

MYTHOS

A Serious Role-Play Video Game
for Adopted Children and Children with Trauma



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INTRODUCTION

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.

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 OVERVIEW

Research has shown that adopted children and children with trauma have major challenges that require intervention. Because of its unique focus and environment, play therapy is uniquely suited to help these children, both to help them work through past traumas and to teach them how to play. The play therapy space is a sensory-rich environment with a wide variety of materials and activities for children to choose from. Borrowing concepts from game-based learning, the game's focus is to mirror experiences often faced by adopted children and children with trauma.

- **Role-play:** Children participate in the game as a stuffed animal, allowing them to project their emotions and experience the trauma journey using an outside lens. A self-defensive mechanism, projecting uncomfortable and difficult feelings onto another helps to "keep discomfort about ourselves at bay and outside our awareness." (Healthline, 2018)
- **Storyline:** The game uses the 12-step hero quest, a common narrative technique used in role-play games, to mimic the process often used in trauma and recovery programs. Many recovery programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, use a 12-step program. Child therapists often use a program called the 3-5-7 Model to help children work through feelings of grief and loss (Henry, 2014).
- **Learning opportunities:** To advance the game, children use their imagination, explore, make decisions, solve puzzles, collect objects, and pick up a variety of skills, such as identifying their feelings, learning coping skills, understanding loss, and others.
- **Physical object:** Children will be provided with a physical stuffed animal that emulates the stuffed bear in the game. The hope is that children will use it to embody and project their feelings, both positive and negative, to help them process their experiences and heal.

Partnering with therapy throughout the game is key. Designed to be used as a tool by therapists, they can incorporate the game into their therapy sessions, as well as with child support groups.

- **Therapy relationship:** Building and maintaining the therapist-child relationship is crucial. Therapists focus on creating a safe environment, building rapport, and allowing the child to dictate where and how sessions go.
- **Treatment goals:** Since many adopted children have missed an important stage in their

cognitive development, therapists need to meet the child at whatever stage they're in. Because every child and their story is different, the game is flexible to accommodate varying treatment goals, based on situation and child.

- **Companion guide:** Therapists will be provided with a companion guide to help them prepare and work in concert with the game. Split into modules, the guide will discuss various aspects of the game and provide suggestions for treatment goals. Therapists can incorporate these goals or create their own as needed.
- **Frequent check-ins:** Working through trauma is, in itself, a traumatic process. Throughout the game, therapists check in to see how the child is doing and provide support. They can also work with parents to continue necessary support at home.

Therapeutic 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.

GAMEPLAY SUMMARY

Since adopted children and children with trauma have significant problems with imagination and play, this game uses a digital point-and-click game format like Adventure Games or Clue Escape Room to help them build these skills while harnessing their gravitation toward puzzle-like games. Children can play by themselves or as part of a group.

Children participate in the game as a stuffed bear. As an action-adventure game, child 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.

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.

Targeted Types of Fun

- **Sensation:** Game as sense-pleasure. Games that evoke emotion in the player, be it through sound, visuals, controller rumble or physical effort.
- **Fantasy:** Game as make-believe. Game as a means to take the player to another world. Some call it escapism.
- **Challenge:** Game as obstacle course. Games that provide the player(s) with highly competitive value or with increasingly difficult challenges.
- **Expression:** Game as self-discovery. Games that allow for self-expression from the player through gameplay.

Sequencing

The game uses the 12-step hero quest to mimic the process often used in recovery programs. There will be a total of 12 levels, one for each step in the trauma journey. Each level will have its own map and quest, where players explore and solve a puzzle or overcome an obstacle, culminating with a contest with the boss. Each step will unlock a new part of the map, as well as new functionality. Quests build upon each other, each with different treatment goals, leading up to the game's final challenge.

