Safe Havens App and Responsive Website

Jim Neessen

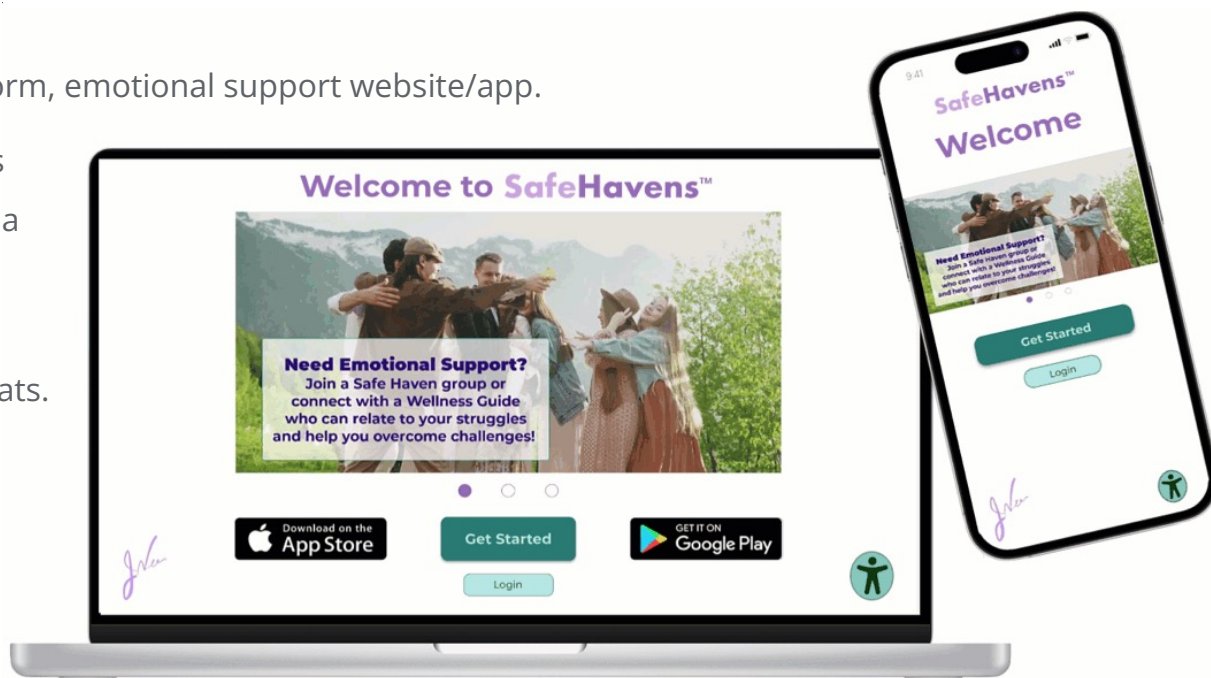# Project overview

The product:

Safe Havens is a cross-platform, emotional support website/app.

The primary target market is teenagers (13-18) who want a safe place to anonymously connect with peers through private guides and group chats.

Project duration:

April 2023 to June 2023

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Project overview

The problem:

Approximately 50% of teens have faced emotional issues in the past year, including 13.3% who experienced major depressive episodes. These adolescents require a secure and confidential platform to seek guidance and emotional support—a safe space where they can connect with others who have overcome similar challenges, while maintaining anonymity to protect their privacy from friends and family.

The goal:

Design a user-friendly app that enables easy setup and access to topic-specific group chats. The app will connect users with personally matched private wellness guides, ensuring personalized support. Prioritizing user privacy, the app will create a secure environment for individuals to navigate their emotional issues and receive valuable guidance

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Project overview

My role:

UX designer leading the app and responsive website design from conception to delivery

Responsibilities:

Conducting interviews, paper and digital wireframing, low and high-fidelity prototyping, conducting usability studies, accounting for accessibility, iterating on designs, determining information architecture, and responsive design

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Understanding the user

- User research
- Personas
- Problem statements
- Competitive audit
- Ideation

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User research: summary

Through extensive research, including interviews and empathy mapping, I gained valuable insights into the needs of the target users. Teenagers grappling with insecurity, anxiety, and depression emerged as a prominent user group. Many participants expressed their openness to trying an emotional support app or website to connect with peer groups or private counselors.

Contrary to my initial assumption that most teens preferred chatting with licensed therapists, survey results revealed a significant number of teens seeking independent solutions. They preferred a platform with non-licensed volunteers, as long as reliable reviews and quality control mechanisms were in place to ensure effective support. Financial constraints and privacy concerns were key factors driving this preference.

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Persona 1: **Landen**

Problem statement:

Landen is a 9th grade boy with ADHD who transferred to a new school who needs to connect to a peer support group using his phone's browser, because he wants help with life challenges without his parents' involvement.

