

Let's Talk about Children

Logbook for Families of 3 to 5-year-old Children

Tytti Solantaus
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'Day care' refers to any arrangement outside home, where children under day care age are regularly cared for, brought up and educated, usually during the caregivers' working hours. 'Day care' does not refer to spending a few days with grandparents or friends, or alike. However, if they have an agreement of being responsible of the child and their care over a period of time, this is included in 'day care'.

'Caregiver' refers to the child's parents and other caregivers in the parenting role irrespective of their biological, social or legal background. We use "the Child" 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.

The Let's Talk about Children logbook © Tytti Solantaus

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

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LETTER OF WELCOME TO CAREGIVER/S

Dear Caregiver/s.

You have been invited to discuss your child's wellbeing along the lines of the Let's Talk about Children (LTC) approach. **Welcome to the discussion!** Here is a brief overview of the approach, hopefully answering some of your questions about what is ahead.

What is LTC for?

LTC was developed to help caregiver/s and day care professionals to support children's wellbeing, learning and development in collaboration with each other and the child. The LTC discussion involves building a shared understanding around the child at home and in day care, and agreeing on action that is based on that understanding. **The aim is to contribute to the child's a day-to day life that supports their wellbeing, studies and development and to build mutually supportive collaboration between caregivers, child and day care and day care staff.**

HOW does this happen?

The practical part first. LTC consists of one or two discussion sessions and, if needed, 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. The maintenance of day care and day care professionals' confidentiality is covered in the LTC process.

As to the contents, LTC discussion focuses on the child's day-to-day life as everyday interactions, encounters and routines are important to children and their wellbeing. Caregiver/s and teachers have their own responsibilities for the child and also experiences with the child in everyday life. If shared, both parties' benefit, and especially the child. Shared understanding helps adults interact with the child in the best possible way in the course of ordinary days. It is also hoped that the LTC approach helps caregiver/s and teachers appreciate even the smallest things that they do with the child in the course of the ordinary day.

In the course of the discussion, the participants identify strengths and vulnerabilities in the child's life. This makes it possible to cherish the strengths and find solutions for the vulnerabilities, which happens with the help of the action plan. Factors at home and in day care that support child development are listed in Annex 1 and Annex 2 tells what strengths and vulnerabilities are.

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

Kind regards,



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LET'S TALK ABOUT CHILDREN INTERVENTION

Words of welcome and introduction of participants

A brief overview of the aims of LTC and what to expect during the discussion

Confidentiality and how the discussion is documented in children's records, as needed

Logbook and how it is used

The framework and themes for the discussion are documented in the logbook. The logbook serves as means to identify and discuss strengths and vulnerabilities in the child's life at home and in day care, and to make an action plan based on the discussion. **The logbook is not an assessment tool, nor a questionnaire to be completed.** Let's Talk about Children is **not** about making assessments of the caregiver/s' or the day care personnel's interaction skills and quality. It simply aims to understand the child's daily experiences.

The logbook is made for caregiver/s to keep and make notes on. You are most welcome to take it home and go back to any topic to reflect on it and discuss it further at home. It would be especially worthwhile to talk about the planned actions and how the whole family could get involved. Factors supporting children's wellbeing and development are presented in Annex 1

Strengths and vulnerabilities (See also Annex 2)

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.

DISCUSSING THE CHILD IN THE FLOW OF ORDINARY DAYS

1. A brief introductory discussion

- **To family members:** Would you (including the child) like to share something about yourself and your family? How was it like for you to come to this session?
- **To the practitioner and the child:** Would you like to share something about the day care setting? How was it like for you to come to this session?
- **To the Child:** Would you like to say something about yourself? For instance, what do you like to do? What makes you laugh? How was it for you to come to this session?
- **To others:** How would you describe the Child?

CHILD

2. Child's curiosity, imagination and joy of learning

To the child: What do you like to play? Do you make up stories? ...

To adults: What would you say, is the Child interested in the world around them and eager to get to know it? Is the Child proud of their achievements?

The child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The practitioner

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

3. Child's wellbeing and health A discussion about the Child's wellbeing and health, mood and energy. Include the Child. What things could be affecting the child's mood and wellbeing, what have you noticed?

The Child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The practitioner

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

4. Have you had any worries about the Child?

Would you tell more? To the Child: What do you think?

Have you sought for and received help for help? Where? _____

The Child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The practitioner

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

5. Child's engagement in and sense of belonging to day care

Discuss whether the child enjoys day care, participate in activities, enjoys teaching sessions and learning new things ... What is the Child's mood when coming home? ... Is the Child proud of being one of "the Squirrels" (or whatever their own group is called)? Discuss also what the day care setting is like for this particular child. How do they match with each other?

The child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The practitioner

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

HOME AND DAY CARE TOGETHER

1. Understanding the child's situation

If the necessary awareness exists, home and day care can support the child when there are stressors in the other. Understanding the overall situation of the child helps caregiver/s and workers interact with the child in the best possible way. Consider possible supporting action in the action plan.

