

PRODUCT

Frens - Community Node Sharing App

PRODUCT TYPE

Educational App

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As a parent or caregiver, I want a fun and engaging early education app that helps children learn about emotions and empathy, so I can support their emotional development and encourage meaningful communication about how they feel.

PLATFORM

Mobile & Tablet

USER BASE

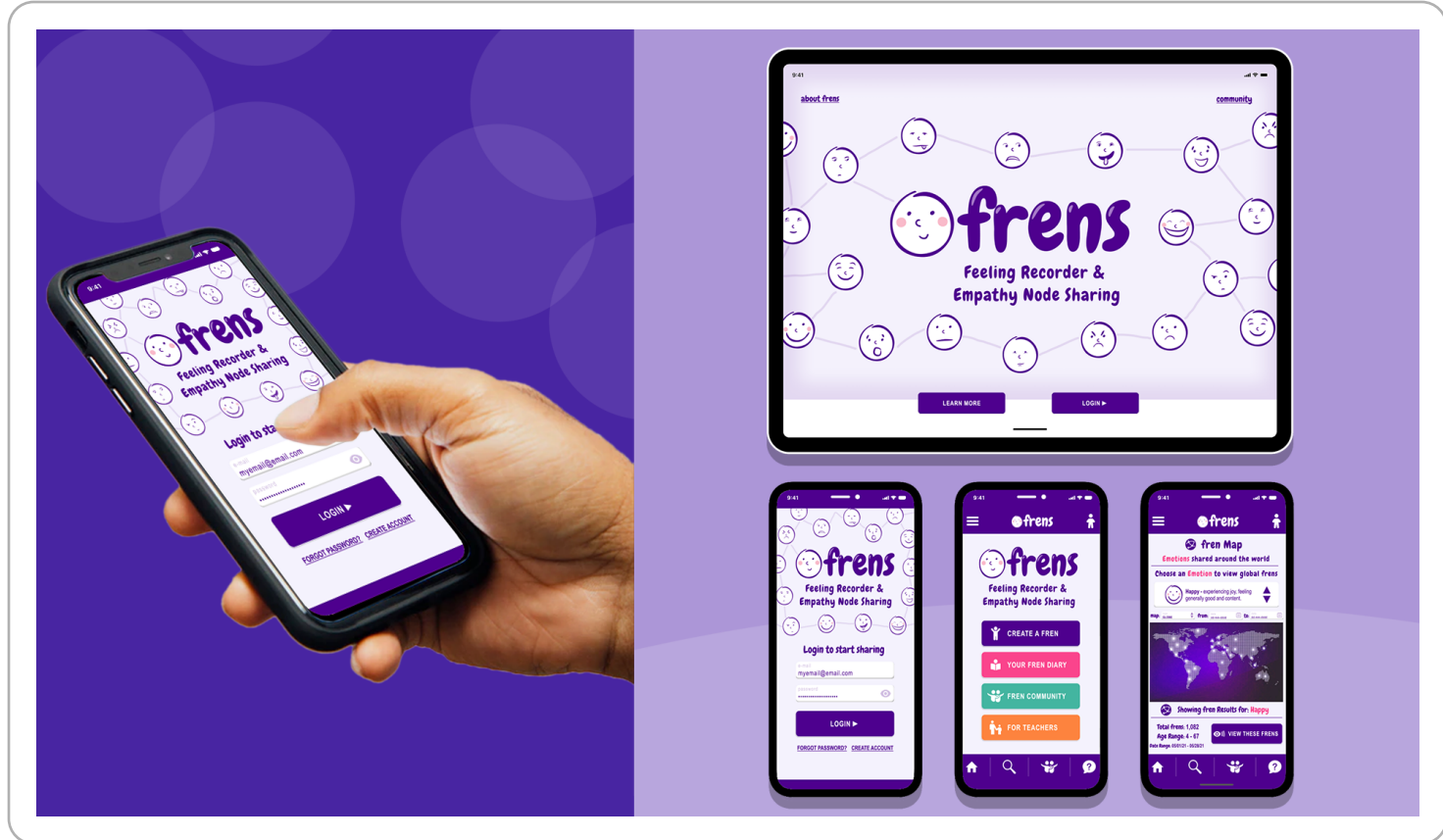
Early Education Students & Teachers

TIMELINE

Jul 2021 - Sep 2021

ABOUT

frens is an online community project designed to educate users of all ages about emotions and the development of empathy. Its primary audience includes parents and educators who want to introduce and foster empathic thinking and emotional understanding in adolescents.


My Roles & Contributions
UX Designer

- Designed & built user interfaces
- Designed Product Branding & assets
- Planned & Conducted user-base Testing

UX Researcher

- Researched User Needs and Pain Points
- Defined Potential End User Base
- Conducted Market Gap Analysis

Data Architect

- Optimized product data architecture
- Built Unique Product Functionality
- Improved User Path Throughputs

Key Decision Factors

ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS

A safe, engaging way to teach emotional vocabulary and empathy while supporting adults (parents/educators) who guide learning.