Landen

Age: 14
Education: High School Freshman
Hometown: York, PA
Family: 2 Parents, Brother, and Sister
Occupation: Student

"I think an online website would be better because my parents can see what I download."

Goals
- A website where I can post my problems so others who have knowledge and experience can reply and offer solutions.
- I want a confidential friend to give me advice and support, away from others finding out.

Frustrations
- When my parents find out about my personal struggles or something that happens at school.
- My parents randomly check my phone and can monitor my mobile app downloads.

Landen is a 14-year-old high school freshman who recently moved to York, PA with his parents, older brother, and younger sister. He is currently adjusting to a new school environment after the transition. Landen has been diagnosed with ADHD, which presents challenges for him in terms of focusing in school and finding acceptance among his peers.

In addition, Landen faces the hurdle of strict parents who closely monitor his mobile phone activities, including the apps he downloads, making it crucial for him to have a confidential outlet for personal discussions and seeking advice.

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Persona 2: **Rachel**

Problem statement:

Rachel is a busy college freshman with problems at home who needs a simple, peer-support group app with the option to chat with a trained therapist, because she wants to learn how to cope with emotions, conflict, and stress.

Rachel

Age: 19
Education: College Freshman
Hometown: Lancaster, PA
Family: Divorced Parents
Occupation: Nursing Student

"In addition to peer groups, I would also like to receive professional support from a therapist or a trained support counselor."

Goals
- To join a support group with other girls who struggle with similar challenges who can understand me.
- To download an app with a support group, resource information and the option to talk one-on-one with a trained therapist.

Frustrations
- Some topics and people's comments trigger anger and negativity in me when chatting online.
- Most of my friends are petty, and I have a hard time trusting others.

Rachel is an overwhelmed 19-year-old college freshman from Lancaster, PA. Currently studying to become a nurse, she juggles her academic responsibilities while adjusting to the new challenges of college life. Rachel comes from a family with divorced parents, which adds additional stress to her already busy schedule.

Alongside her commitments, Rachel is actively seeking different counseling options that are both affordable and helpful, recognizing the importance of accessing the support she needs to navigate her emotional challenges effectively.

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Competitive audit

An audit of a few competitors' products provided direction on gaps and opportunities to address with the Safe Haven app.
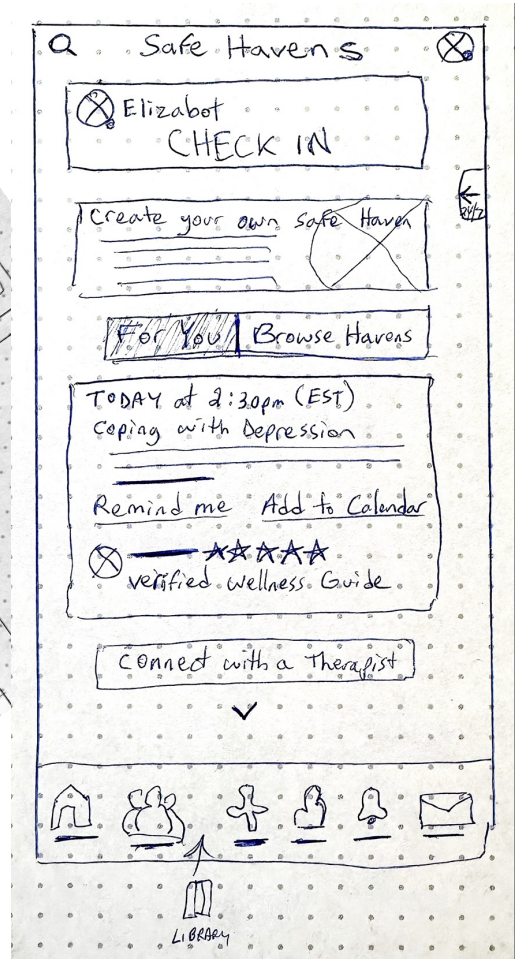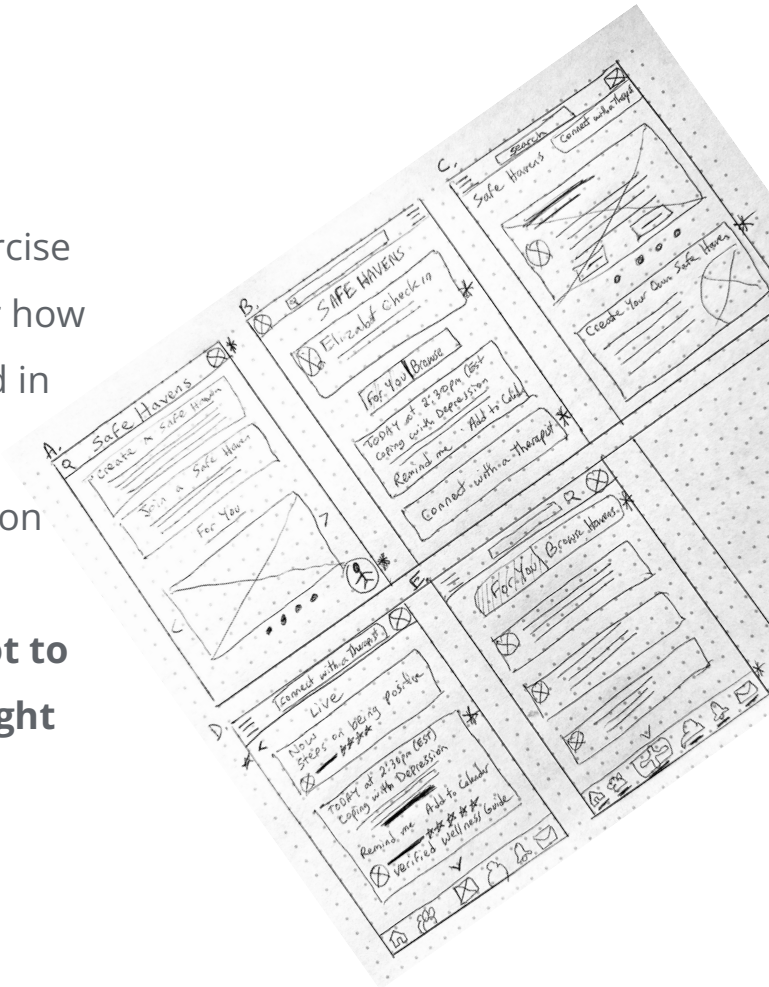
Competitive Audit

