

# MyndConnect: A Mental Wellbeing Application

## Proposal

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The college environment today presents unique challenges to students’ mental health. As academic expectations grow and familiar social circles fade—especially for students moving abroad—finding support for mental wellbeing has become increasingly important. Mental health applications have emerged as a convenient option, providing discreet and flexible tools for self-care. However, many existing apps focus on a single feature, such as meditation or mood tracking, leaving gaps in holistic support.

**MyndConnect** aims to bridge these gaps by offering an all-in-one mental wellbeing platform. With features such as mood tracking, journaling, mindfulness exercises, links to professional resources, and an anonymous peer-support forum, MyndConnect provides multiple avenues for users to manage their mental health effectively.

This proposal outlines the development of a secure and user-friendly prototype of MyndConnect, adhering to privacy standards and fostering inclusivity.

### 1.1 Background

The increasing number of college students, both domestic and international, underscores the need for effective mental health solutions. The Central Statistics Office (2022) reports that the number of individuals in Ireland with third-level qualifications has nearly quadrupled since 1991. Similarly, international student enrollment has tripled between 2009 and 2022 (Erudera, 2022). While this growth highlights educational progress, it

also reveals the social and mental health challenges faced by students adapting to new environments.

Existing mental wellbeing apps often prioritize a single core feature, such as meditation or therapy scheduling. In contrast, MyndConnect integrates multiple functionalities to provide a comprehensive solution, including an anonymous space for peer-to-peer support. This feature is particularly relevant for college students, who may find solace in sharing their experiences anonymously.

## **1.2 Main Research Questions**

The project addresses the following questions:

- What design practices can make a mental wellbeing app inclusive, supportive, and user-friendly?
- How can the features of mental wellbeing apps be improved to better meet users' needs?
- What legal and ethical considerations must be addressed in handling user data securely?

## **1.3 Literature Review**

### **1.3.1 Current Trends in Mental Health Apps**

In recent years, mental health apps have grown rapidly in both popularity and variety. These digital tools are designed to help users cope with challenges such as stress, anxiety, depression, or general emotional wellbeing. They come in many forms, including self-help programs, guided mindfulness exercises, mood trackers, and virtual therapy sessions. One of the main reasons behind their rising popularity is the convenience they offer. Unlike traditional in-person therapy, which can be expensive and may require people to travel or wait for appointments, mental health apps can be accessed anytime and from anywhere

via a smartphone or tablet. This increased accessibility helps reduce common barriers to seeking help, such as cost, perceived stigma, and the limited availability of professional therapists Torous2018,Firth2017.

For many individuals, the idea of downloading an app to improve their mental health feels less intimidating than seeking out face-to-face counseling. In communities where mental health services are limited, apps can fill an important gap, providing immediate guidance and support tools Hollis2017. Some studies even suggest that these apps might help reduce symptoms of anxiety or depression over time, especially when used consistently and combined with traditional treatments Bakker2016. The potential cost savings are also significant. While therapy sessions can cost hundreds of dollars over time, many apps are free or offer low-cost subscription models, making mental health support more financially manageable and inclusive.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that while mental health apps show promise, there are still some notable limitations. Many existing solutions do not adapt well to the unique needs of individual users, leaving some people feeling that the advice or exercises are too generic to be truly helpful Grist2019. Privacy concerns also remain a significant challenge since users are often hesitant to share sensitive personal information without strong assurances that their data will remain confidential and secure Anthes2016,Bardus2020.

As a result, recent trends in mental health app development focus on improving personalization features, encouraging community support, integrating gamified elements to engage users, and strengthening data privacy measures. By identifying these key areas for improvement, developers and researchers can work together to design more effective, user-friendly tools that can genuinely support a wide range of mental health needs.

## **1.3.2 Features That Need Improvement**

### **Personalization**

Personalization is considered one of the most important emerging trends in mental health app design. Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all approach, personalized apps ad-

just their recommendations and activities based on each user’s unique symptoms, goals, and progress over time. Research shows that users who feel a tool is tailored to their specific needs are more likely to engage with it regularly, leading to better outcomes DeMello2021,Bakker2016. For example, an app might analyze a user’s mood-tracking entries to identify patterns in their emotional wellbeing and then suggest targeted activities, such as meditation, journaling, or cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) exercises designed specifically to address those patterns.

Another personalization strategy is to use adaptive journaling prompts. Instead of offering the same daily prompt to every user, the app might generate questions or exercises related to the user’s recent experiences or mood fluctuations. For instance, if the app detects that someone has been feeling more anxious in the evenings, it might provide calming suggestions or short breathing exercises during that time. Studies indicate that these personalized features not only improve user satisfaction but can also boost long-term retention, meaning that people are more likely to keep using the app if it remains relevant and helpful Wasil2020.

