

Let's Talk about Children

Logbook for working with families of children from 12 to 18 years of age

Tytti Solantaus
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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!

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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LETTER OF WELCOME TO CAREGIVERS

Dear Caregiver/s,

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

The age range of the discussion covers children from about 12 up to 18 years of age. This is an exciting time for young people and their caregivers. Young people enter this age period as children, six years go by and they emerge as adults! It is a time for intense development of the young person's mind and body. Joy and delight are felt deeply, and so are sadness and anxiety. These ups and downs are strongly felt also by caregivers and the rest of the family. - 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 at 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 in bad 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 young person at home

1. **What would you like to share about your family and yourselves?** Would the worker like to tell something about themselves and the work setting?

2. **How would you describe N, what is N like?**

Also: What does N enjoy? What makes N laugh?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

3. **How would you describe N's wellbeing and health?** Mood and energy?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

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

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Have you searched for help, where? _____

5. **Does N enjoy the company of sisters and brothers?** Also: What do they like to do? Is something they enjoy particularly?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

6. **How would you describe your own relationship with N?** Also: Are there activities that both you and N enjoy? Does N tell you about their delights and sorrows? Is there something that you would like to be different?

The one caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The other caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

7. **Does the whole family share any activities or hobbies?** Playing, reading, movies, baking, cooking, outdoor activities, going for walks, ...etc

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

At school. If N is not at school any more, but working, proceed to 7.

1. **What would you say, does N like school?**

Also: What does N find good or not so good at school

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

2. **Does N have friends at school?** Also: Do you think N feels welcomed at work / at school in the mornings? Is there discrimination or bullying?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

3. **How do school routines go?**

Getting to school in time

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Eating during the day

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Attending lessons / doing the assigned work

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Doing homework strength vulnerability

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

4. **How are N's studies progressing?** Also: What would you say, is school easy for N or is it stressful? Do you think N's achievement is in line with N's capacities?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

If 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

5. **What would you say about N's relationship with the teacher/s?** Also: Are teachers fair and are they available when N needs them?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

6. **How would you describe 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 ☐

At work

1. **What would you say, does N like going to work?** Also: What does N find good or not so good at work?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

2. **What do you think, does working mean for N?** Also: What does it mean for you?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

3. **Does N have friends or acquaintances at work?** Also: Do you think N feels welcomed at work in the mornings? Is there discrimination or bullying?

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

4. **Is there anyone N can turn to when there is a need?** Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
5. **How do work related routines go?**
 Getting to work in time Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
 Eating during the day Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
 Doing the assigned work Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
6. **What do you think, how is N managing work life?** Also: What would you say, is work easy for N or is it stressful? Do you think N's achievement / success at work is in line with N's capacities?
 Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

If work is very stressful for N, it could be due to many issues, one being those foremen and the work system put a lot of pressure on workers to succeed, or that N does not get the support they need e.g., due to having special needs at work, being depressed, overworked, etc.

7. **What would you say about N's relationship with the foremen/women at work?**
 Are they available and supportive? Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
8. **Does N have plans for the future, what do you think?** Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Spending time outside of school and work

Participating in different activities with others and doing things alone are important for young people. At best, they are fun and build up young people's sense of self, but sometimes they include worrisome aspects. These include substance use, bullying others or being bullied, excessive time on the internet/ games with unhealthy content.

1. **How does N like to spend free time?** Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
2. **Does N have a special interest or a hobby?** Also: Are there possibilities for N to get involved in such an activity or interest group? (Are they available, is there money to attend, ways to commute etc?)
 Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

