

Let's Talk about Children
Logbook
for working with families of
children from 5 to 12 years of age

Tytti Solantaus
2023



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Every family is different

Some families have a mum, dad, and children, while others have only one parent with children or have two mums or two dads. Children might also come from different backgrounds and live with grandparents, legal custodians or in out of home care.

In our logbooks, we use the word "caregiver" instead of "parent" to include all types of families. We have "the one caregiver" and "the other caregiver." Participants can of course choose what they want to be called during discussions. We use "N " as a placeholder name for the child being discussed, but we encourage using the actual name in the discussion and in the electronic logbook if possible.

Thank you!

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Thank you to all the families who trusted me with their life stories. What I learned from you is translated into Let's Talk about Children for helping other families.

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Logbook Let's Talk about Children Network Meeting © Mika Niemelä and Tytti Solantaus

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LETTER OF WELCOME TO CAREGIVERS 5-12

Dear Caregiver/s,

You have been invited to participate in Let's Talk about Children (LTC) discussion, welcome!

Children's age range for this discussion is from 5 years up to 12. This is an exciting age period! At school, children learn to make sense of letters and numbers, to read and write, to learn about the secrets of life and even gain a new identity as Student. Together with friends, they explore the world, build secret cabins, make up fantasy stories and whatever else. Their play and social life expand beyond home. Unfortunately, the world includes many temptations that might cause worries for caregivers. LTC discussion is for talking about both delights and worries. Here is a brief overview of the LTC approach, hopefully answering some of your questions about what is ahead.

What is LTC for?

LTC was developed to help caregiver/s and other important people in the child's life to support children's wellbeing and development. The aim is to contribute to the child's a day-to day life that supports their wellbeing, learning and development.

How does this happen?

The practical part first. LTC consists of two discussion sessions with a plan on what to do next and, if needed to carry out the plan, LTC Network Meeting. Network Meeting includes a gathering of the individuals that are identified by the caregiver/s to explore opportunities to support the child.

LTC discussion focuses on the child's day-to-day life as everyday interactions, encounters and routines are important to children and their wellbeing. However, life is not always easy. Every family has times of stress. Sometimes they are short-lived, sometimes they come to stay longer. Hardships take their toll and erode caregiver/s' energy and mental health resources. Caregiver/s might become impatient and irritable, maybe silent and withdrawn. Children react in their particular ways and parenting becomes more challenging. Everyday routines fall on the wayside, and when it happens, caregivers feel even worse.

Every family has unique strengths, which family members may not always recognize or give themselves credit for. Let's Talk About Children is a resource that helps families identify and nurture their strengths in the everyday life, and find solutions to difficult issues. The program is designed to support families and provide them with the tools they need to thrive.

It is time to start! I hope you have an interesting and inspiring discussion.

Kind regards,



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FIRST LTC SESSION

Getting started

1. Welcome and introduce participants
2. A brief overview of the aims and what to expect during the discussion.
3. Confidentiality and how the discussion is documented in the family member's records, as needed.
4. Before going on: How did you feel about coming here today? (caregiver/s and the worker)
5. A closer look of strengths and vulnerabilities

Strength: An area of the family life and of child's life outside home (day care, school and leisure environment) that is progressing well, including everyday routines, time spent together and activities with friends and the community.

Vulnerability: An area of the family life and of child's life outside home (day care, school, leisure environment) that might cause problems if nothing is done, or is already a concern which would benefit from further attention and support.

Caregivers often have different experiences and points of view. Do not worry, it is fine. If you disagree about strengths and vulnerabilities, mark them both.

Two examples to be discussed with the caregivers

A shy child in a lively and loud class room (or some other example)

The child is very lonely, left alone. The shyness is a vulnerability in this context. Action plan: to help the child integrate (caregivers and teacher), and to help the school mates learn to accept someone who is different in their group (teacher). Shyness could be a strength in another kind of environment.

A mother with alcohol problems takes the child to day care (or some other example).

The mother brings her child to the day care center with a hangover and the staff looks down on her. Overall, the child is doing well. Strength: The mother brings the child does this risking her own reputation, because she is sure that it is better for the child to play with other children in day care than stay at home with an ill mother.

The child at home

1. **What would you like to share about your family and yourselves?**

To the worker: Would you like to tell something about yourself?

2. **How would you describe N? What is N like?**

Also: What does N enjoy? What does N like to play?

What makes N laugh?

3. **Is N curious about new things, eager to try them out and know more?** Also: Does N have a special interest to focus on? Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

4. **How would you describe N's wellbeing and health?**

Mood and energy?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

5. **Have you been concerned about N?** What kind of concern? How about other children?