USER CONSIDERATIONS

Short attention spans and cognitive load required simple language; adults needed oversight; privacy and permissions were important.

CONSTRAINTS & PARAMETERS

Age-appropriate content, safety/moderation needs, and accessibility considerations shaped tone, interactions, and community features.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Kids could name emotions and practice empathy, while adults observed progress with minimal setup or confusion.

PRODUCT CORE FEATURES OVERVIEW



The Product:

frens is an online community project intended to educate people of all ages on emotion definitions and how to develop empathy. *frens* primary target is adult users like parents and teachers who are concerned with introducing and fostering empathic thinking in adolescents.



∞ End-to-End Workflow

EVALUATE BUSINESS NEEDS

Validated the educational goal and the role of adults as decision-makers and facilitators. Design an app that will improve education on the topic of emotions and empathy, by creating an exercise that teachers and parents can use as a lesson plan.

DEFINE SCOPE & EXPECTATIONS

Defined scope for activities, content guidelines, and moderation/permissions requirements.

CONDUCT USER RESEARCH & PROBLEM DISCOVERY

Reviewed best practices for SEL content and interviewed target adults for expectations and constraints.

EVALUATE USER NEEDS & PAIN POINTS

Identified pain points: unclear definitions, inconsistent vocabulary, and lack of guided practice. Parents & Teachers need a educational activity that will help them illustrate concepts of emotions and empathy to their students.

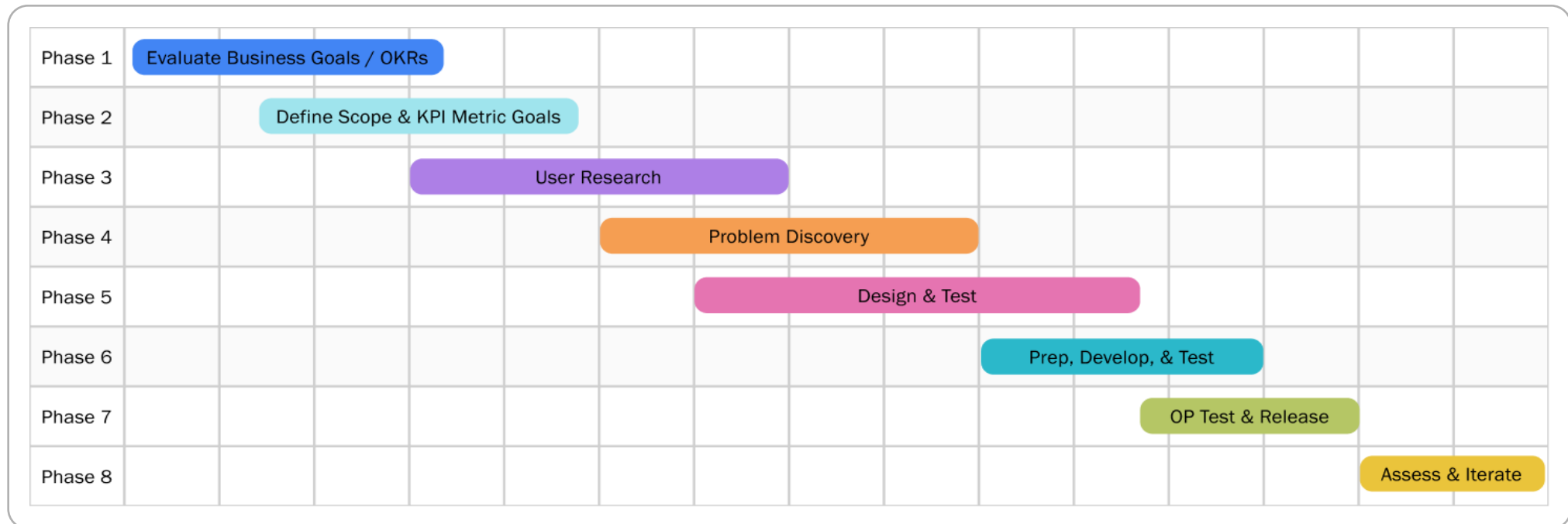
CONFIGURE CONTENT & DEVELOP SOLUTION APPROACHES

Designed short activities with visual cues and reflection prompts, plus adult-friendly guidance.

MEASURE OUTCOMES & ITERATE

Measured engagement and comprehension signals, iterating content and interaction patterns.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT WORKFLOW PHASES



Design Decision Highlights

KEY DESIGN CHOICES

Simple emotion definitions, short activities, visual cues, and guided prompts with adult-facing guidance.

WHY I MADE THESE CHOICES

They reduced cognitive load and supported consistent learning across ages and contexts.

WHAT I INTENTIONALLY OMITTED

Open-ended social features that would require heavy moderation and increase safety risk.

WHY THESE CHOICES MATTERED

Clear, safe learning experiences improved engagement and supported real-world conversations.

KEY DESIGN COMPONENTS

Design System

Creating the Design Assets:

The site utilizes an "education for all" business model, so I designed art assets and chose colors that leaned toward a friendly but also thoughtful and emotional aesthetic. A main sans-serif font was chosen for instructional text, as well as a more charming font to appeal to adolescent audiences.