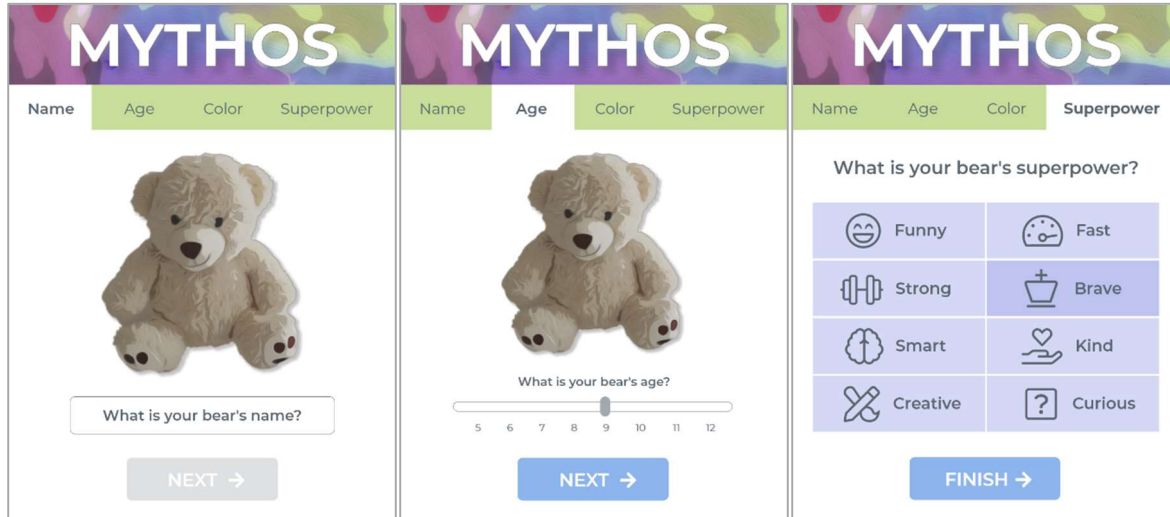
Competitive Products

When interviewed, play therapists and other therapists who work with children stated that they have used video game themes, such as Minecraft, in their practice, or watched their child patients play a video game, such as Roblox, but they have not employed the use of actual video games for therapy. For the therapeutic games that do exist, a common complaint is that they're too wordy and not built to suit the unique needs of children and what they're going through. At the same time, therapists believed that video games can play a valuable role in therapy.

VISUAL APPEAL

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.

Characters: Children participate in the game as a stuffed bear. They can customize the bear’s name, age, color and choose a superpower. Age determines the difficulty level of the game, as well as the complexity of exercises. Superpowers are based on character traits, such as funny, strong, smart, kind or curious, and evolve over the course of the game.



Character customization

World: Mythos is a cold, snowy, dystopian world with ruins and fantasy underpinnings, such as mythical beasts (fairies, gigantic spiders, dragons, unicorns, trolls), magical objects (wands, potions, spells, books), and magical powers (teleporting, invisibility, flying, shapeshifting). It uses an anime illustration style to keep things light and fun.