Have you searched for help, where?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

6. **Does N enjoy the company of sisters and brothers?** (when appropriate)

Also: What do they do? Is there something they enjoy particularly?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

7. **How would you describe your own relationship with N?** Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Also: Are there activities that you and N enjoy together?

Does N talk to you about delights? Does N turn to you when upset?

The one caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The other caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

8. **Does the whole family share any activities or hobbies?** Baking, cooking, playing games, movies, outdoor activities ...etc Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐



The child at school and preschool

Five- and six-year-old children have only a certain number of lessons per week. This is called here preschool.

2. **How has starting pre/school been for N?** Also: How does N feel about the lessons by the teacher? How about the tasks that the teacher asks to do?
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
3. **What would you say, does N enjoy pre/school?** What does N enjoy and maybe not enjoy?
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
4. **What do you think, is there enough time for N to play and relax during the day?**
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
5. **How does N get along with other children at pre/school?** Do you think N feels welcomed at pre/school in the mornings?
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
6. **Does N have friends at pre/school?**
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
7. **Is there discrimination or bullying at pre/school?** Is N a target and how? or somebody else in the group? In both cases, it is a problem that should be attended to
i. Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
8. **How do pre/school routines go?** (when appropriate)
Being at school in time Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Eating during the day Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Attending lessons Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Using the toilet Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Playtime Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Doing homework Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
9. **How are N's learning and studies progressing?** Do you think N's achievement is in line with N's capacities? Also: What do you think, is school stressful for N?
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

If pre/school is stressful for a student, it could be due to many issues. It might be that teachers and the school system put too much pressure on students to succeed, or that students do not get the support they need e.g., due to being a different learner, being depressed, having things to worry about at home, a parent fallen ill, etc.

10. **What would you say about N's relationship with the teacher/s and other staff members?**
Also: Are teachers or other staff members available, when N needs them? Is there somebody N can turn to for comfort?
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

11. How would you describe home-school co-operation and your relationship with N's teacher/s?

Do you meet with N's teacher/s? Are they helpful and available? Is there a system to help caregivers and teachers to communicate? Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Spending time outside of school

1. How does N like to spend free time? Does N have a special interest or a hobby?

Are there possibilities for N to get involved in such an activity or interest group?

Are they available, is it economically possible to attend, are there ways to commute etc.?)

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

2. Does N have friends in the neighbourhood to meet and spend time together?

What do they like to do? Does the environment inspire play and explorations?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

3. Does N spend a lot of time alone? Does N enjoy being alone? What does N like to do when alone?

A child might enjoy time alone, or being alone might be due to feeling low, perhaps depressed.

Not joining others might also be the result of bullying and discrimination (see below)

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

4. Has N been bullied or discriminated during free time and on internet? If yes, what happened and how has it been taken care of? Are further measures needed? Make a note in the action plan page.

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

5. Does N have a person outside of home whom N feels close to? A grandparent, aunt/uncle, a parent of a friend, a partner, a trainer/ coach in some sport or other activity ...

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Parenting and housework

1 What is it like to be a caregiver? A caregiver to N?

The one caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The other caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

2 How do the daily routines go with N

Morning routines and leaving home for pre/school

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Hygiene and washing up

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Issues concerning clothing

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Eating strength vulnerability

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Physical and outdoor activities

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Curfew's strength vulnerability

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Going to bed, sleeping

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

3 Does N have household responsibilities? What are they and how do they go? What do you think they mean for N? And for you?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

4 Possible disagreements and conflicts with N

There are disagreements and conflicts with all children. They are often passing, but can also be quite persistent and hard to solve. Sometimes either party might lose their temper, especially if there are other pressures and tensions in the family. If this has happened, you are welcome to talk about it, and help and support can be searched for in the action plan.

How do you and N deal with conflicts? Has anyone lost their temper? What happened?

The one caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The other caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

If there has been rough behaviour with physical contact and abuse, or psychological abuse (threats, abusive language, calling names etc) by anyone (adult or child), discuss it and make a note in the action plan section to remind of needed action and support.

6. Have you noticed something special in N, for instance

Difficulties to depart with caregiver

Difficulties to go to pre/school

Persistent low mood, depression

Restlessness, inability to concentrate

Defiance, irritability, behavioral issues

Anxiety and fears

Eating problems

Isolation from others

Signs of substance use

Phobias, obsessive-compulsive behaviors

Odd thoughts, talk or behavior

Comments and behavior around self-harm or dying

Caregiver/s' wellbeing and social support

1. **How would you describe your own wellbeing and health?** Are you (both caregivers) What do you think, do they have an impact on children and parenting? Experiencing any persistent worries and stress reactions or mental health issues? How would you describe them? If the other caregiver is not present, discuss how they are doing, do they have any such issues that interfere in family life and parenting? (e.g., excessive work; exhaustion & burnout; health and mental health issues, substance use, and others)

The one caregiver
The other caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

2. **Other concerns** It's possible that you may have concerns related to your other children, the health of extended family members, work-related issues, family stress, or other matters. Do you have any other concerns, and if so, how do you manage them? Is help needed from other services (e.g. school, health and social services, income support services, etc)?

