.



# Solving puzzles

The primary mechanic revolves around players pointing and clicking on highlighted markers and objects. Some provide clues, while others allow players to collect items or revolve around a challenge.

## Collecting objects

Players collect objects as part of gameplay. Later iterations will include a robust inventory system.



## Collecting clues

Players can take pictures of clues and later piece them together to decipher and understand puzzles.

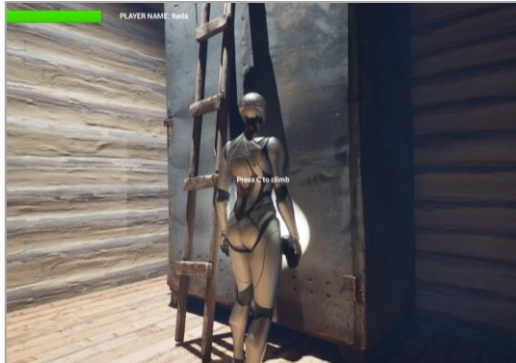


# Navigating gameplay

As part of gameplay, players may need to climb ladders to access objects in high places, navigate obstacles, grab and move objects, and use a flashlight to see what's around them in dark areas.

## Climbing

Sometimes players need access to high places, indicated by a ladder.



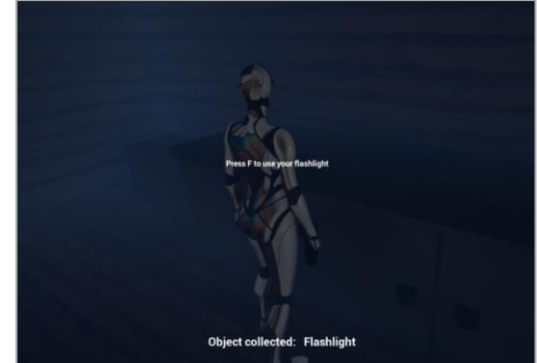
## Moving objects

Players often need to grab and move objects for access or to move through the level.



## Using a flashlight

Some areas are poorly lit and require the use of a flashlight to properly explore.



# Conditions

## **Win conditions**

Game play shows one part of the map at a time. The map builds as players proceed through the game.

Like Adventure Games, Clue Escape Room, and other point-and-click games, players interact with various objects to achieve the objective for each location. This unlocks the next location on the map, leading up to the final challenge for that level.

## **Fail conditions**

If a player attempts to complete a challenge before they have collected any required objects or performed any required tasks, they will be redirected and unable to proceed to the next checkpoint.



# Key Concepts



Unique selling points

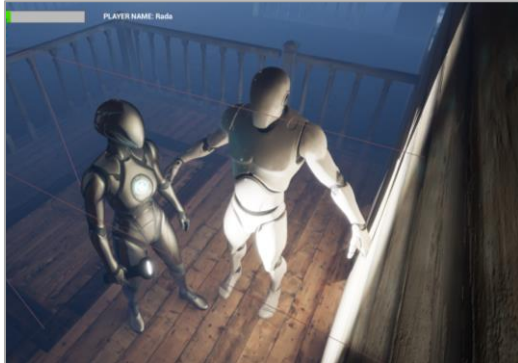


# Maintaining health

Children with trauma often find it difficult to determine if they are hungry, thirsty, tired, or cold so the concept of maintaining health is a key component of the game.

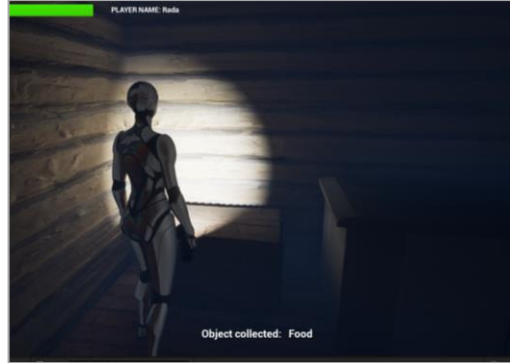
## Taking damage

Encounters with other characters or falling off a railing requires first aid.



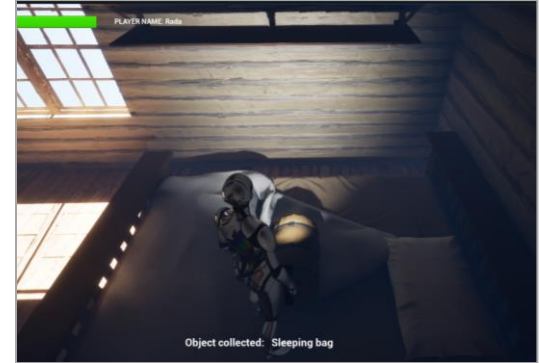
## Hunger and thirst

Lots of physical exertion will make players hungry. Water increases stamina.



## Tired and cold

If tired, players need to find a safe place to rest. If cold, they need to find a heat source.