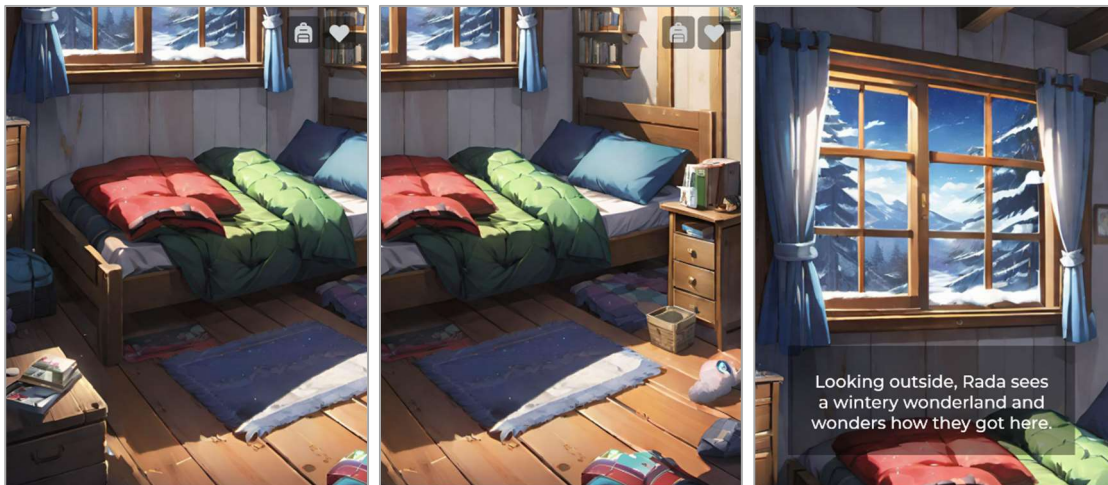


Illustration style

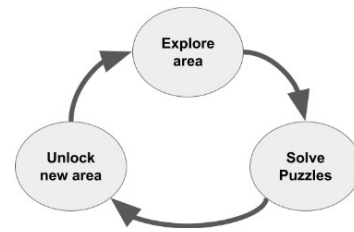
GAME MECHANICS

Mythos isn't a fighting game. Instead, as players explore, they are presented with a series of puzzles and challenges. As they solve those challenges, players unlock a new area.

The primary mechanic revolves around players pointing and clicking on highlighted markers and objects. Clickable objects show as blue on mouseover or touch, indicating that players can interact with them.

Some markers provide clues and provide hints to the story, while others allow players to collect items or revolve around a challenge. Some choices advance the game, while others have adverse consequences. To provide maximum flexibility, players can complete them in any order.

Core Game Loop (Puzzle)