## **Community Support**

Feeling connected to others who share similar experiences can be incredibly valuable for individuals working on their mental health. Many apps now include options for joining online forums or support groups where users can communicate with others facing the same challenges. These communities can reduce the sense of isolation that often accompanies mental health issues and foster a sense of belonging. Research by Naslund2016 shows that anonymous peer support forums help users feel understood and validated, which can encourage them to stay committed to their mental health journey.

However, maintaining a positive and helpful online community is not always easy. Moderation is crucial to ensure that discussions remain supportive, respectful, and free from harmful content. Developers can invest in more advanced moderation systems, including artificial intelligence (AI) tools to detect harmful language, automated flagging systems, and well-defined community guidelines to handle conflict. By doing so, the goal

is to create a welcoming environment where users feel safe sharing their stories and experiences without worrying about harassment or misinformation. Studies indicate that when users feel part of a caring online community, they are more likely to stick with the app and continue using it as a resource for their emotional wellbeing Naslund2016,Grist2019.

## **Gamification**

Gamification refers to using game-like features to make a non-game product more engaging and motivating. Within mental health apps, gamification can include offering achievement badges for completing certain tasks, using streak counters to track daily usage, or creating a points system that rewards users for meeting their personal goals. These elements can turn what might feel like a chore—such as completing a daily CBT exercise—into a more enjoyable activity Torous2020.

Research has shown that such motivational features can boost engagement and help users build positive habits over time Bakker2016,Hollis2017. For instance, an app might give a user a virtual badge after they complete a week’s worth of mood-tracking entries, providing a sense of accomplishment and encouraging them to continue. By making the app experience more interactive and fun, gamification can help overcome the initial resistance some users feel about dedicating time to self-care practices.

Still, it is important to ensure that gamification elements remain meaningful rather than becoming mere distractions. Developers need to design rewards and challenges that truly align with users’ mental health goals. For example, a badge for practicing relaxation techniques consistently might feel more personally rewarding than one given randomly. This approach can help ensure that the gamified features actually enhance the app’s therapeutic value rather than simply turning it into a game.

## **Data Privacy and Security**

Despite the potential benefits of mental health apps, privacy concerns are a major hurdle. Users are often required to share sensitive details about their moods, thoughts, and personal histories. If this information is not properly protected, it can lead to serious



consequences, including identity theft or the misuse of sensitive data by third parties Anthes2016,Bardus2020. Privacy policies need to be presented in clear, user-friendly terms, allowing users to understand exactly what information is being collected and how it is used.

Ensuring compliance with strict data protection regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union, can help reassure users that their personal data will not be misused. Additionally, end-to-end encryption and secure data storage practices can further safeguard user privacy. Some studies also suggest that building trust through transparent data handling can increase user confidence and encourage people to engage more consistently with mental health apps Nowak2022.

Beyond basic data protections, it can be helpful to give users more control over their data. For example, allowing users to decide what kind of information to share, or enabling them to delete their data whenever they want, can increase their sense of safety. When users trust that their data is in good hands, they are more likely to open up and gain the full benefits of the mental health tools offered.

### **1.3.3 Additional Considerations for Effective Mental Health Apps**

As mental health apps become more widespread, researchers and developers are exploring additional features and strategies to improve their effectiveness. For example, some apps now integrate artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms to offer even more sophisticated personalization. By analyzing large amounts of user data, these systems can predict what interventions might be most helpful for an individual at a given moment Torous2018,Wasil2020.

In addition, many apps are experimenting with multimedia elements, such as short educational videos, guided meditation recordings, and interactive quizzes. These formats can keep users engaged and address different learning styles. Some apps also incorporate evidence-based therapies, like CBT or Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), ensuring that their content is grounded in scientific research rather than just generic advice Grist2019.

It is also worth noting that not all apps will work equally well for every user. Cultural differences, personal preferences, and varying levels of digital literacy can influence how individuals respond to different features. For instance, some users may prefer text-based exercises, while others might benefit more from guided audio meditations or community discussions. Recognizing these differences can help developers tailor their apps to reach a broader audience.

### **1.3.4 The Role of Evaluation and Evidence-Based Design**

A growing body of research emphasizes the importance of evaluating mental health apps using scientific methods. While many apps make bold claims about improving mental health, not all have undergone rigorous testing to back these promises. Randomized controlled trials, user experience studies, and qualitative interviews are all methods that can help determine whether an app is effective and how it can be improved [Hollis2017](#), [Firth2017](#).