Goal: Compare the overall browsing and customization experience of each competitor's website

	General information								First impressions	
	Competitor type (direct or indirect)	Location(s)	Product offering	Price ($ - $$$$)	Website (URL)	Business size (small, medium, large)	Target audience	Unique value proposition	Desktop website experience	App or mobile website experience
	Indirect	Glenview, IL	A confidential online chat with trained listeners, licensed therapists and psychiatrists.	Free to $150/month		Large	Anyone who needs emotional support	24/7 availability, professional therapists, customizable chats	**Outstanding** +Clean layout design. +Easy-to-use.	**Outstanding** +User-friendly design. +Great chat functionality.
	Direct	San Francisco, CA	A mobile app for peer-to-peer emotional support and a directory of therapists.	Free to $29.99/month		Small	Young adults, ages 18-35	Easy-to-use mobile app, peer-to-peer support, affordable therapy	**Outstanding** +Appealing color scheme. +Modern layout design.	**Outstanding** +Intuitive and simple interface. +Convenient navigation.
	Direct	London, UK	A supportive community with a focus on mental health and wellness, and professional therapy services.	Free to $29.99/month		Medium	Teens and young adults, ages 13-24	Anonymity, supportive community, professional therapy options	**Outstanding** +Clean and engaging layout design. +Friendly and welcoming.	**Okay** +Simple and straightforward interface. +Intuitive navigation. - Desktop site is non-responsive (in beta)

UX (rated: needs work, okay, good, or outstanding)

Interaction				Visual design	Content	
Features	Accessibility	User flow	Navigation	Brand identity	Tone	Descriptiveness
Okay +Easy-to-navigate chats. +Professional listener/therapist support. -Confusing pricing structure. -Slow loading times.	**Good** +Screen reader friendly. -Limited color contrast options.	**Okay** +Quick registration process. -Challenging to find the therapist directory.	**Good** +Simple menu. -Cluttered footer.	**Good** +Professional and inviting. -Can feel too clinical.	**Okay** +Positive and supportive. -Can be repetitive.	**Okay** +Descriptions are concise and to the point. -Lack of information on privacy policy.
Good +Customizable profiles. +Direct messaging. -Limited therapy options.	**Okay** +Accessible to people with disabilities. -Few accessibility features.	**Okay** +Easy-to-use search function. -Clunky registration process.	**Okay** +Clear and direct. -Can be challenging to find support groups.	**Good** +Engaging and authentic. -Unclear branding.	**Good** +Informal and relatable. -Limited variety of content.	**Good** +Descriptions are clear and informative. -Limited detail on how data is used.
Good +Support groups. +Private messaging. -Lack of therapist support.	**Okay** +Accessible to people with disabilities. -Limited accessibility features.	**Good** +User-friendly and intuitive. -Limited community engagement.	**Good** +Clear and informative. -No FAQ page.	**Good** +Young and friendly. -Can be seen as immature.	**Good** +Encouraging and supportive. -Limited variety of content.	**Okay** +Descriptions are detailed and thorough. -Limited information on community guidelines.