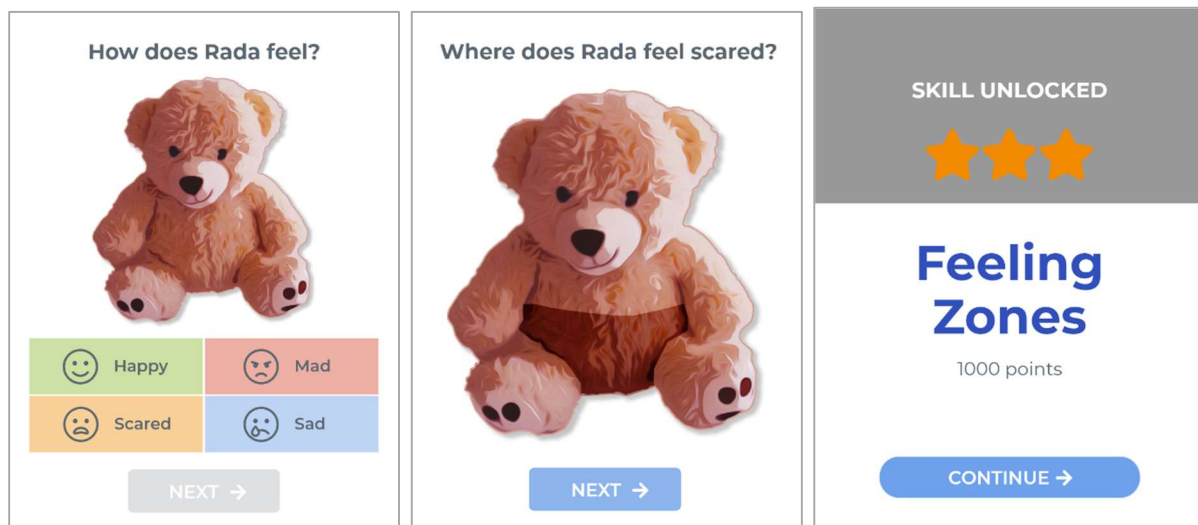


Maintaining Health and Learning Life Skills

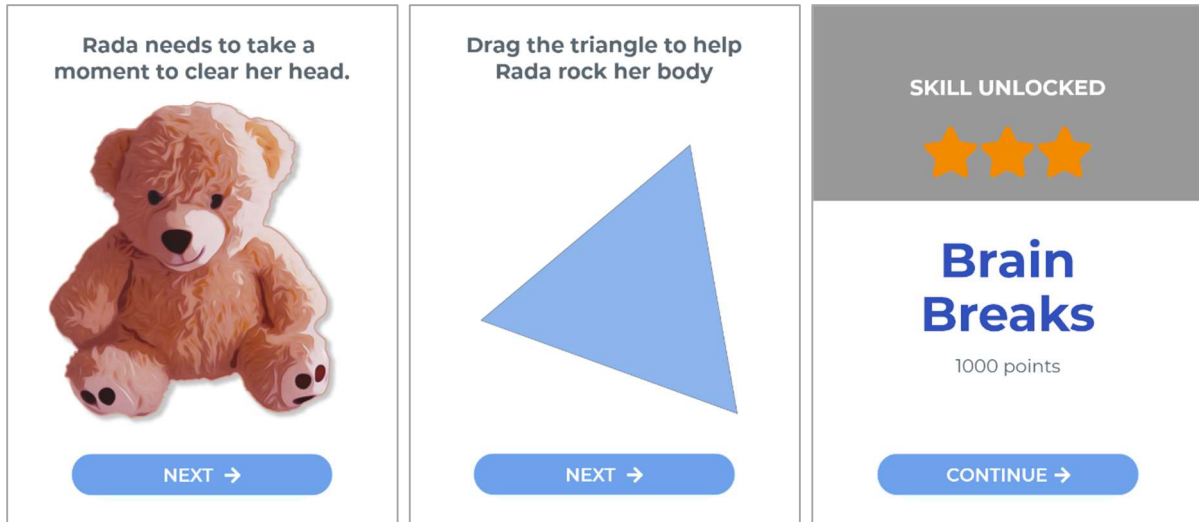
Players unlock a variety of life skills (shown as health cards) throughout the game. In the beginning, when their bear is suddenly whisked away from their home and ends up in a cold, desolate land, players are prompted to identify how their bear is feeling (happy, sad, scared, angry) and where they are experiencing those emotions: do they feel sick in their stomach, does their head hurt, is their chest beating hard, are their arms numb?

As they progress, they will unlock more skills. For example, when they hear a strange sound, they are prompted to take a moment to help their bear calm down (give themselves a hug, shake it out, or rock). They will also unlock skills to identify if their bear is hungry, hurt, tired or hot/cold.

As they encounter various elements in the game, they will be prompted to identify their bear's physical and/or mental state and identify and/or find ways to solve those issues. For example, if they determine their bear is hungry, they will need to locate a food source. If their bear is cold, they will need to locate a source of warmth. If they are stressed, they will take a moment to help their bear calm down.



