

Benchmark Analysis

User Centered Design: Prototyping & Usability

YSDN 3005

Group 01

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Talkspace



What it is:

Talkspace markets itself as a platform for improving mental health. With access to therapists through a subscription services, accessibility to a therapist at any time is possible, making convenience a key asset. Talkspace has special services catered to teens and couple therapy.

Who uses it:

Talkspace's primary audience are young adults on the face of consumers, and sell themselves as a corporate health service to businesses. They are trying to attract and grow a younger teen audience, with added benefits of unlimited messaging and price discounts (probably due to the smartphone usage and added benefit of instilling brand loyalty in a younger generation).

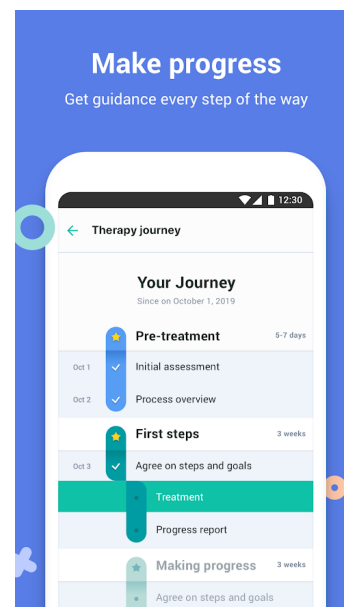
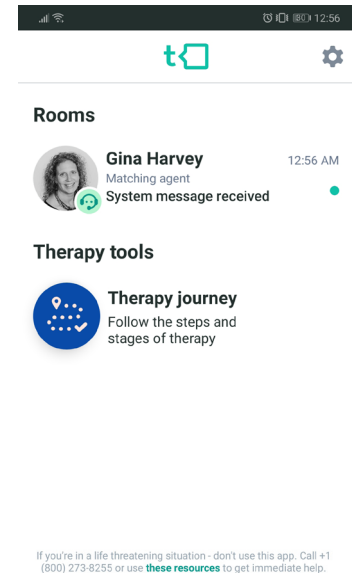
Why do they use it:

The problem that Talkspace is trying to solve is the availability of therapists when you need them most. If you are in a critical or emotional time and need therapy, you need to take the time to call and create an appointment that works with both your and your clinician's schedule, wait a designated amount of time before going to such appointment, and traveling to the appointment.

Talkspace bypasses the process by connecting you to a therapist immediately.

Information Architecture

In regard to the Android version of the platform, it features a single main activity which contains a chat root with therapists, tools to help track your journey of therapy, a footer to access immediate help during life threatening situations, and an option to personalize and adjust app settings. The chatroom allows users to talk to customer support, their main therapist, and any additional therapists they might have. In regards to your therapist you have access to a biography, availability, and work experience. This is used to instill trust in users, as trust is harder gained with a metaphorical border between users devices. The journey tracker offers a transparent view of the steps that a therapist will take with you, as well as the estimated time of completion. For the immediate help footer, there is a number to call, or if your immediate threat is more specialized, you can click a shortcut to access a list of more specialized hot-lines. In terms of personalization, features are limited in the ability of adding read receipts to conversations with therapists, and adding a pass-code to the app.



Interaction Design

For interactions, there are flows present that are not obvious to users. For chats with therapists the interaction of viewing details about a therapist are not apparent, and in the journey screen there is no suggestion that you can click on text in the list to learn additional details, where there are in fact additional details that users would find helpful. While going through flows it's easy to navigate with a persistence of a back button to leave the flow, and in terms of motion design, native Android animations are used, save for a custom animation on the log in button.

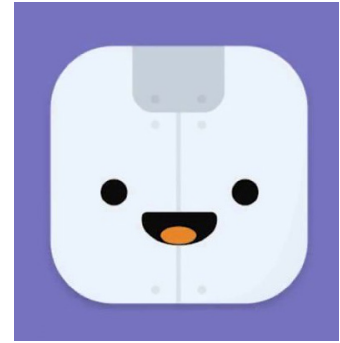
Design System

Talkspace's design system delivers approachability with the atmosphere of a medical environment, with a color theme that is simple and doesn't draw attention to anything but Talkspace's brand color - used for call to action's on interactable elements. This call to action is inconsistent with it's representation of interactivity. Talkspace aims to comfort the users by use of rounded components, and approachable iconography that accompanies components. Components are based off of, or are from Google's material design guidelines.

Synthesis

Overall the app is effective in its approach and to its audience, but there is a lot of room for improvement. For the immediate response page, information that is most relevant to you would be of great improvement, as well as more hot-lines for countries other than the US. From an interaction standpoint components that are interactable should be clearer to the users, and the implementation of an onboarding/tutorial would help inform users of how to operate the app. For the design system there could be improvements made through consistency of the design system as well as conversion of native material components to custom ones that further deliver the perception that the company's brand is trying to deliver.

Reflectly



What it is:

Reflectly is a journaling and diary app that tries to help users understand their own feelings, learn to deal with negative thoughts, and enable users to think more positively. It allows you to log your days, your feelings, and track your personal growth.