Ideation

I did a quick ideation exercise to come up with ideas for how to address gaps identified in the competitive audit.
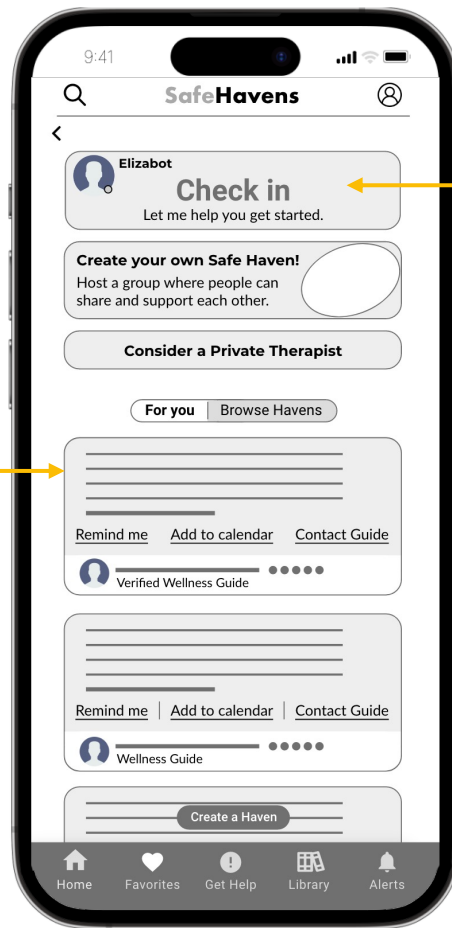My focus was specifically on **account creation**, **chat groups** and an **AI chatbot to match users with the right wellness guide.**

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Starting the design

- Digital wireframes
- Low-fidelity prototype
- Usability studies

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Digital wireframes

After ideating and drafting some paper wireframes, I created the initial designs for the Safe Havens app. These designs focused on helping users connect with emotional support chat groups and live wellness guides using an AI chatbot check-in.

The AI chatbot helps users find a live wellness guide who can help them with their specific problem

Easy access to emotional support groups on priority topics selected by the user

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Low-fidelity prototype

To prepare for usability testing, I created a low-fidelity prototype that assessed the user flow of creating an account profile and using an AI chatbot to connect with a live wellness guide.

View Safe Havens' low-fidelity prototype

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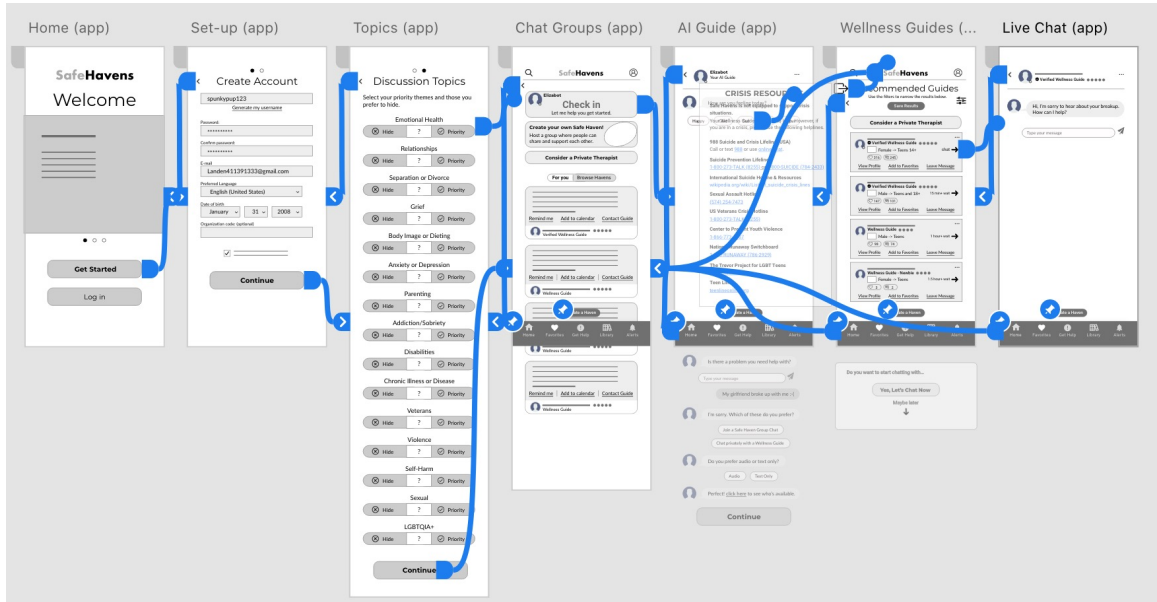
Usability study: parameters

Study type:

Moderated usability study

Location:

Pennsylvania (USA)

Participants:

5 participants

Length:

20-30 minutes each

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Usability study: findings

These were the main findings uncovered by the usability study:

1

Wellness Guides

People thought that wellness guides were therapist, because they were listed below the 'therapist' button.

2

Topic selections

Users wanted clearer icons showing that default topics may be included in discussions in addition to priority selections.

3

Emergency hotlines

Participants want to see a clearly marked emergency button, which is critical if they need immediate help.