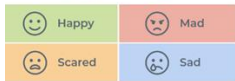
# Learning life skills

Because children with trauma often have issues with executive functioning, a large part of the game revolves around teaching a variety of life skills and strategies.

## Feeling Zones

Players are often prompted to identify how their bear is feeling and where they are experiencing those emotions.

How does Rada feel?



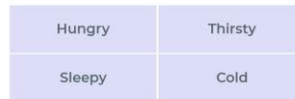
Where does Rada feel scared?



## Body Zones

As they encounter various elements in the game, players will be prompted to identify their bear's physical state.

How does Rada's body feel?



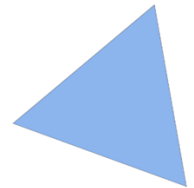
## Brain Breaks

When stressed, players will take a moment to help their bear calm down.

Rada needs to take a moment to clear her head.



Drag the triangle to help Rada rock her body



# Navigating complex situations

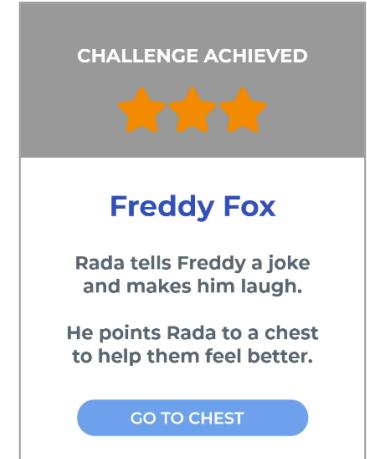
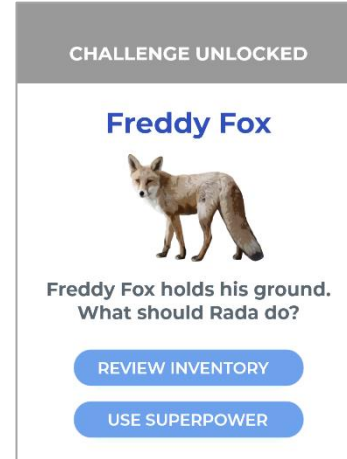
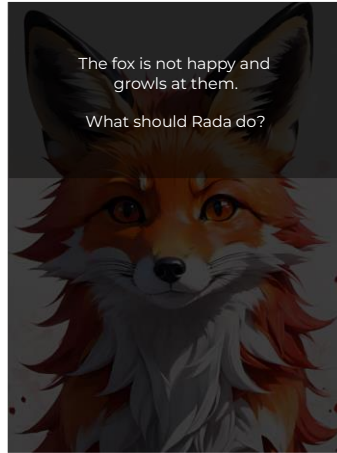
To help children learn how to better navigate complex situations, the game uses a spinner to help players determine their next action. This can include utilizing their inventory, their superpower, stress reactions, and options from the play therapist's toolkit.





# Interacting with other characters

Negotiating and interacting with other people can be a challenge for children with trauma. During gameplay, the player must interact with other characters to learn information and advance the game. Some present information and important objects, while others can walk along as a partner in the player's quest.



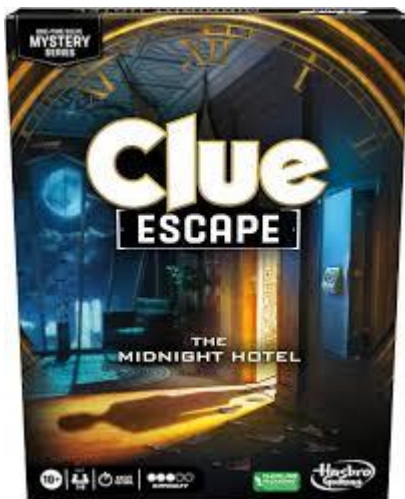


# Project Proposal

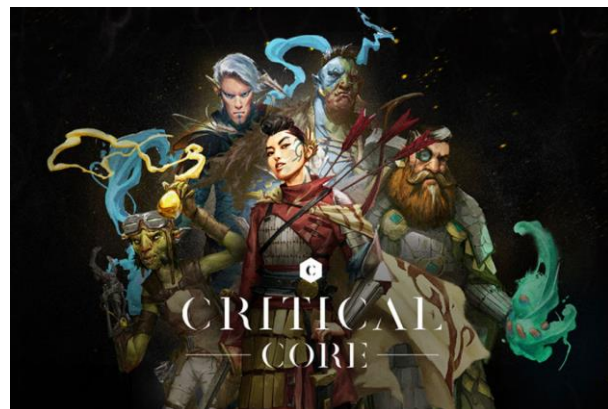
# Competition and similar games



[Adventure Games](#)



[Clue Escape Room](#)



[Critical Core](#)

# Localization needs

Mythos is specifically designed to be used as a tool by therapists. They can incorporate the game into their individual/play therapy sessions, as well as with child support groups.