Who uses it:

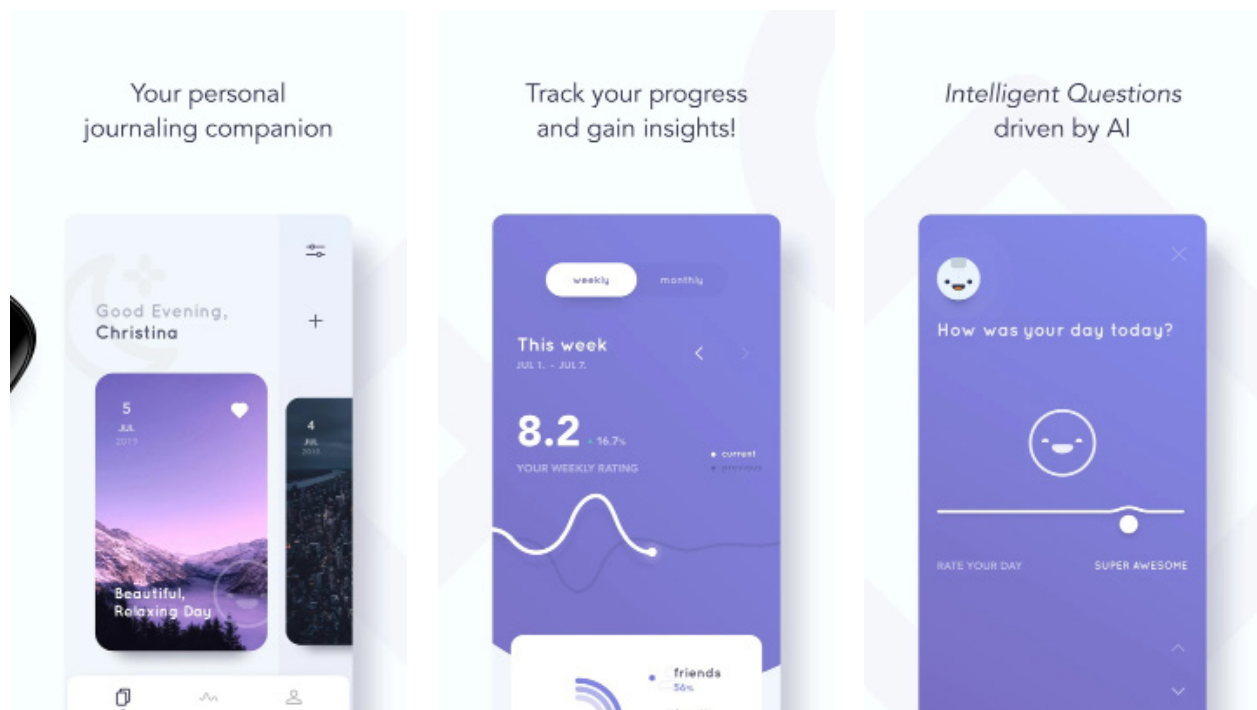
Reflectly's primary audience is teens that are interested in self-growth, with a secondary audience that is that of young adults. Evidenced by their branding, they are trying to attract an audience that is young, but has income to spend on the app's subscription service.

Why do they use it:

The problem that Reflectly is trying to solve is allowing people to associate feelings with their journal, allowing for better analyzation of self. It brings the traditional journal into a familiar mobile app setting, allowing a younger audience to explore the positive effects of journaling. It also furthers journaling via technologies, with questions that are tailored to the user via AI, which allows the app to have a level of personalization. By allowing users to be aware of their feelings, they can notice trends that alter their mood. By recognizing up and down swings users can make conscious decisions about themselves

Information Architecture

In regard to the Android version of the platform, it features three main activities with tabs that feature a dashboard with historical overview of entries, insights to track and learn about your moods, and a profile where you can modify details about your self. The dashboard features the current and past day, with an option to add a new entry. There is also an option to filter results to find relevant entries that you might be thinking about, and an option to flag days that you acknowledge have important events. On the insight page there is options to change the timescale from a weekly or monthly view, with a data visualization of your mood rating. If you have connected with social media, you can even compare your statistics with friends and family. For the profile activity, there are features to control personal details, notifications, subscriptions, and app/ developer details.



Interaction Design

For interactions, Reflectly is making use of custom interactions with an emphasis on verticality, which resemble going down the page of a journal. There are interruptions to flow during use prompting users to upgrade to Reflect's paid plan, which is intrusive for its free users, but makes sense as it is their source of income. Reflectly could also make use of interactions within the journaling section, by allowing for gestural navigation in addition to button presses.

Design System

Reflectly's design system delivers approachability through a mascot that instills the qualities of being friendly and motivated. Its color scheme is youth forward with a focus on pictures with high contrast, and a brand color of purple, instilling a youthful atmosphere. Interactivity is implied through opacity, with use of rounded components to deliver a humanist approach to the interface. The mascot is used in flows where the user is approached with questions, to instill a familiarity to the interaction, and give the user a higher level of trust.

Synthesis

Overall the app is effective in its approach, and caters well to its audience. The information architecture makes sense and is easy for users to understand. The visual design system delivers the app's interactions well, although when it comes to an older audience they might find the app hard to grasp, as the interactions are not coherent with material or human design principles. Going forward, Reflectly could benefit from additional features to make statistics more refined, and being accessible to audiences other than its target ones. Moving forward the team could benefit from crafting creative solutions to incentivize monetization features without being intrusive for their large free-to-use audience.