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Refining the design

- Mockups
- High-fidelity prototype
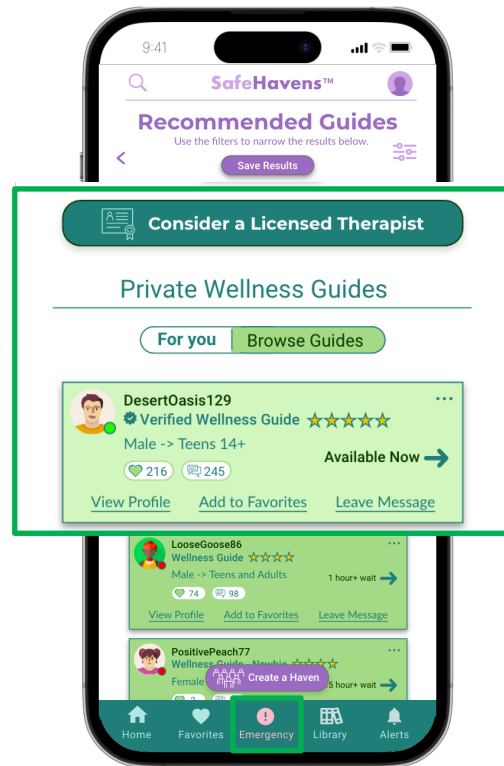- Accessibility

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Mockups

Based on the insights from the usability studies, I applied design changes like providing a heading above the individual wellness guides, so they aren't mistaken for licensed therapists.

I also added a clear "Emergency" button on the bottom menu for quick access to urgent hotlines, along with other minor changes.

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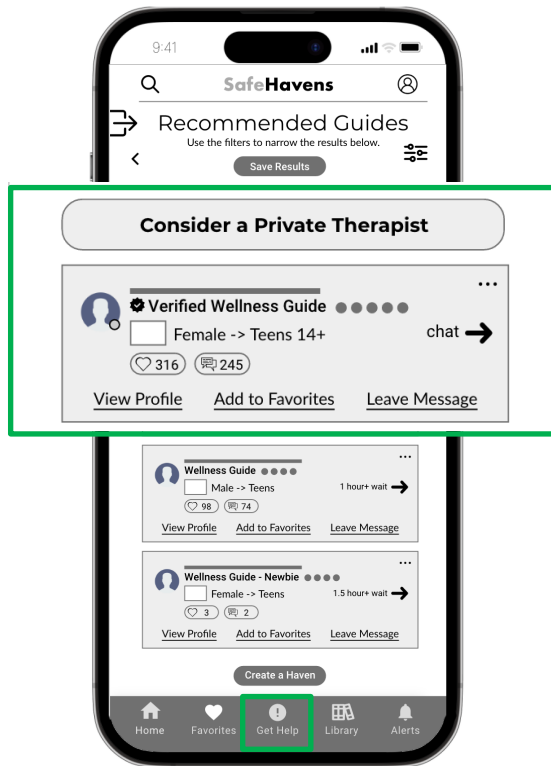
Mockups