The one caregiver
The other caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

3. **Communication and solving problematic issues** How do you feel about talking about your worries and potential signs of stress and mental health concerns with your partner/ support person? Have you explained the possible changes of your behaviour to your child/ren?

Talking among the caregiver's
the children

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐ Talking to
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

This concerns building up shared understanding among the caregivers and the family. It is very important in any family, but crucial when a family/ a couple faces difficulties. Introduce this now and come back to it in the second session.

Examples of strengths: Caregivers share and discuss difficulties and issues causing distress; problems concerning children are shared; solutions are found; treatment services are supportive and involve also the family

Possible vulnerabilities: Issues of distress and their consequences are hard/impossible to discuss among caregivers and with child/ren; discussing leads often to quarrels or withdrawal; caregiver struggle alone; treatment services are not supportive enough, family members are not included



4. **Household chores, child care and gainful employment** How do you manage all these different tasks? Are you satisfied with the division of labour? If you are alone, do you get help from friends, extended family or others?

Child care and parenting

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Household chores

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Gainful employment

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

5. **Couple relationship** Do you find delight and joy in each other's company? Empathy and support?

The one caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The other caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

6. **Social life, friends, relatives**

Joy and shared activities

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Availability of practical support

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

7. **Is there anything else you would like to talk about?**

8. ***Home assignment**

9. **Ending the meeting**

How was this discussion for you, the caregivers? And for the worker?

Set up the next meeting

Thank you!



*Home assignment

It is time to close this discussion and to give you two tasks to focus on at home.

No.1 We would like to ask you to get acquainted with Annex 1 and Annex 2 or the booklet, How Can I Help My Children?

If the family is dealing with mental health problems, recommend or give them a copy of the booklet How Can I Help My Children. It has a more thorough presentation of the family situation and talking with children.

Annex 1, SHARED UNDERSTANDING AND CO-OPERATION IN THE FAMILY explains what shared understanding means. It describes how important it is for family members and their wellbeing to be able to make sense of what is happening in the family. As you will see, this is true also with children.

Annex 2, TALKING ABOUT DIFFICULT ISSUES WITH YOUR CHILDREN and booklet **How can I help my children?** give guidelines how to talk with children about issues that have an impact on their life but are difficult for everyone to talk about. These include anything from economic problems to a family member's mental health issues or a severe illness.

Annex 3, TALKING ABOUT DIFFICULT ISSUES WITH ONE'S CHILDREN for practitioners and **"How can I help my children?"** give more detailed information about talking with children and will help you to discuss these issues with caregivers. They can also be given to caregivers.

No 2. As to the action plan, we'll discuss ways you can nurture your strengths and address vulnerabilities. To prepare for this, we ask that you select the strengths you'd like to focus on and identify any vulnerabilities you'd like to find support and solutions for. The list of ****Things to pay attention to when making an LTC action plan** is helpful in putting the plan together. Please take your logbook with you when you come next time.

You may involve your children in these discussions. They may have helpful insights related to their own experiences and situations. Furthermore, if you like, you can invite N to join us in the second session to discuss these issues.

Thank you!



*Things to pay attention to when making the LTC action plan

Here are some important things to consider when creating an action plan for Let's Talk about Children (LTC). They refer to both caregivers and children, including young people.

Note! It is not expected that families manage all these situations, probably no family does. The list helps you to identify the strengths that you have and select issues that you find important to focus on in the action plan and family life.

1. Shared understanding and co-operation in the family
 2. Caregivers discuss difficult things and make plans in a constructive manner
 3. In case of problems affecting children, they are helped to make sense of what is happening and to cope with the situation
 4. Parenting and housework are shared between the caregivers to their satisfaction.
 5. Children have responsibilities in a way which is appropriate for their age and situation
 6. Regular hours and sufficient rest for everyone in the family
7. Shared moments of joy between the spouses and with the whole family
 8. Friends and relatives who bring joy and give practical help
9. Children feel loved and are cared for, and valued by the caregivers
 10. Caregivers play and spend time with children
 11. Children have interests and friends
 12. Children are valued by teachers at day care/ kindergarten/school and by leaders/ coaches in activities /hobbies and appreciated in respective peer groups
13. Courage to ask for help even if it is difficult and feels shameful
 14. Services that are available, understanding, get involved and provide help



The second LTC session

1. Greet the participants: How have you been?
2. How was the previous LTC discussion for you? For the worker? is there anything you would like to go back to?
3. Explain the aims and process of this session
4. How did you feel about the home assignment? Did you have time for it? If not, that is fine. Let's look at them now.
5. **Annex 1** Shared understanding and co-operation in the family.
What do you think about this? How does this sound to you, does it make sense?