MindShift –CBT



What it is:

A science based, cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) app for mindfulness meditation and mood tracking. This app gives tools to help people with anxiety to cope and become more mindful; to take active steps to take charge of anxious thoughts.

Who uses it:

The primary market are young adults that are suffering from various types of anxiety disorders, including but not limited to social anxiety, stress-induced anxiety and generalized anxiety disorder. Secondary targets would be young adults that are looking to be more mindful or to practice mental awareness and find tools to cope with different feelings of stress.

Why do they use it:

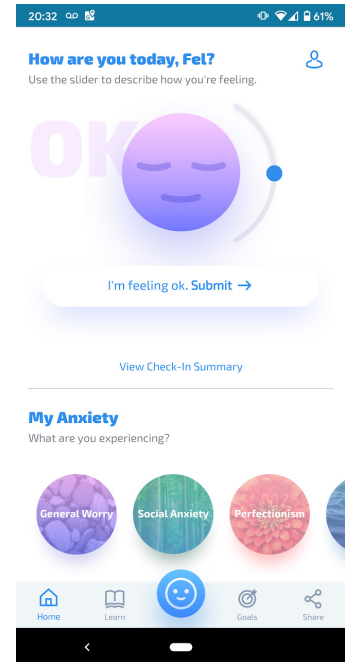
This app is based on scientific studies regarding CBT. CBT is a psycho-social intervention that aims to improve mental health by challenging cognitive behaviours and distortions and improve personal coping methods. Apps like MindShift are developed to allow users to have access to this treatment while they may not be able to afford or access regular healthcare and therapies. It is also helpful for those who are intimidated by the idea of going to formal therapy and allows them to receive help in their preferred regularity and without fear of judgment. decisions about themselves

Information Architecture:

When the app is first opened, it is clear the the priority is allowing the user to enter their feelings. The first call to action is a check-in. Titles in bold, blue letters draw your attention while smaller, grey words provide supportings words for each activity. Information is organized by putting an emphasis on progress and different tools that the user can use. The main button the the navigation bar is a “quick relief” section, where users can easily access coping mechanisms to calm anxiety in a moment. Everything is labelled with lots of white space in between, ensuring that all information can be easily found at all times.

Hierarchy is achieved through use of colour, illustrations and contrast of size and weight. Each section is clearly labelled and allow for easy flow throughout the app.

The use of bold, black type and thin, grey type for call and response answers empowers the tone of voice this app aims to invoke, by creating a reassuring voice for the user to listen to.



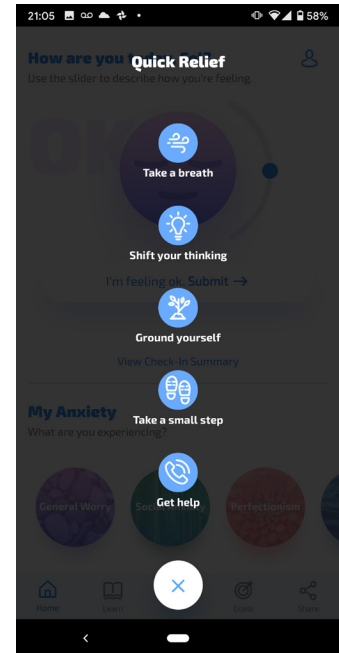
Visual Design:

The colour palette of the app are cool tones and a lot of white space to encourage a calm and safe feeling. The colours used stand out the most to me as a user, because they are highly effective in reflecting the mood of the user while still maintaining a very gentle and safe feel.

The use of two sans-serif typefaces, big, simple icons and strategic spacing allow for the eye to breathe. It is much easier for the user to consume the content in the app with very simple lettering and using colour and imagery to create their brand. There are sliders and interactive elements so the app does not have a static design. There are many gradients and soft shadows that reinforce the mood of the app.

The style of the icons match the type and colours as well, using rounded edges and soft drawings without any harsh angles. To create separation or hierarchy, circles are always the preferred shape to highlight something.

The app even changes the colour of the native nav bar on the phone to really eliminate any harsh colours and create a reassuring atmosphere.



Usability:

It is a very intuitive app to use. Clear hierarchy and a bottom navigation allow the user to easily find the content that they are looking for. When first using the app, the flow is very easy to navigate. It is functional in helping users name the anxiety that they are feeling and leading them to a solution.

There are recorded exercises of meditation to help ground users and shift their thinking into a more progressive and positive mindset.

I find this app to be very effective for its purpose; it highlights education and cognitive thinking which are the two defining characteristics of CBT.