Logo & Slogan:



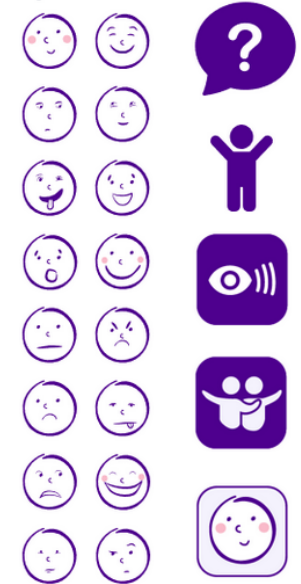
Fonts:

Arial Narrow
Arial Narrow Bold
chewy regular

Colors:



Graphics & Icons:



Design Process Elements

USER RESEARCH



Julie Miller

Age: 34
Education: Bachelors
Hometown: Milton, MA
Family: Husband 38, 2 sons (9, 7)
Occupation: Real Estate Agent

"I work long hours, so when I get home my kids tell me all about their day."

Goals

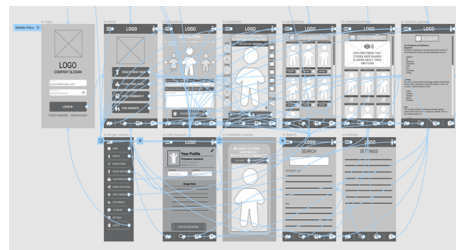
- Find ways to connect with her kids when she gets home from work.
- Support her family financially and emotionally.
- Help her kids learn about making new friends.

Frustrations

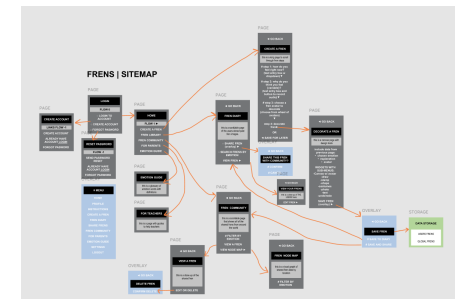
- "I can't get my kids to behave, sometimes they fight with each other too much."
- "They like having their friends over after school, but sometimes they can't come over."
- "I always check my kids phones and only let them have a few apps because you have to be so careful letting them online."

Julie has been a Real Estate Agent for 6 years and works 40+ hours a week. She works hard to provide for her family. Her husband is a stay-at-home dad and handles most of the house chores. Julie tries hard to make time to reconnect with her family when she gets home. She is looking forward to helping her sons get ready to go back to school in the fall.