Life skill – Feeling Zones

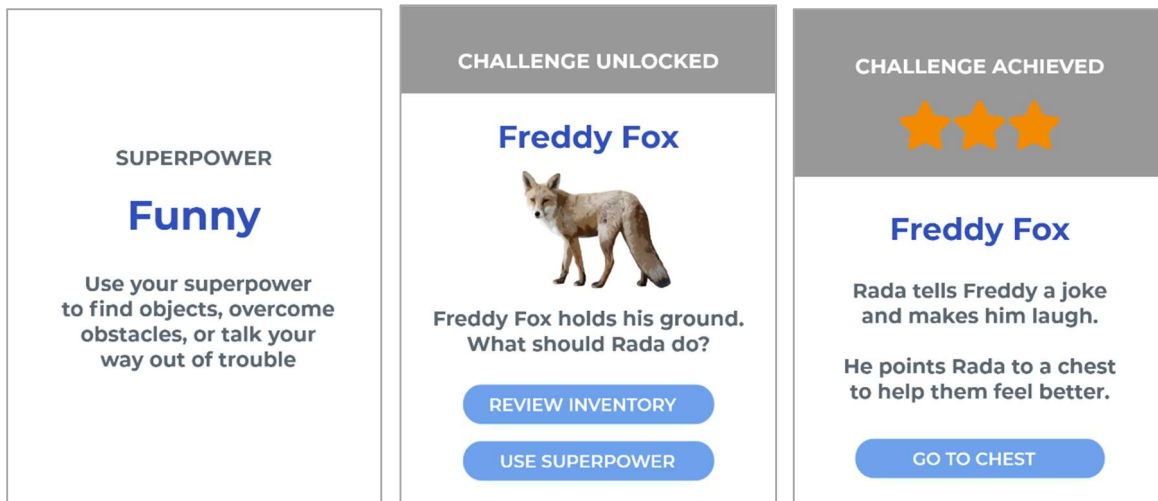


Life skill – Brain Breaks

Selecting and Using Superpowers

Players select a superpower during onboarding. Superpowers are based on character traits rather than physical traits, such as funny, fast, strong, brave, smart, kind, or curious. Players have ready access to their superpower and can use it on puzzles, obstacles, and enemies. Since one’s superpower can vary wildly, superpowers essentially function as a wild card in the game. For example, when players encounter a crocodile, they can tell the crocodile a joke (funny superpower) which saves their life, or they can try to escape (strong superpower) which gets them eaten.

Initial superpowers consist of one action, such as telling a funny joke (Funny) but will evolve as players progress through the game. They can also add new ones.



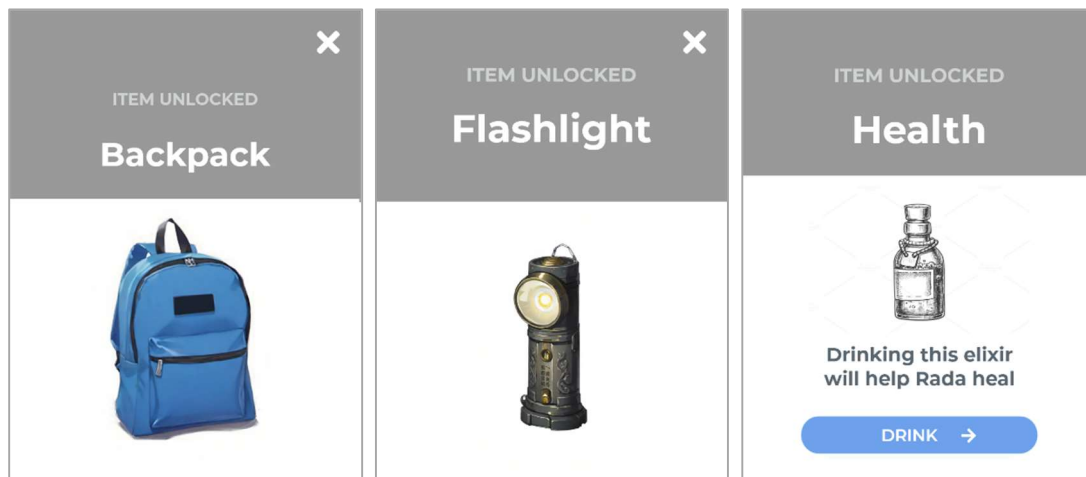
Examples of the impact of one’s superpower on gameplay

Collecting and Combining Items

In addition to unlocking life skills, 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. For example, they can collect berries if their bear is hungry, locate a blanket if their bear is cold, or use a magic flower to heal them from a bee sting.

They can also combine items together. For example, if they can't locate a blanket, they can pair a special rock with a pile of sticks to start a fire. They can also craft items, such as an ax to chop down a tree, or combine different flowers to create a special potion that will enable them to breathe underwater.

Players can trade items in their inventory at "stores" to purchase supplies or upgrade equipment.