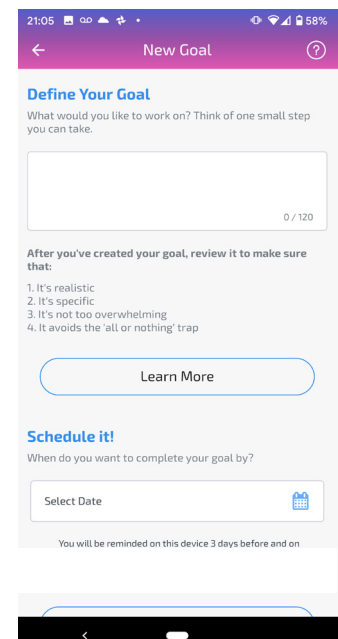
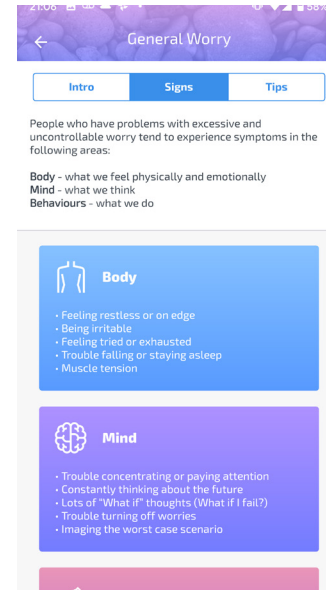
Content:

The home page has a section to track feelings and ask how the user is feeling that day. From there, it creates an entry with more details for the user to fill out; a scale to rate their anxiety for the day, a free text field to enter problems or worrying thoughts and a symptom list to offer ways to name the stress that they may have.

The next section is a selector that lets the user pick how they are feeling from a list of options. Each option then has an introduction to the anxiety and different symptoms that they may experience.

The last part is providing strategies to manage the anxiety.

The user can set goals that they would like to achieve, a very important aspect of CBT. It allows them to track their progress with the app and an option to view if their overall anxiety has gone down over time. There is a large focus on education on the topic.



Synthesis:

MindShift is an effective tool for anyone experiencing thoughts of anxiety. The information provided is accurate and science based. The user experience is very fitting for the type of content it provides. The user flow is well thought out and intuitive to use. The app manages to provide a lot of information while not being overwhelming to read and absorb. For the purpose and focus, it is a very effective app.

eMoods Bipolar Mood Tracker



What it is:

eMoods is a mood tracker app that accommodates for managing symptoms related to bipolar/manic depression, depression, anxiety and other generalized mood disorders. It helps the user keep track of triggers, mood swings and other symptoms. A unique feature is that it offers a pdf summary of each month to share with a doctor. It offers options to track medicine applicable and customize tracking points.

Who uses it:

The primary market are teenagers and young adults that are suffering from various types of mood disorders, specifically bipolar/manic disorders as those hold the most risk for triggers and mood swings. It can appeal to anyone who struggles with different moods and triggers. It provides options for symptoms and scales to rate specific moods per day.

Why do they use it:

This app helps visualize and track lifestyle, behaviours, sleep, anxiety and medication. It is a great tool for anyone struggling with any type of mood disorder or even just someone looking to have a better record of their life. It offers graphs that compare and track patterns in sleep and behaviour and is helpful for anyone looking to improve and reflect on their illness.

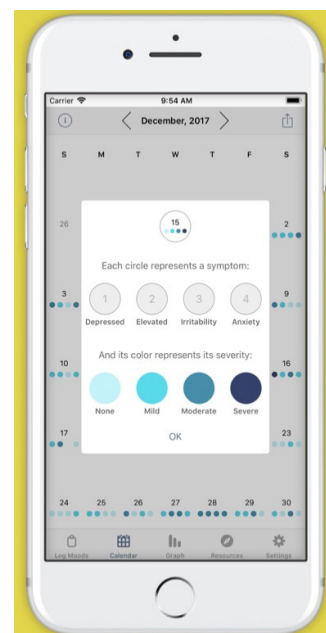
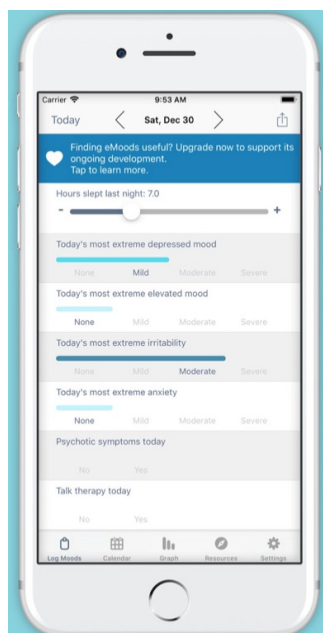
Information Architecture:

The landing page of the app immediately opens to the current day and journal entry. The app itself is quite simple, its main and sole purpose is to journal and reflect on the entries. It is divided into 5 categories; journal entry, calendar, graph, upgrades and resources.

Some features are restricted unless purchased in the premium version.

The journal page is very well designed. It has selectors to track anxiety, sleep, depressive moods and psychotic symptoms on a scale. Each level on the scale (none, mild, moderate, severe) are colour coordinated and these colours are consistent throughout the app into the calendar and graphs sections as well. Bold type and colour add hierarchy to highlight customizable points.

There are no illustrations which allow the colours corresponding to each mood to pop out more and for the user to easily understand the progress that they have made.



