Ethical Considerations

Mental Well-being and Emotional Safety

The target group includes young adults (18–22) who may experience social anxiety, loneliness, or other mental health challenges. It is ethically important that the game does **not increase stress, pressure, or feelings of failure**. Game mechanics should avoid punishment, humiliation, or competitive ranking systems that could negatively affect self-esteem. Instead, the game should promote **supportive interaction, encouragement, and low-pressure participation**, allowing players to engage at their own pace.

Avoiding Social Pressure and Forced Interaction

While the goal of the game is to encourage social connection, participation should never feel forced. Players must always feel that they have **autonomy and choice** in how they interact. Forcing verbal communication, spotlight moments, or public performance may increase discomfort for socially anxious players. Ethical design means offering **structured but optional interaction**, where players can contribute in different ways (e.g., listening, small tasks, or non-verbal actions).

Inclusivity and Accessibility

The game should be accessible to players with different social abilities, communication styles, and mental states. This includes clear instructions, predictable game loops, and a safe environment where mistakes are normalised. Designers should avoid assumptions about confidence, extroversion, or neurotypical behaviour. Inclusivity also means considering sensory overload (e.g., loud sounds, flashing visuals) and allowing players to opt out or pause if needed.

Privacy and Psychological Safety

Because the target group may be vulnerable, it is essential to protect players' privacy. The game should **not require sharing personal or sensitive information**, such as mental health details, unless absolutely necessary. Anonymity or the use of avatars can help players feel safer and reduce fear of judgement. Any collected data should be minimal, transparent, and used only for the intended purpose.

Avoiding Manipulation and Emotional Exploitation

Games designed for connection must avoid manipulating emotions or exploiting vulnerability. Techniques that intentionally trigger guilt, fear of exclusion, or emotional dependency are unethical, especially for players who already struggle with mental health. Ethical game design focuses on **empowerment rather than control**, encouraging positive interaction without emotional coercion.

Responsibility and Boundaries

The game should not position itself as a replacement for real-life relationships or professional mental health support. It is important to clearly communicate that the game is a **supportive social experience**, not a therapeutic tool. Designers have a responsibility to set clear boundaries and avoid making claims about mental health improvement that cannot be scientifically supported.