PROTOTYPES



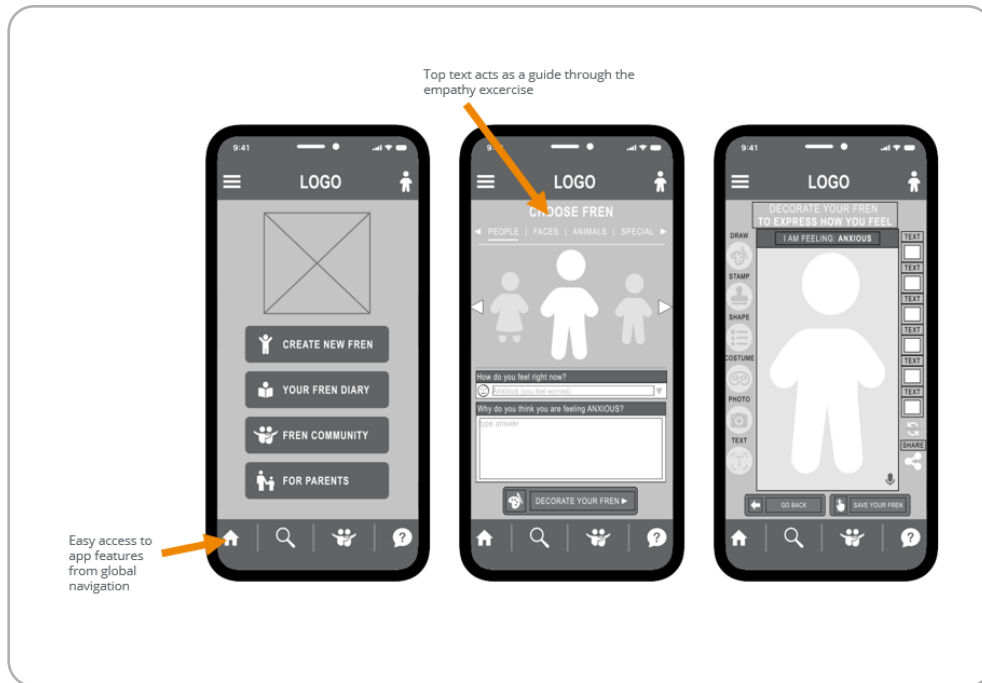
DATA ARCHITECTURE



Impact Snapshot

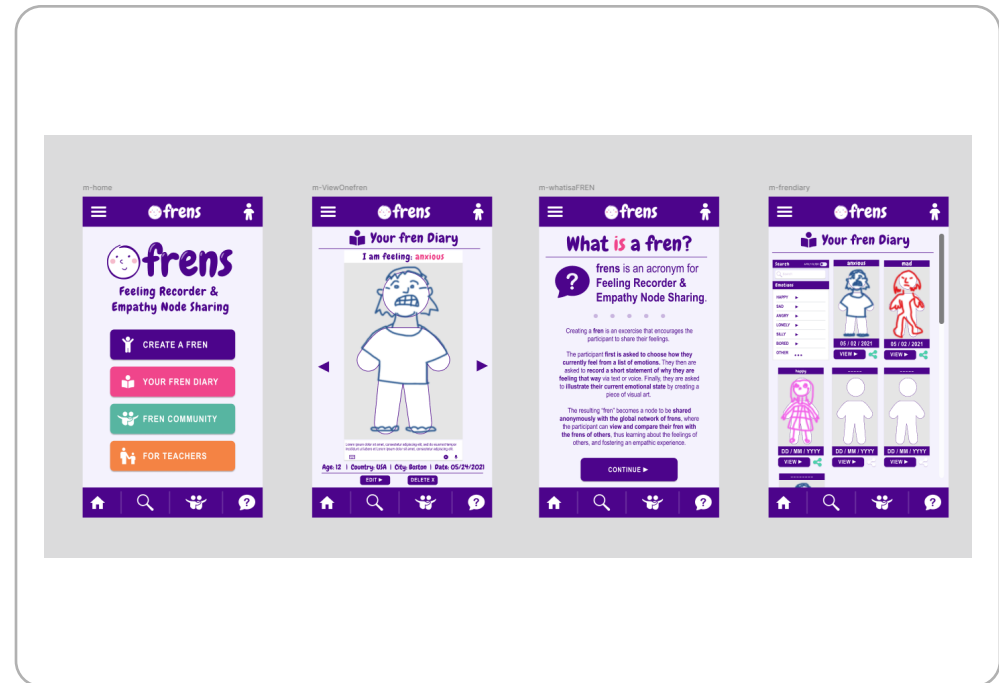
BEFORE REDESIGN

Content lacked consistency and guidance, making it harder for adults to teach emotional vocabulary reliably. Based on the insights from the usability studies, I applied design changes like providing clearer calls to action on the homepage, and removing the word “parent” and replacing it with “teacher”.



AFTER REDESIGN

Structured activities and consistent definitions improved comprehension and made learning more approachable. Additional design changes included adding more illustrations to the emotion guide, as well as breaking up the definitions to read more clearly to the user.



END-USER QUOTES

BEFORE REDESIGN

“I want something that helps my kid talk about feelings without it feeling like a lecture.”
- Parent



AFTER REDESIGN

“The emotion cards make it easier to start conversations.”
- Parent



AFTER REDESIGN

“Short activities keep them engaged – we can do it in minutes.”
- Teacher





Feeling Recorder & Empathy Node Sharing

community fren map about contact

Search

Your fren Diary

Let's learn about emotions & empathy

Create a fren



How are you feeling today?

Anxious - experiencing worry, unease, or nervousness.



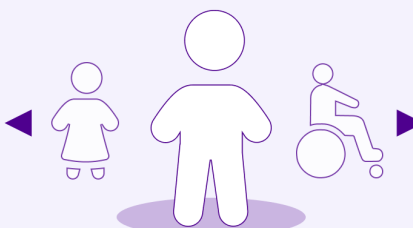
Why are you feeling: **anxious**?

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.



Choose your fren

PEOPLE | HEADS | ANIMALS | SPECIAL



Ready to Continue?