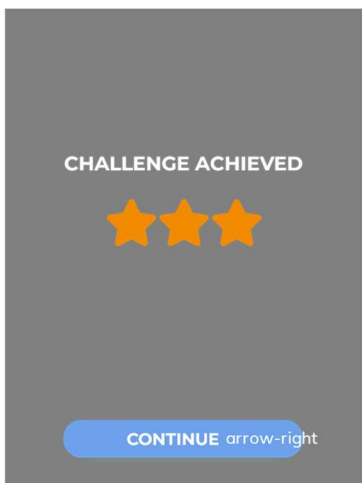
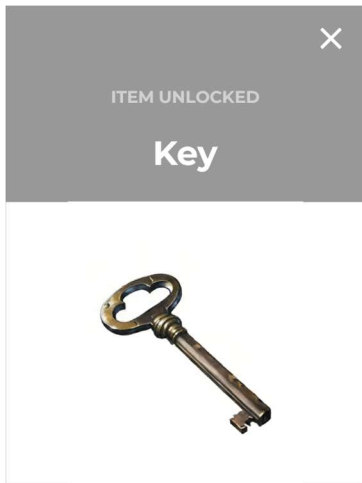
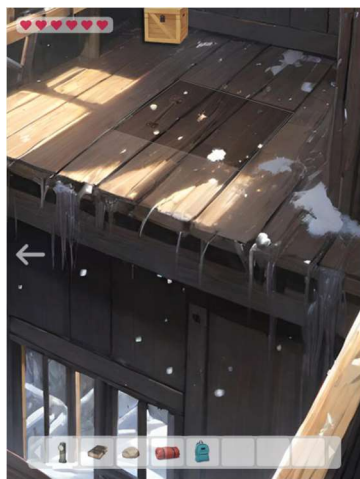
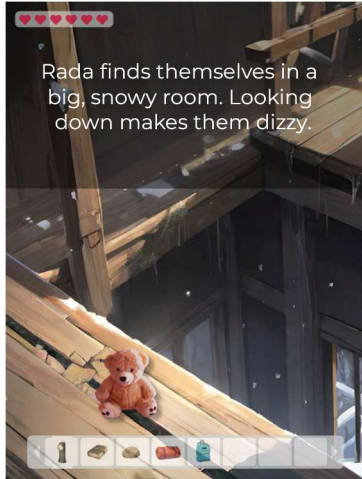


Examples of different objects players can collect

Solving Puzzles and Challenges

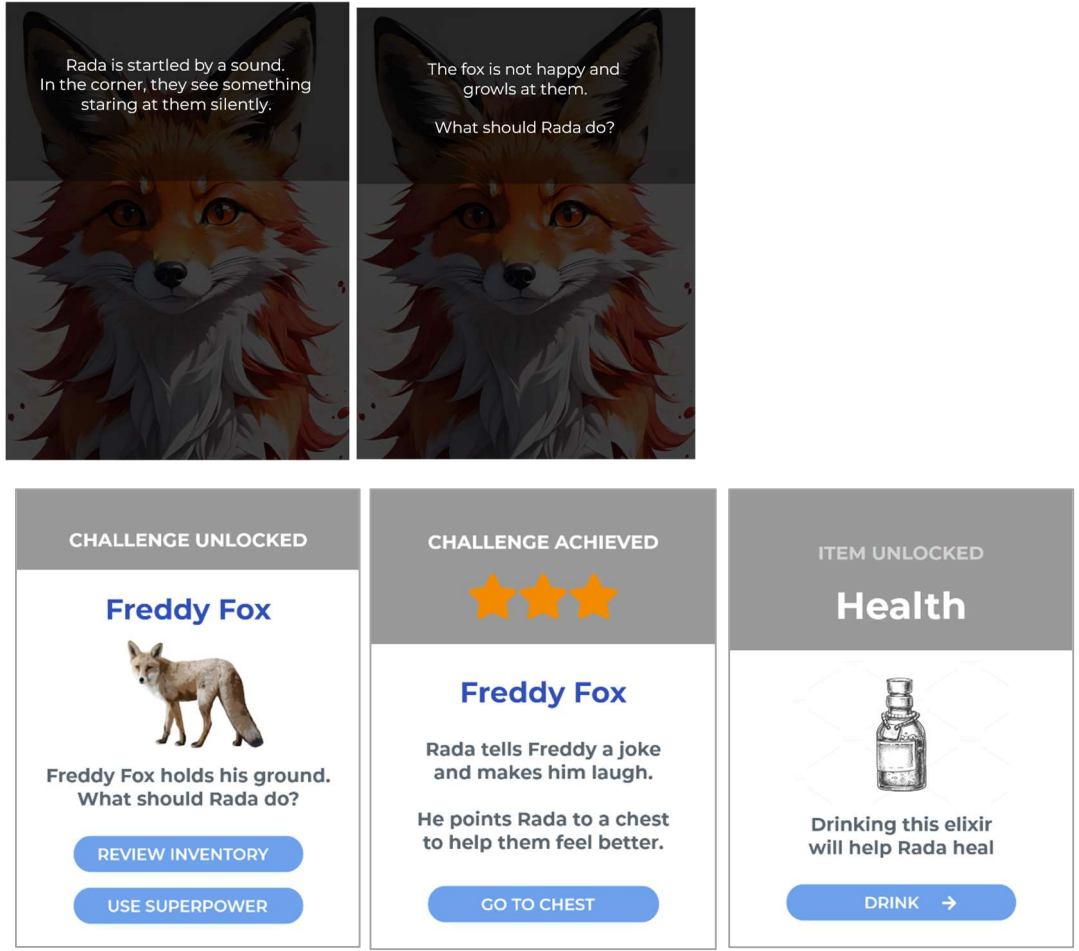
As an action-adventure game, players work to solve puzzles and challenges, which can consist of using an inventory item, harnessing their superpower, employing a stress reaction, or employing the play therapist's toolbox.