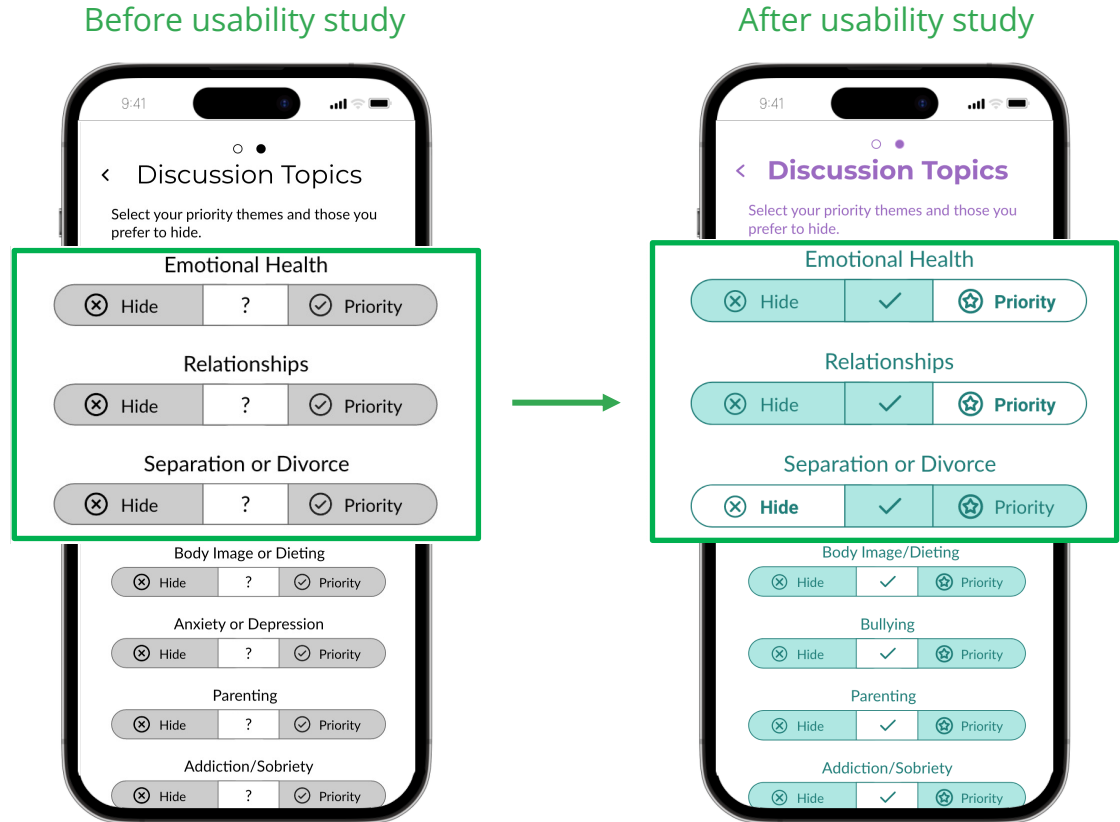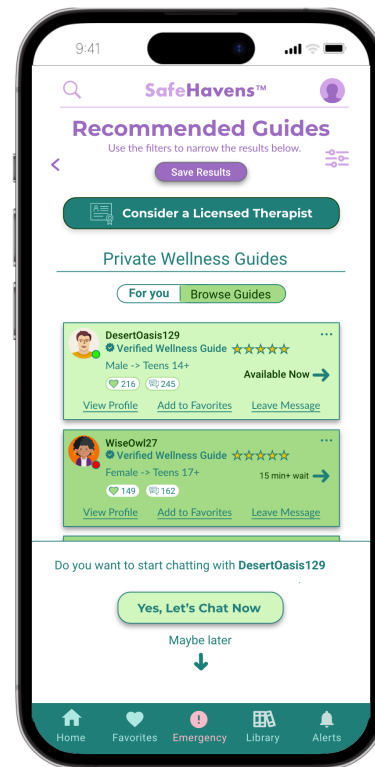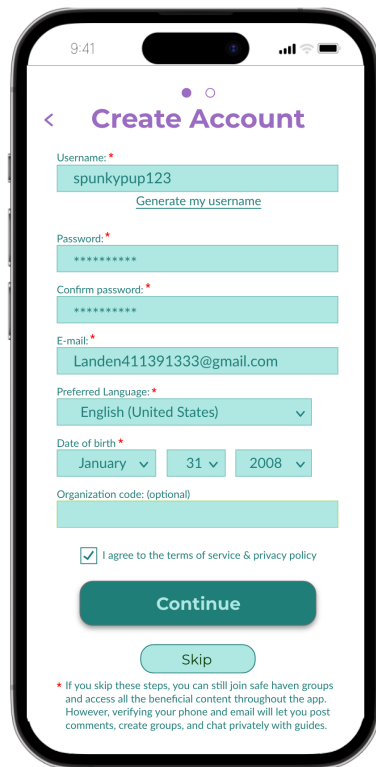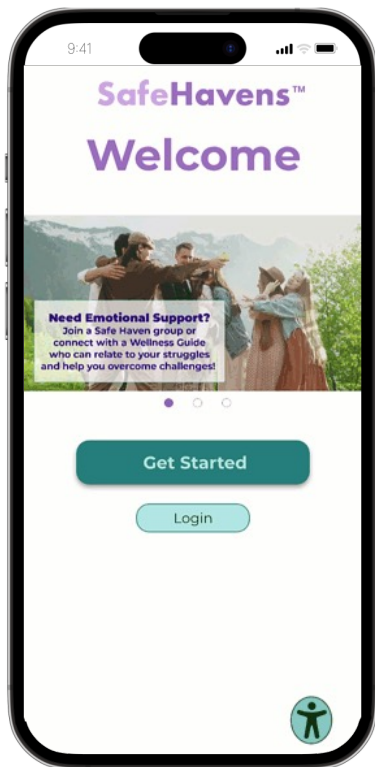Since most usability study participants were confused with by the question marks on the topic selections, I changed them to check marks and made the priority icons stars.