DECORATE FREN

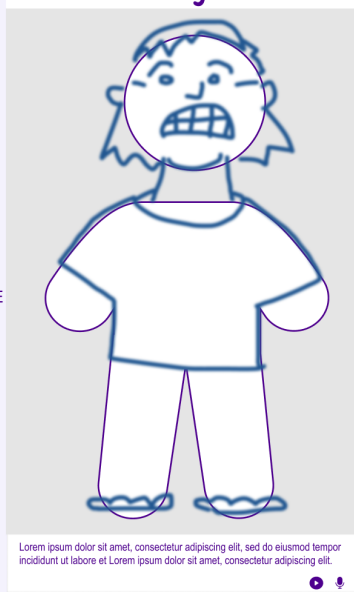
SAVE FOR LATER



Decorate your fren Portrait to **express** your feeling

I am feeling: **anxious**

- DRAW
- STAMP
- SHAPE
- COSTUME
- TEXT



SAVE FREN

Download the app! Available on Android and iOS

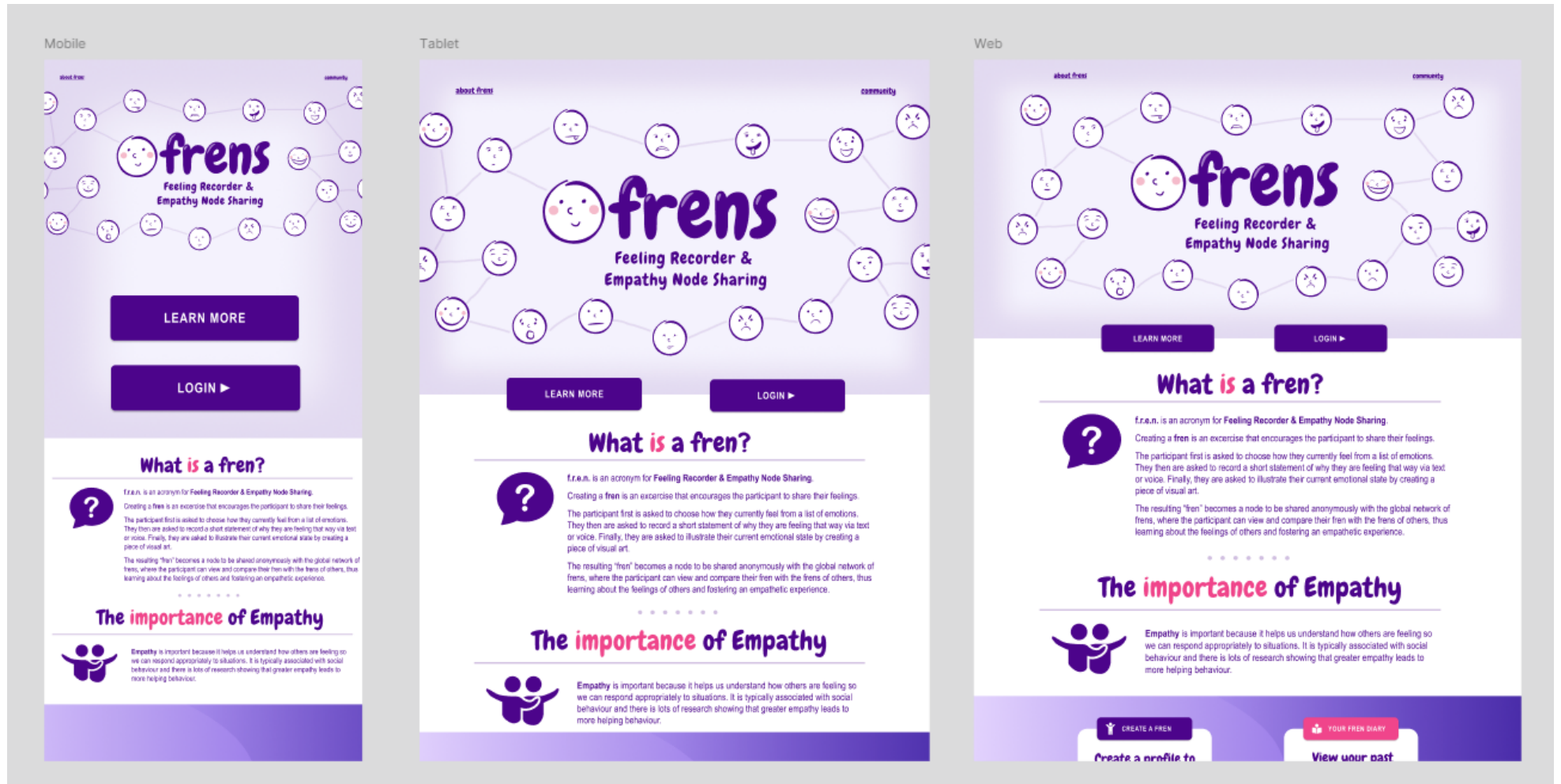
VIEW MOBILE SITE

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Key Visual



Usability Studies

STUDIES CONDUCTED



MODERATED

- Scripted Interviews
- Prototype Walkthroughs
- Heuristic Evaluations



A / B TESTS

- Product Variant Comparisons
- Time on Task Tracking
- Engagement Experiments



UNMODERATED

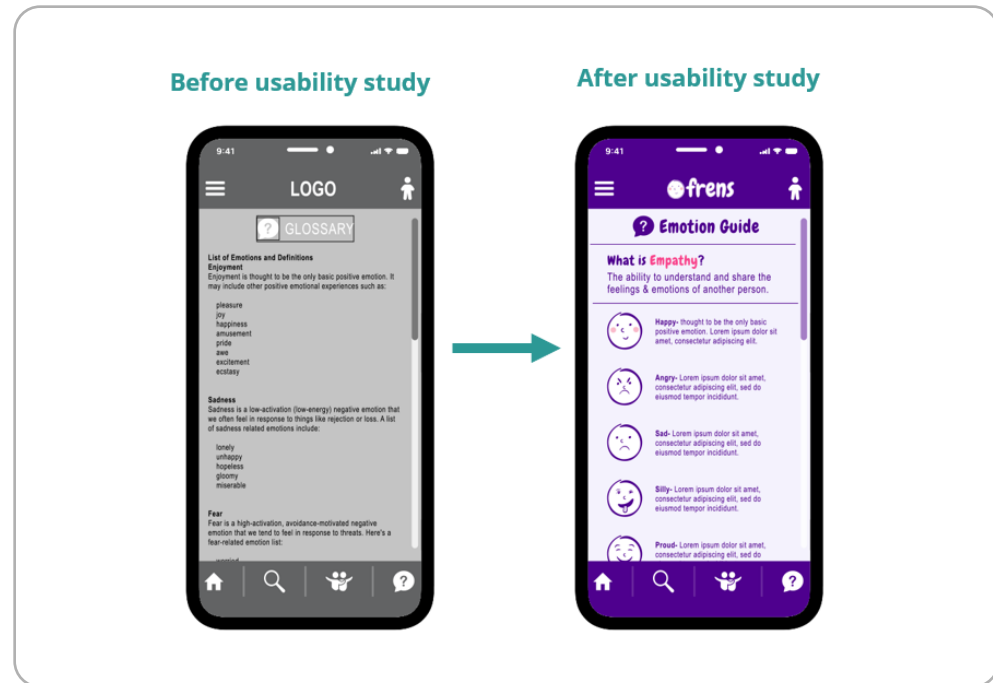
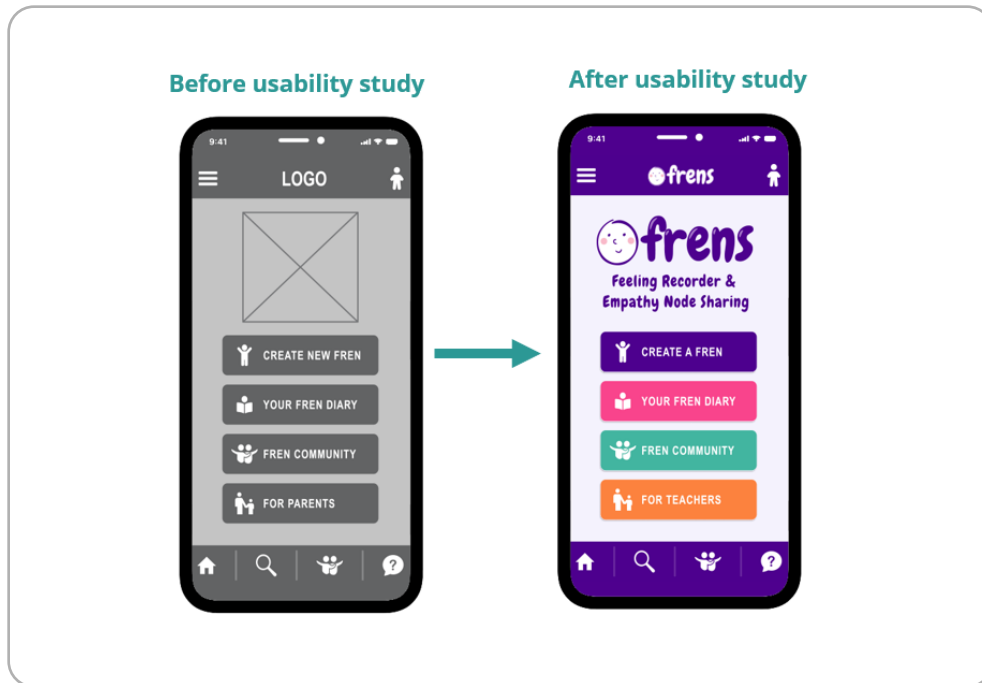
- Email Surveys
- Task-Based Testing via Prototype