Therapists will be provided with a companion guide. Split into modules, the guide will discuss various aspects of the game and provide suggestions for treatment goals.

Throughout the game, therapists check in to see how the child is doing and provide support, as well as work with parents to continue necessary support at home.

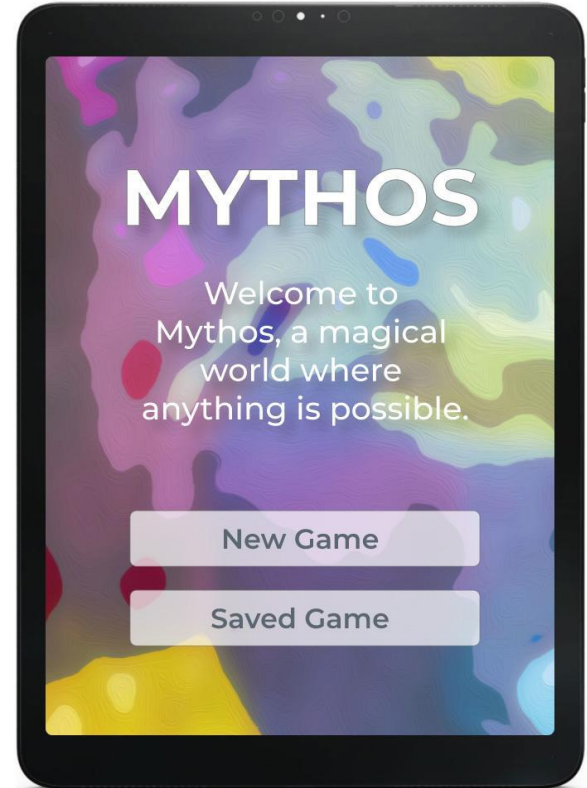
**Business model:** Subscription (where developer provides ongoing technical support).  
The cost to the provider is passed through to the patient's insurance.

# Unique selling points

This study is one of the few to address adopted children and their use of play, and one of the first to discuss the use of virtual play to treat adopted children and children with trauma.

To determine the viability of the game within the therapeutic space, I showed three participants a design presentation describing the concept of the game.

Two were play therapists and the other was a social worker who worked with adopted children.



Unique selling points

# Customization and Role Play

## Value of role play

“

I love that being a bear in what's going on is removed enough from their experience that it's not threatening, but it's close enough to their experience that their brain can still make those connections, which is what you're going for. *(Therapist #2)*

”

## Ability to project feelings

“

And so kids could say with play—and especially if there's like an object like this that kids are likely to project their experience—what they would do onto that object. And so you could talk about it in the context of the bear. And really, you know, they can be internalizing that message. It's the same thing. *(Therapist #1)*

”

Unique selling points

# Focus on Transferable Life Skills

## Real-world application

“

I like that you have the skills integrated because there's like this real-world application, but it's about someone else. And it's fantasy. But they're practicing those skills, which helps them get that into their brain. I think that will make it stick in their brain more than if someone just talks about it with them, or has them do it. *(Therapist #2)*

”

## Working with therapist

“

So it's important, even if they are like, 'I don't know how the bear is feeling? I don't know. I'll just click one.' So then, as the therapist, I would know, okay, maybe we need to go back to our other work and kind of pause and get curious about experiences. *(Therapist #1)*

”

Unique selling points

# Flexible Storyline

## Can be molded to fit child's experience

“

I like the whole storyline here, where you begin in the ordinary world, something happens, and then you end up somewhere and you're really depressed. You have no idea what happens. I love that it's vague, but it's not like, you don't really say exactly what happened. I love that because the therapist can adjust it in the ways they need to. *(Therapist #2)*

”

## Can tie to child's story

“

That's the cool thing about having a therapist doing it with them. Eventually you'd be able to, once you build that relationship with them and once they trust you more, you would eventually be able to get to the point where you could talk about their story. You can kind of adapt it to their story and build upon it. *(Therapist #3)*

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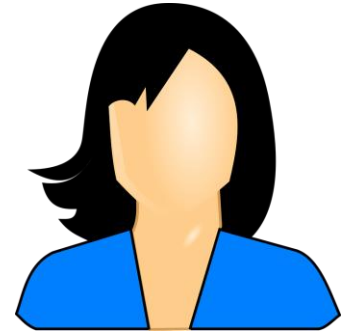


# Team and next steps

Throughout my career, I have specialized in utilizing my experience in design thinking and human-centered design to solve real problems that affect real people.

This project is a continuation of my thesis project, conducted as part of Miami University's Master in Fine Arts Experience Design program. In the first phase, detailed research was conducted with adopted children and children with trauma.

This next phase focuses on concept development and game design. Working as a technical designer, the goal is to create a single-level prototype (MVP) that can be play tested with children and showcased at conferences to obtain funding.



**Coleen M. Sallot**

Designer and Researcher

Miami University,  
Experience Design



**Questions?**