This shows users that all topics are allowed by default, but they can choose which topics to prioritize and which to hide.
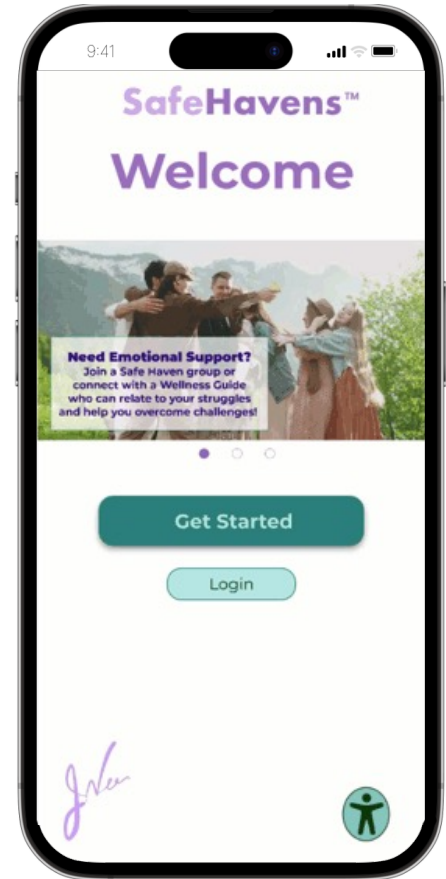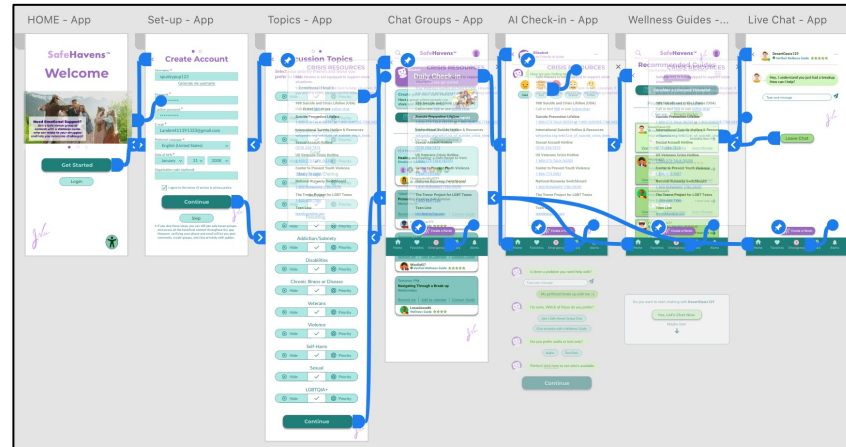
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Mockups

High-fidelity prototypes

The high-fidelity prototypes for different screen sizes followed the same user flow as the low-fidelity prototype, including design changes made after the usability study.

View the prototypes:

- [Standalone App](#)

- [Desktop Website](#)

- [Tablet Website](#)

- [Mobile Website](#)

Accessibility considerations

1

I employed a visual hierarchy by utilizing headings with varying text sizes and incorporating colored border sections, effectively guiding users' attention and enhancing clarity in the interface design.

2

I ensured that interactive elements were equipped with comprehensible labels that are compatible with screen readers, promoting accessibility and inclusivity for all users.

3

I incorporated personalized "for you" recommendations and intuitive filters, empowering users to effectively narrow down their options and address their specific needs more effectively.
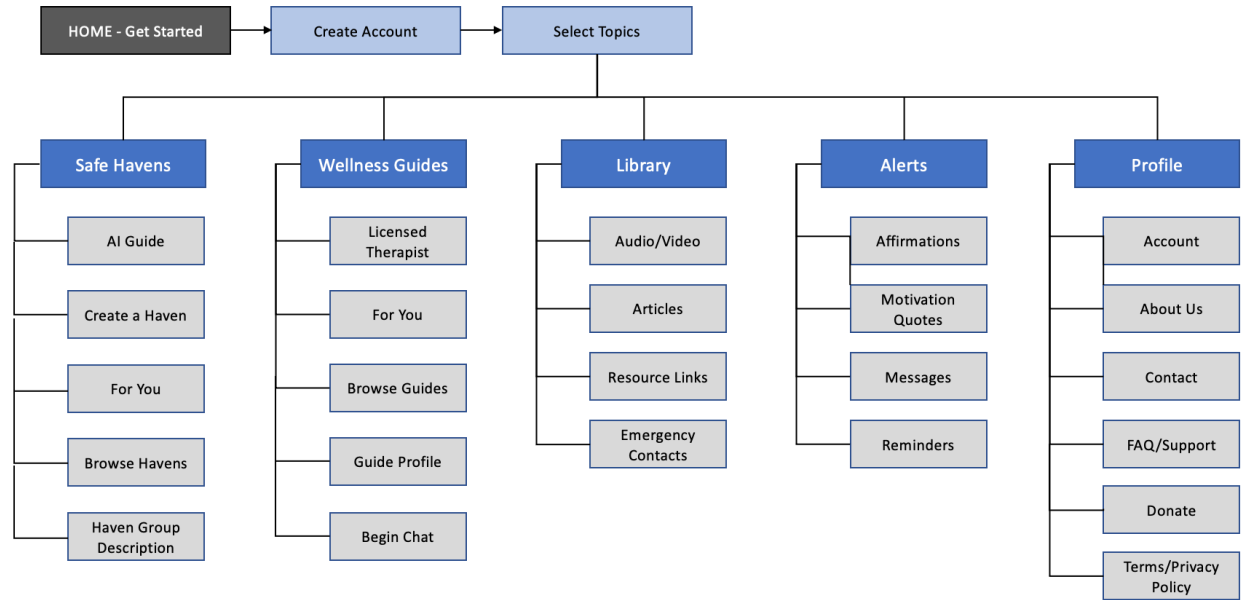
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Responsive Design

- Information architecture
- Responsive design

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Sitemap

With the app designs completed, I started work on designing the responsive website. I used the Safe Havens sitemap to guide the organizational structure of each screen's design to ensure a cohesive and consistent experience across devices.