Visual Design:

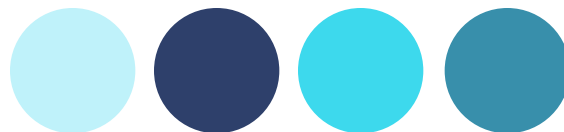
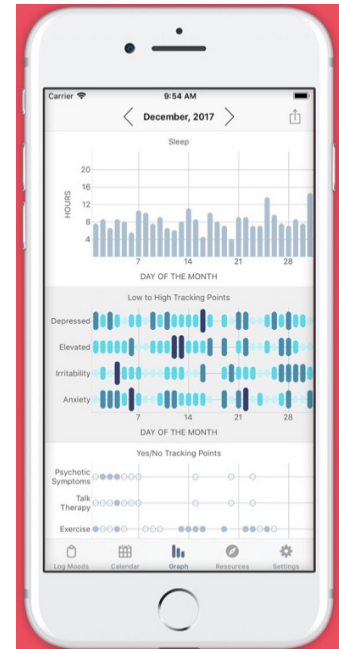
The colour palette of the app are 4 shades of blue and white and grey tones. They help define and separate different areas of information and invoke a calm, quiet feeling. The app design is very minimal and poses a more scientific and data driven feel rather than friendly and warm.

There is a contrast in typefaces; from the android version, it appears that majority of the text is in the default roboto typeface. The buttons are in small caps and colour and weight are used to differentiate different headers. There are no harsh black instances in the design which create a rounded and soft aesthetic. The graphs are very easy to interpret and display the information well.

Usability:

The concept of this app is very simple and that is its advantage. With the potential for the data inputted to become very complex and detailed, the initial design stands strong in usability. It is very clear where to go for each task and the user flow is very intuitive and easy to navigate.

It is a very effective app for its purpose, it offers a private space for a user to accurately and consistently track how they are feeling. It also offers additional help and resources, like blogs and texts that offer more insight on related information.



Content:

The application is entirely based around user input. It determines data points and visualizes all of it depending on the moods selected and severity of each feeling. The app itself is limited in terms of versatility, it really is just made for tracking and recording moods. It helps provide insight on mood swings and lets the user understand triggers or other issues that may come up at certain times of the month and as a result they can act accordingly.

Synthesis:

eMoods is a pretty useful app, especially if the user is suffering from a mood disorder. It is not overwhelming and quite simple to use. The UX is not particularly impressive, as it is quite flat but it gets the point across and does show the potential effectiveness of a minimally viable product.

Mindfulness Coach



What it is:

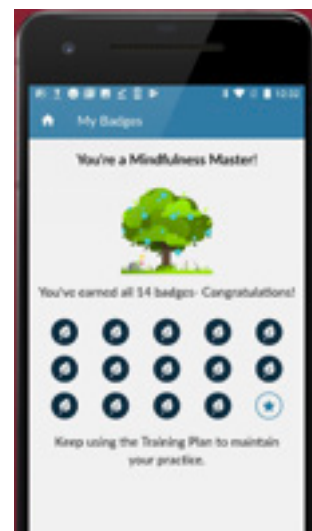
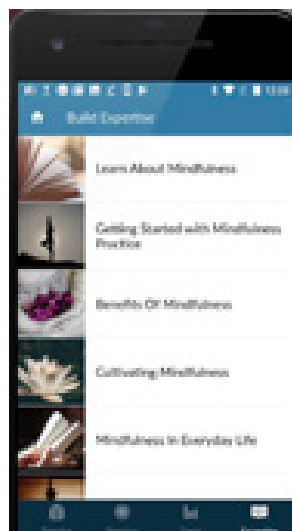
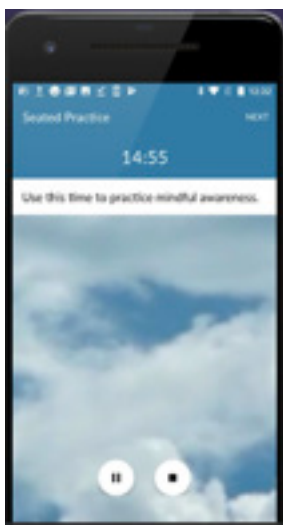
Mindfulness Coach is an educational and guidance app for people learning about mindfulness and its related meditation techniques. It provides tracking of goals and progress, lessons on mindfulness, and guided meditation mode.

Who uses it:

People who use this app are dedicated to practicing and learning about the specific topic of mindfulness. Most people also want to make it a topic of continued interest.

Why do they use it:

They might find it difficult to meditate or be at peace by themselves, so use a convenient medium to find expertise and guidance on a difficult subject. It can also track progress for long term use.



Visual Design

The visual design of the app is a few years dated, so it isn't completely intuitive. There are custom illustrations³, clear and modern graphs⁴, and modern sans serif type. No warm colours are used, blue is the main colour throughout the app.

The app is organized well, with shallow navigation. The effectiveness of the app is good, there is reinforcement through badges and progress tracking, and the content is all there to support the purpose of the app. Aside from the visual design of the app, it functions well and as it intends. The analytics page could be longer, and the design could be updated, by overall it is an effective app.

Content:

The content of Mindfulness Coach is organized in four different sections: Training¹, Practice, Tracking and Expertise². The training section includes various exercises for people learning how to be mindful, and recommends new exercises they might be interested in.

The practice section just has a timer and customizable background, with the addition of being able to pause, stop and set the timer. The tracking section provides analytics of user data from the current week or past month and has a progress graph to display the data visually.

The section also allows the user to input goals. The last section is focused on teaching the user. The app does this by showing a menu of different lessons that the user can go through. The actual content is a mix of statistics, through data visualization, and education, through written and video lessons. There are also badges to collect.