Challenges that utilize inventory items are generally simpler. For example, when a player isn't able to reach the keyhole, they have to move objects around, and then employ the key.



Example of puzzle solving

Another type of challenge revolves around negotiating and working with non-player characters. NPCs serve as key context. 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.



Examples showing relationship with NPCs

Play Therapist's Toolkit

For even more complex challenges, like facing the spider at the end of Level One, players use a spinner to determine their next action, which can include their inventory, their superpower, stress reactions, and options from the toolkit.

As they progress through the game, these choices may become more abstract (i.e. pick a method from the toolkit) rather than straight choices. For example, to escape an island, do they build a raft? Do they blow bubbles to breathe underwater? To obtain an eagle's magical feather to fly, do they use their superpower to tell a joke? Or do they use the toolbox to sing a song or do a skit?

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

Throughout the storyline, the game uses the 12-step hero quest to mimic the process often used in trauma and recovery programs. The story takes child players through the stuffed bear's trauma journey, with the goal of making them co-participants in the process. Because each child and situation is different, therapists will monitor them as they engage with the game and create appropriate treatment goals as they progress. The 3-5-7 Model defines three distinct stages that adopted children will experience:

Act 1: Departure (Clarification)

The hero finds their world completely torn apart and will experience many of the first stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, and depression.

1. *Ordinary World* - Limited awareness of problem.
2. *Call to Adventure* - Increased awareness of problem. Reaction: denial, fear
3. *Refusal of the Call* - Reluctance to change. Reaction: anger, depression
4. *Meeting the Mentor* - Overcoming reluctance. Reaction: anger, bargaining

Key Focus: Understand the events of their lives and reconcile the losses they have experienced (clarification)

Core Issues: Loss and Grief

Act 2: Initiation (Integration)

The hero has accepted that their world has changed and must find a new path within it.

5. *Hero Accepts Call* - Committing to change
6. *Tests and Obstacles* - Experimenting with change
7. *Preparation* - Preparing for change
8. *Ordeal* - Confronting change

Key Focus: Learn to accept themselves and rebuild relationships in their lives (integration)

Core Issues: Rejection, Guilt, Identity

Act 3: Return (Actualization)

The hero now has to confront their new reality. The decisions they've made haven't turned out the way they thought they would, and they have to find a way to adapt to their new world.

9. *Reward* - Consequences of the attempt to change
10. *The Road Back* - Rededication to change
11. *Resurrection* - Last attempt to change
12. *Return* - Final mastery of problem

Key Focus: Visualize their place in their family and a new life (actualization)

Core issues: Identity, Intimacy, Mastery/Control

PERSONALIZATION

As mentioned previously, child players customize their bear: they give it a name, choose an age range, color, and superpower. These choices affect game play and personalization. For example, younger ages encounter simpler tasks and fewer choices on the spinner, while superpowers can vary wildly and impact available choices and gameplay.