SAFE HAVENS – Emotional Support App/Website

```
HOME - Get Started  →  Create Account  →  Select Topics
```

| Safe Havens	Wellness Guides	Library	Alerts	Profile
AI Guide	Licensed Therapist	Audio/Video	Affirmations	Account
Create a Haven	For You	Articles	Motivation Quotes	About Us
For You	Browse Guides	Resource Links	Messages	Contact
Browse Havens	Guide Profile	Emergency Contacts	Reminders	FAQ/Support
Haven Group Description	Begin Chat			Donate
				Terms/Privacy Policy

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Responsive designs

The designs for screen size variation included mobile, tablet, and desktop.

I optimized the designs to fit specific user needs of each device and screen size.
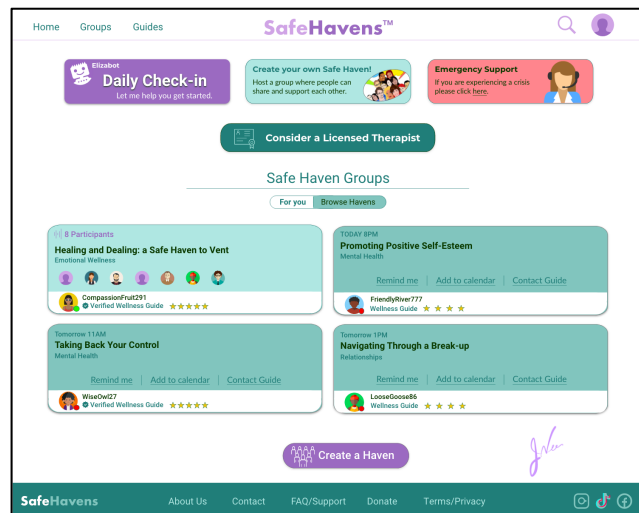
Mobile website

Tablet

Desktop

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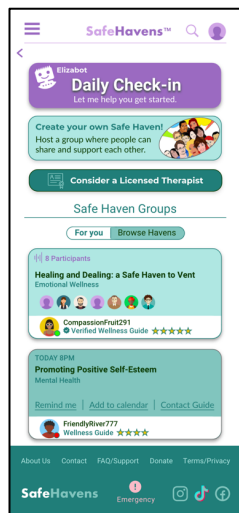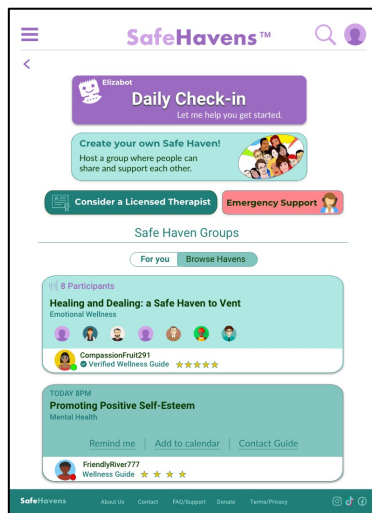
Going forward

- Takeaways
- Next steps

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Takeaways

Impact:

The AI Chatbot "Daily Check-in" received positive feedback from users as it served as an engaging icebreaker and effectively guided them in connecting with suitable wellness guides who were available to attentively listen and provide the needed support. As one user said, *"I love that the group chats and private wellness guides are recommended for me based on my topic selections and answers to the chatbot prompts.*

What I learned:

I meticulously navigated each step of the design process, closely aligning with the specific needs of users. I considered their concerns regarding privacy and quality control. This approach provided valuable insights that helped me craft solutions that not only addressed the overarching problem effectively but also prioritized the goal of creating a safe environment through a human-centered review and monitoring system.

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Next steps

1

Enhance the platform by incorporating a comprehensive library of resources that empowers users to conduct independent research and access additional information and support tools. This library will include articles, resource links, audio/video recordings, and essential contact info

2

Expand the notification alerts section to offer users the capability of receiving text messages and push notifications. These will include daily affirmations, motivational quotes, reminders, and messages from group moderators and wellness guides, which will keep users engaged, motivated, and connected

3

Conduct further research on how successful the app is in achieving the goal of helping teens find hope and solutions to their various emotional struggles

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Let's connect!

Thank you for your time reviewing my work on the **Safe Havens** app/website.
If you'd like to see more or get in touch, my contact information is provided below.

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Website: JimNees.com

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