Aside from that, as the user inputs data, content will be created by the data visualization section.

Smiling Mind

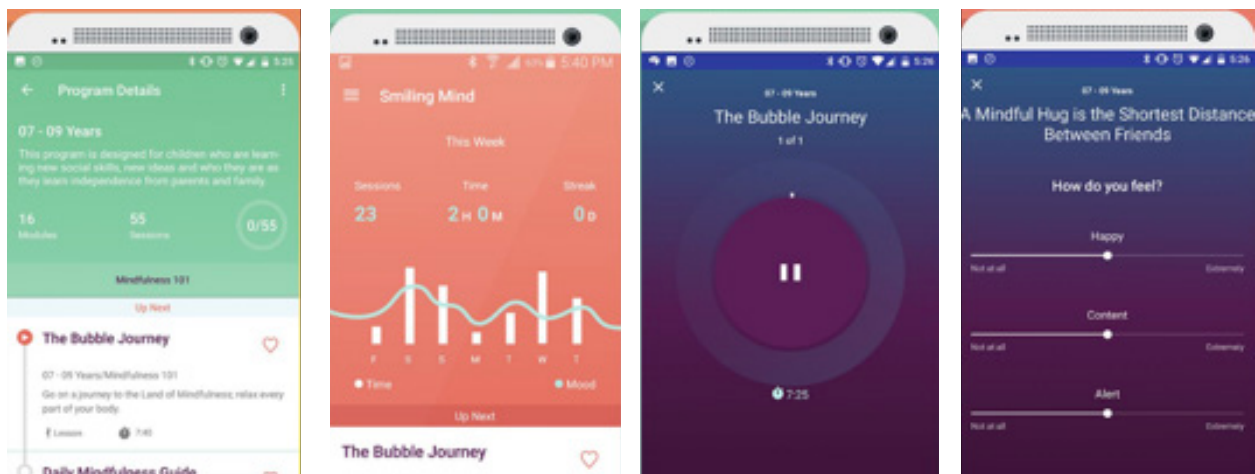


What it is:

Smiling Mind is a guided meditation app with analytics and family friendly programs. Smiling Mind tries to focus on the entire family, allowing people of all ages to practice mindfulness. Parents often like to track the progress of their kids and this allows them to do that. This app also delivers detailed analytics for people looking to track progress.

Visual Design:

The visual design includes modern gradient backgrounds and bright happy colours. The type and icons are similar to modern android UI design. The effectiveness of the app is great because of the colour coded organization of each section.



Content:

The content of Smiling Mind is organized into four sections: Meditation Timer, Programs, Tracking and Login. Meditation Timer is very similar to Mindfulness coaches, in that it is a simple timer like the default phone app, and there is a choice to customize the background. The programs section has programs including lessons with videos, written instructions and exercises. The tracking section tracks all exercises done by the user and visualizes it in a nice modern graph. The Login section manages and adds accounts for the whole family.

Usability:

The timer³ is an integral part of any meditation app, allowing the user to record their session with the easiest to record data. Programs and lessons are very helpful, especially when an app is targeting a family. Less experienced users will have more incentive to use the app. A check in questionnaire⁴ is not imperative, but it does help make the analytics page better than other apps. Setting up accounts is also very important when targeting a family, as different individuals have different progress levels.

Synthesis:

Smiling mind is one of the better mindfulness apps because of its modern design and ease of use for all ages. The organization of the app is also very good because of its color usage.

Calm Harm



Description:

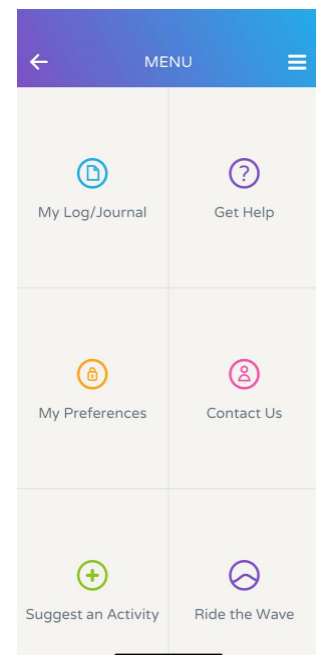
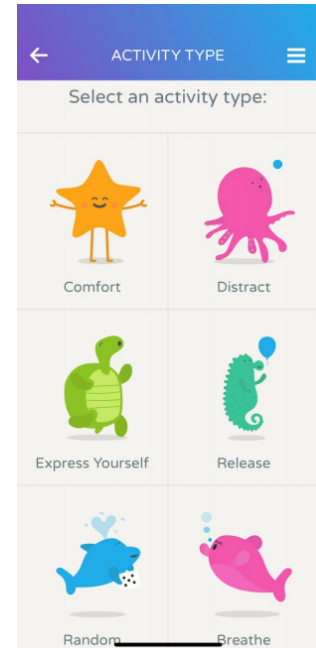
Calm Harm is a free app that is based on the principles of dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT). DBT is a type of talking therapy that's often effective in people with mood disorders. It provides teens with dozens of ways to derail self-harm impulses. The choice between 5 and 15 minute activities and an in-app timer help users turn their attention to healthier ways to handle emotions and manage impulses to hurt themselves. Created in the UK, Calm Harm also lists resources— including websites and country-specific hotlines— that teens can access for further mental health and social support related to depression, self-harm, family problems, and more. Users can also create a personal call list to remind themselves who they know to call when they need support from trusted friends and adults.