- Field Studies

BEFORE USABILITY STUDIES

I conducted two rounds of usability studies. Findings from the first study helped guide the designs from wireframes to mockups. The second study used a high-fidelity prototype and revealed what aspects of the mockups needed refining. Users needed simpler language, clearer guidance for adults, and more engaging visual cues.

AFTER USABILITY STUDIES

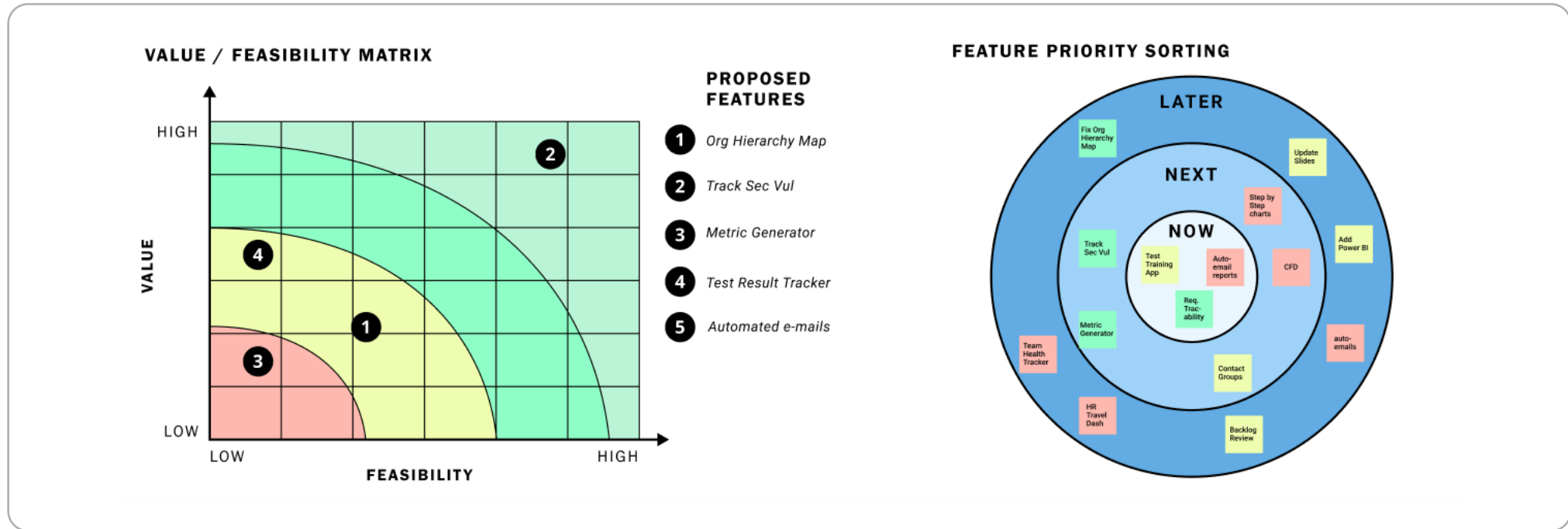
Parents want engaging ways to teach their kids about emotional intelligence and empathy. Simplified wording, improved visual cues, and added facilitator tips for parents/teachers. Users need numbered steps to follow the lesson in the correct order. Users also wanted lots of options for the design phase of the exercise.