By focusing on evidence-based design, developers can ensure that their apps actually deliver on their intended purpose. This means involving mental health professionals, researchers, and user experience designers in the creation process. It also means continuously updating the app based on user feedback and new research findings. Over time, this cycle of research, design, and refinement can lead to more trustworthy and effective mental health tools.

## **1.4 Conclusion**

The literature on mental health apps makes it clear that these tools have enormous potential to reduce barriers and improve access to mental health support. By offering flexible, accessible, and cost-effective solutions, apps can supplement traditional therapy or, in some cases, serve as a stepping stone for individuals who are not yet ready to seek professional help. However, simply releasing an app is not enough. Studies highlight the importance of specific features that need improvement.

Personalization ensures that the guidance offered is relevant to each user’s unique circumstances, increasing the likelihood of long-term engagement and positive outcomes. Community support fosters a sense of belonging and helps users feel understood, but requires strong moderation and well-established guidelines to maintain a safe environment. Gamification can make the mental health journey more enjoyable, encouraging users to stick with healthy habits over time. Finally, robust data privacy measures are critical for building trust and ensuring users feel safe when sharing sensitive information.

These insights inform the design and development of tools like MyndConnect, guiding the creation of an app that combines tailored interventions, supportive peer communities, motivational game-like features, and strong privacy safeguards. By focusing on these key areas, future mental health apps can become more effective, trustworthy, and user-friendly, ultimately helping more people improve their emotional wellbeing.

# Chapter 2

## Requirements Analysis

### 2.1 Functional Requirements

- Secure user authentication via email or third-party OAuth.
- Mood tracking with visual trend analysis.
- Interactive journaling with guided prompts.
- Anonymous peer support forums with moderation.
- Links to professional mental health resources.

### 2.2 Non-Functional Requirements

- Scalability to accommodate a growing user base.
- Accessibility features such as screen reader compatibility.
- Compliance with GDPR and other relevant privacy regulations.

# Chapter 3

## Design

### 3.1 System Architecture

The app's architecture consists of three layers:

- **Presentation Layer:** React Native ensures a user-friendly interface that works across platforms.
- **Application Layer:** Node.js and Express handle business logic and API requests.
- **Data Layer:** MongoDB Atlas securely stores user data with high scalability.

### 3.2 UI/UX Design

The design emphasizes simplicity and accessibility:

- A calming color palette to enhance user experience.
- Clear navigation with minimal text clutter.
- Visual feedback for user actions, such as saving journal entries.

# Chapter 4

## Development

The development process will follow an Agile methodology, ensuring flexibility and iterative improvements.

### 4.1 Development Plan

The plan consists of four sprints:

1. **Sprint 1:** Develop foundational features like authentication and journaling.
2. **Sprint 2:** Add mood tracking and professional resources.
3. **Sprint 3:** Implement the peer support forum with content moderation.
4. **Sprint 4:** Conduct user testing and refine the UI/UX.

# Chapter 5

## Implementation

### 5.1 Security Features

To ensure data security:

- Passwords will be hashed and salted using industry-standard algorithms.
- Data will be encrypted both in transit and at rest.
- OAuth 2.0 will be used for secure access control.

### 5.2 Scalability

MongoDB Atlas will provide a scalable database solution, ensuring the app can handle increased user demand without performance degradation.

# Chapter 6

## Testing

### 6.1 Testing Strategies

- **Unit Testing:** Validate individual features like journaling and mood tracking.
- **Integration Testing:** Ensure seamless interaction between components.
- **User Acceptance Testing:** Gather feedback from college students to refine features.

### 6.2 Load and Security Testing

Simulate high traffic scenarios to evaluate system scalability and conduct penetration testing to identify vulnerabilities.



# Chapter 7

## Conclusions

MyndConnect aims to provide a holistic mental wellbeing app that combines personalization, peer support, gamification, and professional resources. By emphasizing security, accessibility, and user engagement, the app aspires to make a meaningful impact on student wellbeing.

# Chapter 8

## Recommendations

- Regularly collect user feedback to guide future updates.
- Expand features, such as video-based therapy and AI-driven recommendations.
- Partner with universities to integrate campus-specific mental health resources.

### 8.1 Project Milestones

Milestone	Description
Sprint 1	Develop authentication and journaling features.
Sprint 2	Add mood tracking and professional resources.
Sprint 3	Implement peer support forums with moderation tools.
Sprint 4	Conduct user testing and finalize UI/UX design.

## Chapter 9

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