Visual Design:

In addition to the excellent pro-social, pro-self activities, this app is very pleasant to look at. There are a lot of colours used, themes the user can choose from (this tiny detail makes the app significantly more personalized) and cute characters that accompany the activity choices (if a teen balks at them, they can omit the visuals), which all convey a positive energy towards the user just from entering the app. In addition to the illustrations, the app uses a singular friendly sans-serif typeface throughout, keeping it very simple to the eye and easy to look at.

Information Architecture:

The navigation can be a bit hard to understand sometimes. The arrow button acts like a back button, so it takes the user back every single action they make. Often times taking the user back to the login page when pressed one too many times (which can get quite annoying). The app uses a hamburger menu for all its functions, but does not give a clear home page. It also loses the user's spot deeper within a section path when switching between ones from the menu, which makes it difficult to multitask.

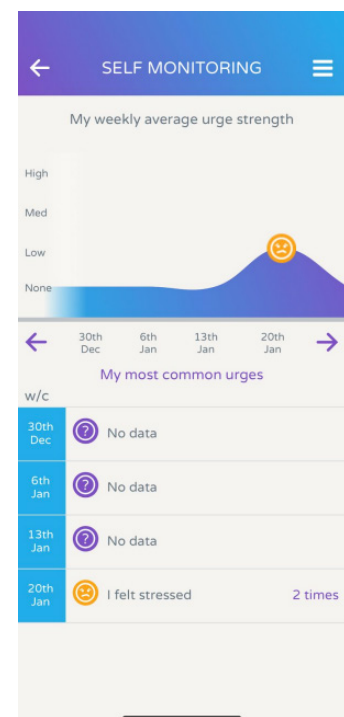


Interaction:

Overall a very easy to use app with simple interactions. Although it is mostly pleasant to use, there are some areas of which the animation does not line up with the trigger and additionally some areas that the user may expect to be additional triggers when there is not. An example of this is the self-monitoring graph. Swiping along the graph may cause some confusion due to what the user is already used to universally. Usually the interface moves along the direction the user swipes as if it is being dragged by the finger, however in this case it is the opposite. On top of this, the graph does not provide additional details when there is an icon present indicating data was recorded. On iOS devices, it is hard to trigger the keyboard to type in information. This is especially not ideal when a user is trying to access the app for help on holding back the urge to self-harm.

Synthesis:

Calm Harm's numerous ideas to distract, to express emotions, to calm, and to release anger in combination with the resource lists based on how a teen is feeling, along with the appealing and fun illustrations make this app a powerful toolbox for struggling teens. With that being said, however strong the concept is, the execution is equally as important; without a smooth and working navigation system, the app can be irritating to use which may cause discontinued usage and would fail its purpose in the end.

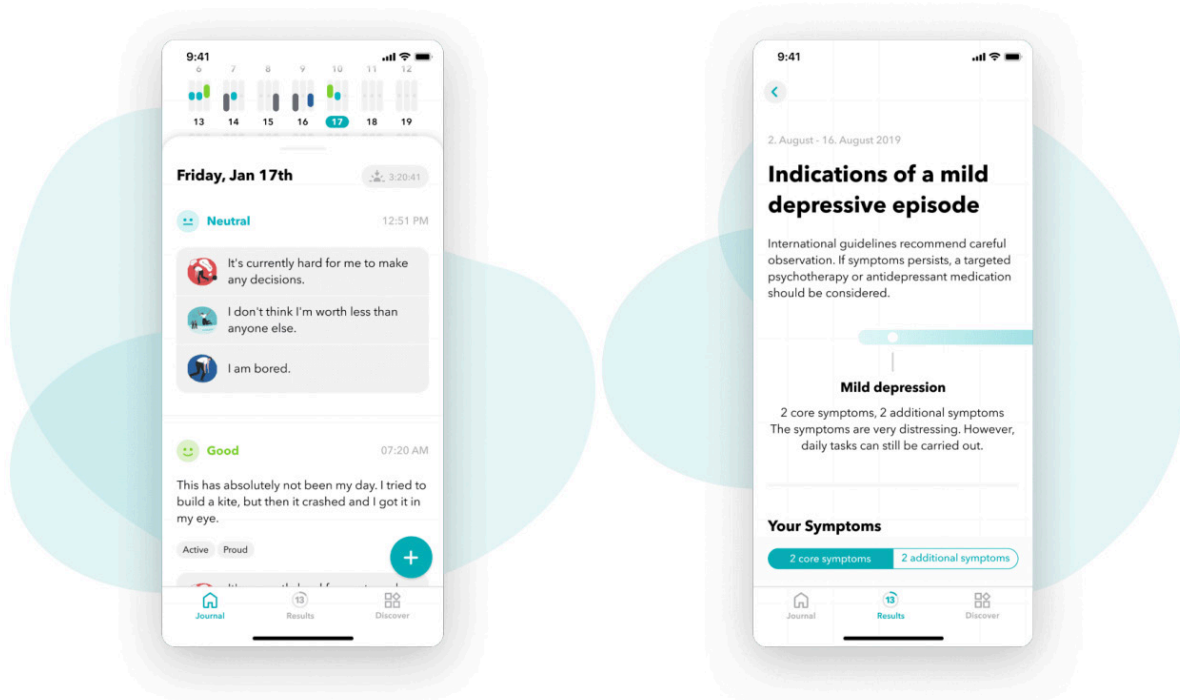


Moodpath



Description:

Moodpath is an interactive depression and anxiety screening program, and asks daily questions in order to assess your well-being. The screening progress aims to increase your awareness of your thoughts, emotions, and feelings. This app tracks psychological, emotional and physical health over a two-week period in order to generate a personalized mental health assessment that users can discuss with their physician or therapist. The app also contains an educational component to teach users about the psychology behind their mood, signs of depression, and psychotherapy, and to help strengthen your mental health.

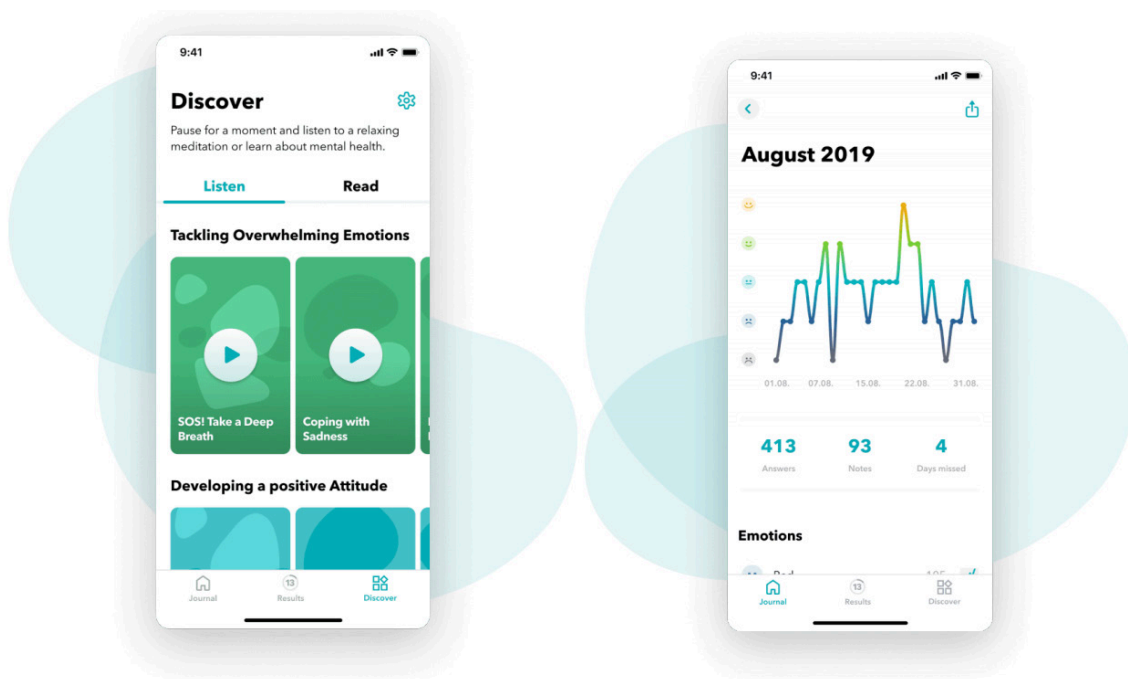


Visual Design:

This app has very inviting illustrations and uses of bright colours.

It is visually appealing and designed in a simple way to focus on delivering information. There is a consistent teal colour used on active sections and icons which is reminiscent of the app's logo.

Although the use of colour is on par in most aspects, there is a lack of colour coordination that could have been implemented to make specific categories on different sections correlated and easily identifiable to the user.



Navigation:

Moodpath's interface is very easy to understand and navigate; everything is organized in a manner which the purpose is never interfered with, so users are able to learn without complications (if they pay to unlock all the features). In the app there are four main sections: Results, Discover, Journal, Profile. 'Results' shows the user how far along they are in their 2 weeks of symptom tracking. 'Discover' provides information regarding detection, explanation, and treatment of depression. 'Journal' allows the user to view an overview of symptoms and mood development over the previous 3 days. 'Profile' includes hotline resources throughout and referral letters once symptom tracking is complete.

Interaction:

The app sends questions to the user three times per day and tracks down your answers. It may work for some audiences, however it does not target a large variety of mental illnesses. Results calculated are not always the most accurate. An example why is because it averages out how the user is feeling everyday (extreme happiness and extreme sadness will be recorded as 'moderate' in a single day). On top of this, the AI created to ask questions tend to get repetitive and mundane which defeats the feeling of it being personalized. There is also a small range of emotions to choose from when asking how the user is feeling. It is essential for users to know that depression (and many other illnesses) are not based only on sadness, but rather a whole array of different feelings (such as loneliness, boredom, anger, etc.)

Synthesis:

The design, layout, graphics, and over UI all work well together, but when advertised to be able to provide a personalized mental health assessment, the approach and usability need to be more considerable to the user.