★ Feature Prioritization

DETERMINING PRIORITY

Prioritized safety, clarity, and engagement first; community features were staged later. Each session revealed new priorities because there were so many ways the users could interact with the exercise.



A Navigating Challenges

USABILITY

Engagement Design

Challenge: Keeping experiences age-appropriate and engaging while teaching emotions without cognitive

Approach: Use short activities, simple language, and visual cues that reinforce learning and reflection.

COMMUNICATION

Content Consistency

Challenge: Educators and parents expected different learning depth and tone, leading to mixed feedback.

Approach: Create content guidelines, validate with both groups, and iterate using structured feedback sessions.

ACCESSIBILITY

Challenge Sub-Type

Challenge: Some users struggled with reading level and comprehension across devices.

Approach: Use simple language, audio support, and consistent visual cues for emotions and actions.

Key Insights & Outcomes

USER INSIGHTS

Adults wanted guidance; kids needed simple, visual, quick interactions. Users need numbered steps to follow the lesson in the correct order.

WORKFLOW INSIGHTS

Sessions were short and repeatable; prompts that supported discussion were most effective. Parents wanted repeatable ways to teach their kids about emotions.

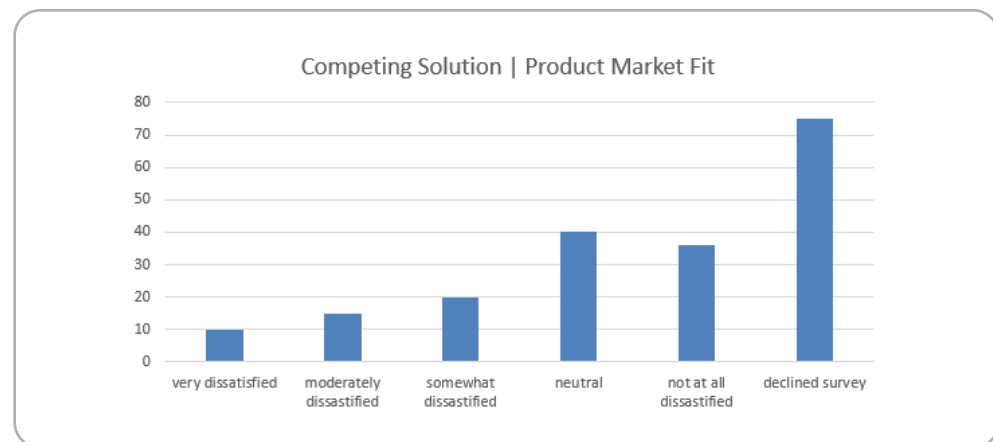
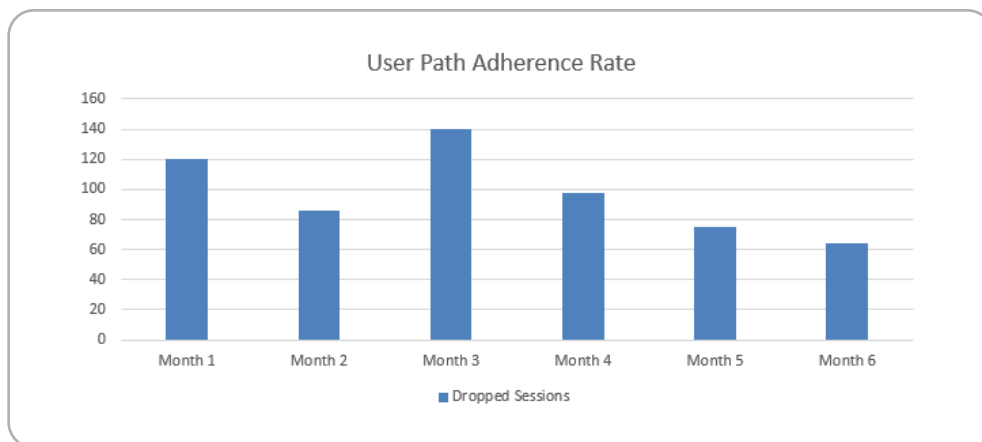
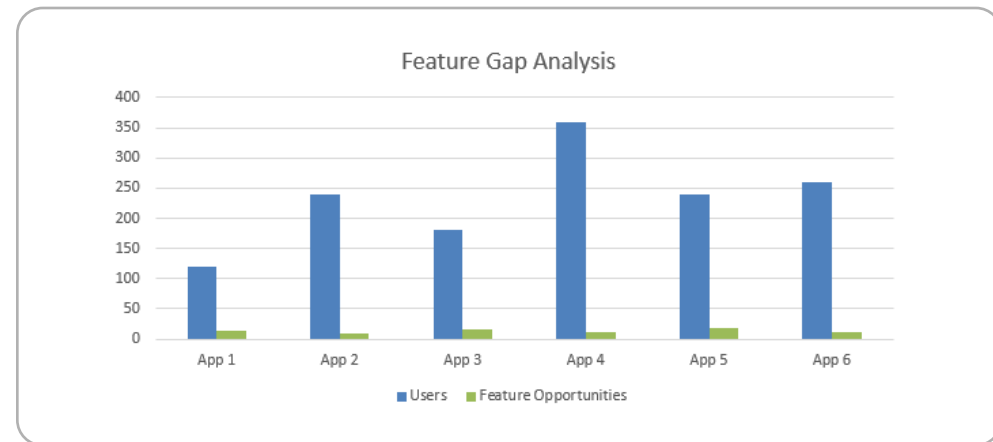
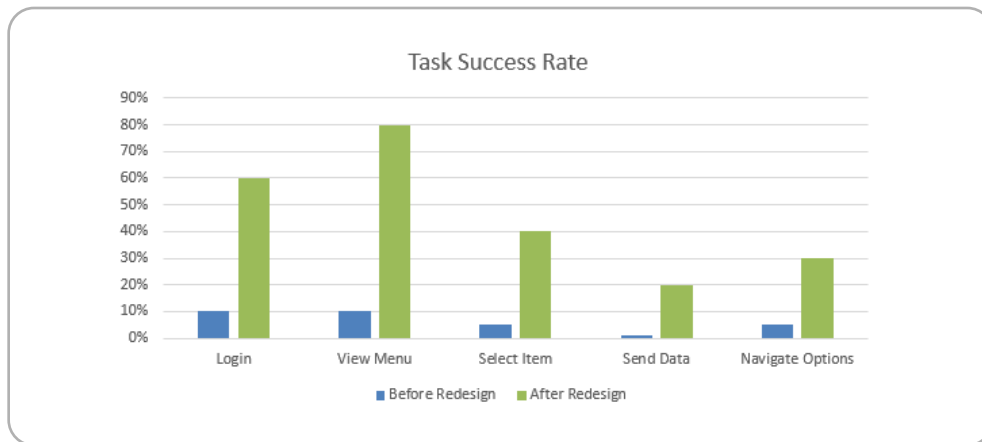
FEATURE INSIGHTS

Emotion cards, prompts, and activity variety increased engagement. Users wanted lots of options for the design phase of the exercise.

PERFORMANCE INSIGHTS