3. **Does N have friends or a group of friends to meet and share time with? How about a partner?**
What do they like to do? How do you feel about it? Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
4. **Does N spend time alone?** A young person may enjoy time alone, or they might be feeling low and not wanted. Spending time alone can also be the result of bullying and discrimination (see below). **How is it with N? What does N like to do when alone?**
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
5. **Has N has been bullied or discriminated during spare time and on internet?** If yes, why? Have there been any efforts to support N and prevent bullying /discrimination?
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
6. **Does N have a part time job aside school?** What do you think, what is its meaning for N? Also: How does N cope with working and school? Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
7. **Does N have a person outside of home whom N feels close to?** An aunt/ uncle, grandparent, a friend, 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 to be a caregiver to a young person? To N?**
The one caregiver Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
The other caregiver Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
2. **How are the daily routines with N?**
Morning routines Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Issues concerning hygiene and washing up Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Issues concerning clothing Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Eating Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Physical and outdoor activities Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Issues of money Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Screen time, social media, etc Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Curfews Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Going to bed, sleeping Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
3. **Does N have household responsibilities?** What are they and how do they go?
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
4. **Possible disagreements and conflicts with N**
Adolescence is a time when parent-child relationship is on the move. Disagreements are common and conflicts may arise. They are often be passing, but they can also be quite persistent and hard to solve. Sometimes either party or both lose their temper.

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.

5. **Have you noticed something special in N, for instance:**

Difficulty to go to school
 Persistent low mood, depression
 Isolation from others
 Restlessness, difficulties to concentrate
 Defiance, indifference, behavioral issues
 Anxiety, fears
 Eating problems
 Substance use
 Phobias, obsessive compulsive behaviors
 Odd thoughts, talk or behavior
 Suicidal thoughts/ comments/ behavior

Caregiver/s' wellbeing and social support

1. **How would you describe your own health and wellbeing?**

Are you (both caregivers) experiencing any persistent stress reactions or mental or physical health issues? What are they? What do you think, do they have an impact on children and parenting?

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)

Examples of strengths: Caregiver/s are feeling well in spite of times of stress; stress reactions and problems with mental health have increased, but treatment services are supportive and offer support also for the family;

Possible vulnerabilities: Caregiver/s' endurance and mental energy is under considerable strain; stress symptoms have aggravated; caregiver/s is/are irritable and angry; it is difficult to enjoy the child; use of alcohol /drugs has increased; the treatment service is of no help, does not involve the family

The one caregiver

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The other caregiver

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

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The other caregiver

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 caregivers

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Talking to N / the children

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. (Supporting and building up shared understanding and co-operation in solving problems is one of the key issues in LTC, see Annex 1 and 2.)

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; caregivers 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? Do you get help from 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
Availability of practical support

Logbook for a specialist
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

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

8. Home assignment*

9. You can also welcome to invite N to join the meeting, if you would like to. 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.

10. Ending the session

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

Set up the next meeting _____

*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 worker 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

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.

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 TALKING ABOUT DIFFICULT ISSUES WITH YOUR CHILDREN and 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?

Annex 3 for practitioner and “How can I help my children?”

These include information about mental health issues in a family and serve as guidelines for you to discuss these issues with caregivers. With the child's developmental age in mind, proceed according to the Annex or the guidebook. Be sensitive to caregivers' responses, discuss the contents and examples from different angles, and add your own examples. If caregivers would like, you could also study the booklet together and, for instance, choose issues especially relevant for them.

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

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.

5. **How was this discussion for you?** And the practitioner?
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 about the needed services and how to reach them is given

Planning LTC Network Meeting

- a) Explain the purpose of meeting
- b) Explain how the meeting is set up
- c) Caregivers agree on the topics and topics that the 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 _____

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 caregiver/s 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.

Thank you!

LTC Network Meeting

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1. Begin by warmly welcoming everyone making introductions.
2. The leader of the meeting describes the outline of the meeting and how it has been prepared.
3. Caregiver/s or the worker, as agreed, describe the reasons for the meeting and areas of
 - a. action, i.e., the strengths and vulnerabilities
4. Discussion among caregivers and invited participants
 - Clarifying questions and points of view
 - Ideas on how to proceed on each item
 - Turn the ideas into concrete actions that family members agree on
5. **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.

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

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 depends 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.

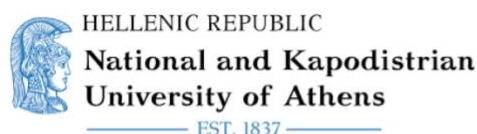
***Format the memorandum**

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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