

AstroMission

A game that facilitates the emotional connection between children with cancer and their parents

Why did AstroMission originate?

In Turkey, pediatric oncology patients aged 8-9 get cancer-related information, including diagnosis, through their parents (Dr. N. Yıldız Silahlı (MD), personal communication, 2022; Taşkıran Tepe, 2019). However, parents often hide or oversimplify this information due to their own psycho-emotional status and underestimating their children's ability to understand or cope (Coyne et al., 2016; Küreci & Büken, 2016). Besides information, they hide their feelings to maintain their child's morale and hope. This attitude of parents negatively affects children's understanding of cancer, adjustment to the life changes that occurred due to cancer, and coping with the challenges of cancer. Children might feel lonely and unsupported and exhibit similar behaviour of hiding their feelings. Moreover, parents need to deal with the psycho-emotional burden alone.

What does AstroMission do?

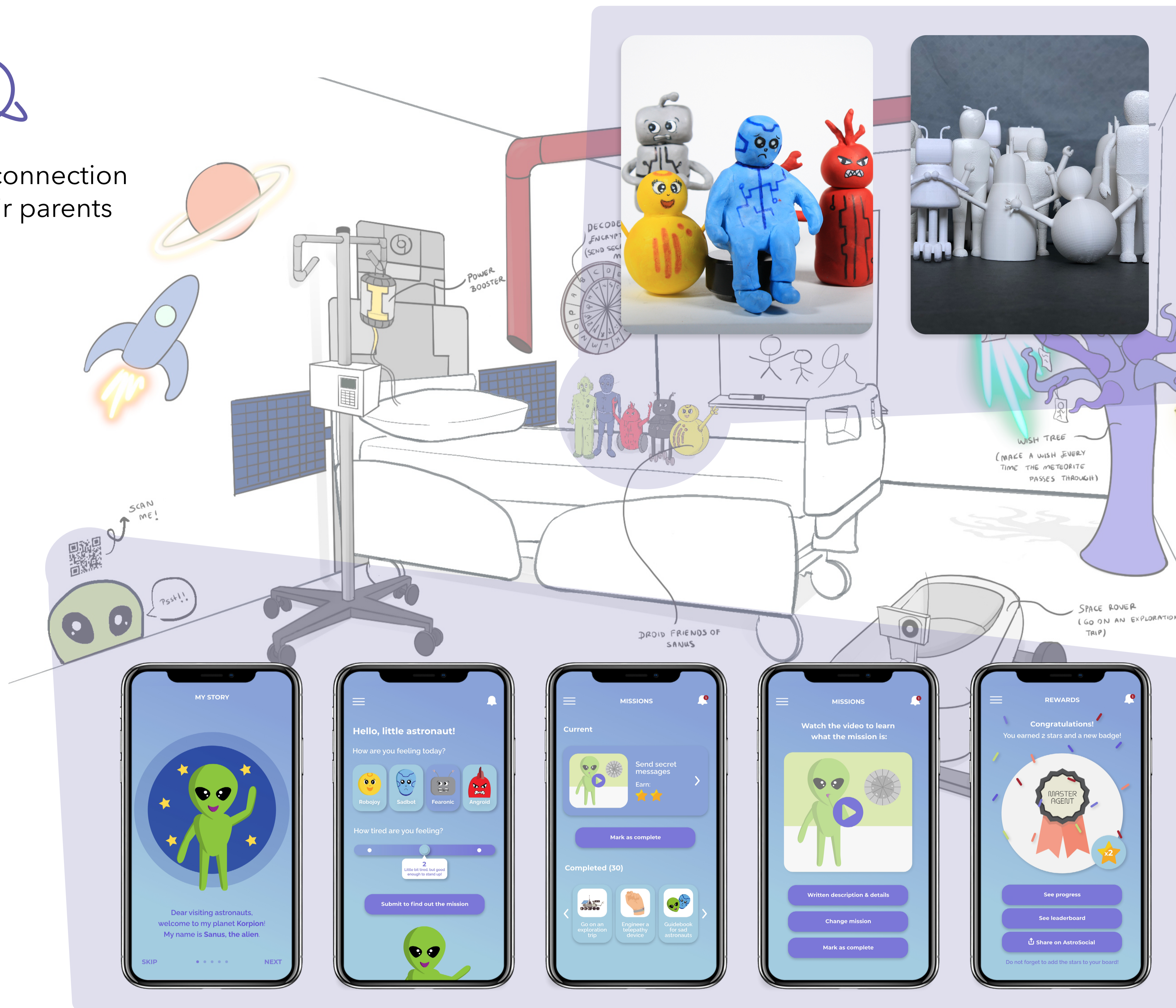
AstroMission encourages children and parents to have open communication about cancer and express their emotions to each other by means of live-action role-playing, where the family immerses themselves into a different world and takes the role of certain characters.

When the family stays at the hospital for the first time (after diagnosis), a space-themed room with various play materials welcomes them. This way, the child's perspective of the hospital is reframed into a less scary, even fun place. When the family scans the QR code on the wall, they encounter an alien's story which is a metaphorical representation of cancer: The alien's planet is invaded by his evil enemy and the enemy's clones. He needs the help of the new-coming astronauts (i.e., family) to save his planet.

To save the planet, astronauts need to perform some missions together. These missions are playful activities whose content nudges the family into talking about cancer and sharing their emotions with each other. They are presented on an app as a part of the story and suggested to the family based on the child's mood and tiredness level.

To perform the missions, the family can use the materials in the room and get help from a droid army of the alien: the emotion puppets. These puppets are a set of physical toys that represent four basic emotions: joy, anger, sadness, and fear. They help the child express their feelings and initiate a conversation between the parent and child about these feelings.

When the family completes a mission, they earn rewards that are collectible digitally and physically on a board. When the treatment ends, the family can take the board home as a memory that represents their journey.



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