Explain what shared understanding is about and use the example to clarify it. You can also use your own examples.

Annex 2 and the booklet “How can I help my children?”

What kind of thoughts do you have about talking with children about difficult issues? Do you have any experiences? How did it go?

Remember never to put pressure on caregivers to talk about something they are ambivalent about or resist.

Be prepared to respond to questions concerning children's age, type of problem to be told (from low mood to suicide attempt), who tells, how the process continues from that, etc.

If the caregivers have difficulties discussing distress and mental health issues, consider suggesting a session in the action plan to talk about such issues with you and each other.

6. **How was this discussion for you?** And the worker?

The aim is to approach these issues from different angles. Remember that you are not the one who 'knows' and tells what family members should do. Let family members decide. At best, this is a learning period for both you and the family.

7. Did you have a chance to look at the strengths and vulnerabilities identified in the first session? If not, no problem. We can do it now and continue the discussion on that basis

What kind of thoughts came up/ come up regarding your strengths and vulnerabilities? Any surprises, any disappointments, any questions?



Drawing up the action plan

1. Which strengths did you choose to make a plan for? Brainstorm options of what to do, write down what is decided

2. Which vulnerabilities did you choose to make a plan for? Brainstorm options of what to do, write down what is decided.

- If no further activity is needed, proceed to 4. Ending the meeting
- If further help is needed, proceed to 3. Planning LTC Network Meeting
- If further help is needed, but Network Meeting is not an option, information is given about the needed services and how to reach them



3. Planning LTC Network Meeting

- a) Explain the purpose of meeting
- b) Explain how the meeting is set up
- c) Caregivers agree on the topics to be discussed and topics that family does not wish to discuss

Write down the strengths and vulnerabilities and possible other topics for the action plan:

- d) Who is to be invited and by whom?

It would be fruitful for the family to talk with children at home about strengths and vulnerabilities in situations which involve them. Children might have ideas that are important to be included in the action plan. You are also welcome to invite N to join the meeting.

- e) Set a date for the meeting _____

4. Ending this session and the LTC process

How was this session and the LTC process for you? For the worker?

Has it been helpful for you? In what way?

Was there something problematic that you would like to talk about?

If you continue to use the service, you are welcome to talk about the family situation and children whenever you like. The staff is delighted to hear good news and ready to provide support when needed. Agree on whether the worker may initiate a discussion about the children also later on.

If the caregiver/s continue to use the service, encourage them to talk about the family situation and children whenever they like. The staff is delighted to hear good news and ready to provide support when needed. Agree on whether the worker may initiate a discussion about the children also later on.

Thank you!

1. Begin by warmly welcoming everyone making introductions

The leader of the meeting describes the outline of the meeting and how it has been prepared.

2. Caregiver/s or the worker, as agreed, describe the reasons for the meeting and areas of action i.e., the strengths and vulnerabilities.

3. Discussion among caregivers and invited participants

- a) Clarifying questions and points of view
- b) Ideas on how to proceed on each item
- c) Turn the ideas into concrete actions that family members agree on

4. Write a memorandum* stating the courses of action. Use a flip chart or project it on a wall.

Service workers are usually at the top of the list, followed by the family's social network and the family. This way, the family can plan their own actions based on the overall effort. If called for, the order can be changed.

All participants are given a copy of the memorandum at the end of the meeting, if family members agree.

5. Set up the follow-up meeting and agree on who will be there. ***

6. Ending Network Meeting.

How was this meeting for the participants?

To family members: Did you feel that you were understood? Do you think you received the support you needed?

The leader of the meeting makes a summary, hands the memorandum to the participants as agreed, thanks the participants and declares the meeting closed.

**** At least one follow-up meeting is recommended to let the involved parties note what has been achieved and whether a new meeting is called for. The time between meetings and their number depend on the overall situation. The follow-up meeting begins with family members giving a short outline of the current situation and whether the original plan was put into action. If a deed was not carried out, the responsible person describes why not and what was done instead. A discussion follows on what was learned for the future while implementing the plan. If further action is called for, a new memorandum is written stating what courses of action should continue and what else is needed.**

***Format the memorandum**

Network meeting _____ (date)

Topics (For example, 3)	Topic 1: Topic 2: Topic 3:	
Participants	What specific action, when (For example, date, time of day)	Follow-up meeting date

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