

## **Sticks and Stones**

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This digital work comments on the fears and anxieties that are often evoked by psychological Abuse. Psychological abuse, or mental abuse, manifests in verbal aggression, humiliating statements that infantilize, and threats of abandonment. By its very nature, psychological abuse can seem discrete and sometimes hide behind physical abuse, but its effects remain just as devastating by causing stress, social withdrawal, and long-term psychological trauma typical of anxiety, chronic depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

This digital piece gives us, the viewers, an opportunity to step into the mind of a victim of physiological abuse, a little girl named Ellis. We can help guide Ellis as she navigates fearfully through a psychological world to escape her personal fears and demons. This universe reflects both submission and resistance related to past abuse. The psychological damage and struggle that the character endures is illustrated in the background representation by extended hands.

During the game, the little girl travels through the subconscious to confront the side effects of her emotional abuse: low self-esteem, lessened self-worth, suicidal thoughts, and medication. She carries a teddy-bear gun as a symbol of comfort and protection, which also represents her determination to cope with trauma using the “bullets” of Prozac. The dominating man-spider complicates her escape from the trauma, leaving we, the players, to encourage her to keep going. Subliminal messages, and other obstacles, will attempt to slow down our progression and the only way to escape: continue advancing despite the pain it may cause Ellis. If we can help Ellis to survive and escape through the exit door, the game will reset itself and must be played again. The immediate play back of the game after completion is symbolic of the never ending cycle and that one must go through as they learn to cope and move forward with their lives after being abused.

In closing, as we move through the majority of her campaign, we see how the abuse seeks to destroy her. However, I want to stress how important it is that we, the players support her as she learns how to cope with the torment and her inner self to become healthier and, inevitably, win the game.