Lightweight interactions improved performance on mobile and reduced dropout. Saving work in progress to review later was essential for users.

METRICS TRACKED



 Takeaways

HOW DID FEEDBACK INFLUENCE DECISIONS?

Feedback showed where content felt too complex or unclear. Iterations focused on clarity, shorter activities, and stronger visual scaffolding.

HOW DID THESE CHOICES INCREASE VALUE?

Improved emotional vocabulary and engagement supported stronger parent/child conversations and learning outcomes.

HOW DID THE OUTCOMES ALIGN WITH BUSINESS GOALS

Outcomes aligned with goals by improving engagement and supporting measurable learning moments.

WHAT ELSE WOULD I CHANGE?

When expanding age ranges, adding new activities, or introducing moderated community features.

WHAT NEEDS FURTHER EXPLORATION?

Progress tracking, additional activity packs, and optional educator resources aligned to curricula.

WHAT I LEARNED

Consistent vocabulary and short, repeatable activities drove the strongest engagement and comprehension.

 Next Steps



FOR THE BUSINESS

Expand learning content

Add new activity packs and educator resources to broaden adoption while maintaining safety and quality.



FOR THE TEAM

Strengthen content operations


Establish a content review pipeline and moderation guidelines for any community-enabled features.



FOR THE USERS

Support guided learning

Add progress summaries and suggested next activities so adults can guide learning confidently.

 Let's Connect!



Thanks for Reading!

If you'd like to further discuss my work, talk about product strategy, UX design, or building productivity tools, I'd love to connect. Hope to hear from you!

-Hill

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RESUME

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