LICENSING/BUSINESS MODEL

The game can be licensed using two different methods:

- Subscription (where developer provides ongoing technical support). The cost to the provider is passed through to the patient's insurance.
- Digital Box. Provider purchases the game for patient use as needed.

GAMEPLAY FEATURES

Reward Systems

Throughout the game, players can collect objects and trade items in their inventory at "stores" to purchase supplies or upgrade equipment. For each successful challenge, they can gain points or obtain new powers.

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.

Modes of Play

Working closely with their therapist, children can play by themselves or as part of a group. Therapists can participate in the game as an observer so they keep track of the player's progression and ask them questions about their experience afterwards.

GAME DYNAMICS

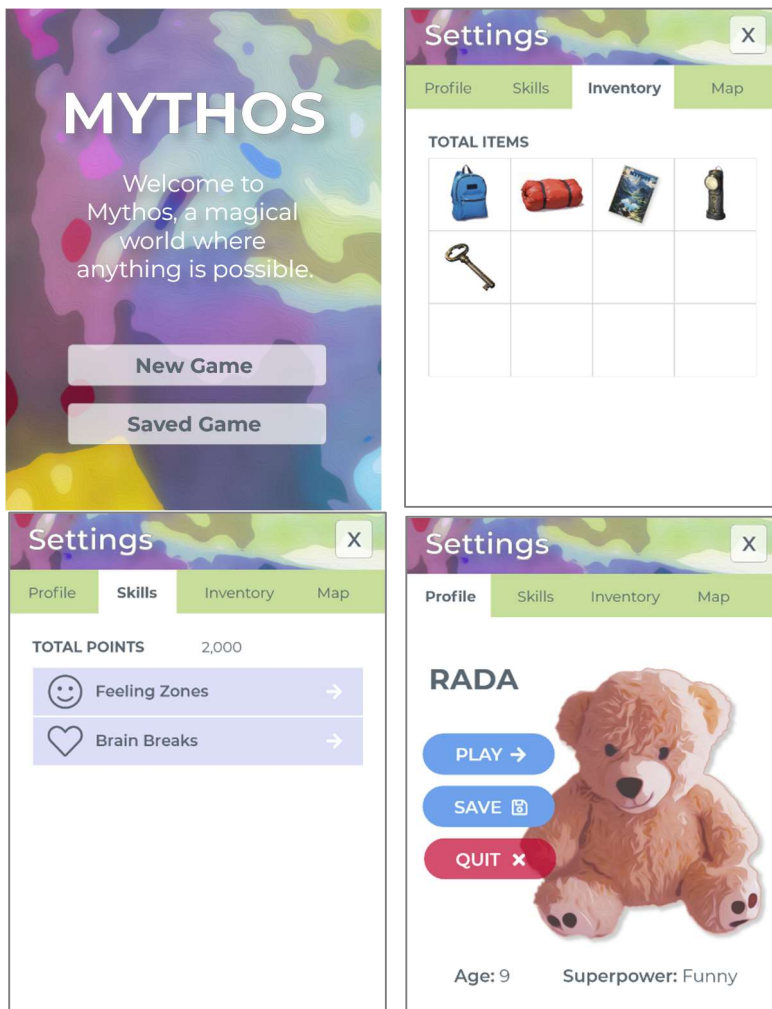
AI

While the level structure is linear, players can achieve challenges in a variety of ways. For example, when they encounter Freddy the Fox hiding in the shadows, they are presented with a spinner, where they can offer Freddy an object, use their superpower, or choose from the toolkit like singing a song. Some of these choices work, but sometimes they don't. In addition, they can choose to have an NPC like Freddy accompany them on their trip, or they can choose to go it alone.

Object Interaction

The primary mechanic revolves around players pointing and clicking on highlighted markers and objects. Clickable objects show as blue on mouseover or touch, indicating that players can interact with them. Some markers provide clues and provide hints to the story, while others allow players to collect items or revolve around a challenge.

INTERFACE DESIGN



LEVEL DESIGN

The first level begins with the player in the bedroom of a dilapidated cabin. Their objective is to make their way out of the house, which turns out to be not so easy.