- a) **Is there something in day care that may be affecting the child's wellbeing and should be considered by the caregiver and day care staff when interacting with the child?** For instance, the child group is restless and quarrelsome, an important peer or adult has left, an atmosphere of tension and exhaustion among day care personnel, etc.

Any problem: Vulnerability

- b) **Is there something in the child's life outside of day care that you would like to mention, something that should be considered by the caregiver/s and day care staff when interacting with the child?** For instance, birth of a new baby, moving, parental separation, a serious illness in the family, some other stressful situation, an atmosphere of tension and exhaustion at home etc.

Any problem: Vulnerability

2. Daily routines: smoothness and atmosphere

Daily routines are often underestimated. Routines are not much paid attention to, however, they are the backbone of everyday life. When adults and children are happy and full of energy, the routines are done with smiles, while under stress, the irritability and exhaustion show almost immediately in the routines and their atmosphere. This applies to home and day care, to adults and children. A cranky child is a nightmare to dress up, be it home or day care. If there is a disagreement between child and adult, please mark them both.

	Home	Day care
Waking up and morning routines	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Leaving home and coming to day care	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Eating, mealtimes	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Getting dressed	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Nappies and using the potty/toilet	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Outdoor activities	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Screen time	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Leaving day care and coming home	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Evening routines	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
Sleep and rest	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

3. Wellbeing of caregiver/s at home and in day care

Small children are demanding and it is common for caregivers to feel stressed and exhausted, not only at home but also in day care. How have you been, how do you balance all the different tasks? Do you get support?

The caregiver/s	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
The practitioner	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

4. Collaboration and communication between home and day care

How would you describe the collaboration? Do you have any wishes and suggestions?

The caregiver/s	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐
The practitioner	Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

CHILD AND SOCIAL SITUATIONS

1. The Child's interaction with caregivers at home and in day care

Would you describe times you spend with the Child, what might you do, what is fun together? Is there something that makes it difficult? Involve the Child in this discussion. What are the Child's experiences? Is there somebody whom the child feels close to in day care?

The child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver at DC

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

2. Play and interaction with other children including siblings

Keep the child involved in this discussion. They are really the expert! Discuss issues like if the child enjoys the company of sisters /brothers, of other children and if there is a special friend and what they like to do. How would you describe the Child's ways of approaching and relating to other children? Is there discrimination or racist attitudes among children, at home or in day care? Have you noticed what impacts the Child's interaction with other children?

The child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The practitioner

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

3. Sharing emotions and experiences, understanding those of others

How does the child express its emotional needs? Does the child share its happiness, excitement, sadness with others? How does the child react to other children's feelings and experiences? How do adults respond?

The child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The practitioner

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

4. Disagreements and conflicts at home, in day care and with friends

Have a discussion (including the child) on how disagreements and conflicts arise, how children and adults behave and how it feels and what happens afterwards. Also, has anyone, children or adults, lost their nerve and attacked someone verbally or physically? If this has happened, make a note on the action plan section to remind of needed action.

Note, however, that grabbing a toy from someone or pushing or hitting a peer are still fairly skills, common at age 3, but getting gradually less prominent with the development of language and to social Punishment is not the solution but support and guidance are in place for both children on how to deal with conflicts of interest. This means that such a behavior by small children is not a vulnerability in an environment which handles it with understanding and guidance, while it is a vulnerability if it leads to repeated punishments and negative feedback to the child.

The child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The practitioner

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

We are getting close to making the action plan, two more issues to be discussed!

1. Has something been forgotten, are there any delights or concerns not yet discussed?

To the Child: Has something delightful happened recently that we have not talked about? Is there anything that has bothered you and we have not talked about? Big or small? Others: what would you say?

	Delight	Concern
The Child	Strength ☐	Vulnerability ☐
The caregiver/s	Strength ☐	Vulnerability ☐
The practitioner	Strength ☐	Vulnerability ☐

2. Goals and thoughts concerning child upbringing

The goals and thoughts at home and in day care are likely to be somewhat different. Day care, for instance, has the possibility to guide children in making contact and playing with all kinds of children as well as managing conflicts and disagreements. The variety of cultural backgrounds at home and in day care can feature in this very important conversation.

The Child	Strength ☐	Vulnerability ☐
The caregiver/s	Strength ☐	Vulnerability ☐
The practitioner	Strength ☐	Vulnerability ☐

ACTION PLAN

The participants choose the most important strengths and vulnerabilities to be the focus of action. Then, **plan specific and concrete courses of action** based on the participants' possibilities and resources and the practitioner's job description. **Use Annex 1 on factors that support child wellbeing and development** as a planning aid. Also consider whether additional resources are needed and the LTC Network Meeting should be called.

1. In terms of strengths, the parties agree on the following courses of action:

At home and the child's leisure environment (friends, hobbies, other activities outside home)

In day care / early education

2. In terms of vulnerabilities, the parties agree on the following courses of action:

At home and the child's leisure environment (friends, hobbies, other activities outside home)

In day care / early education

If more people are needed to carry out the action plan, proceed to Planning Network Meeting.

17. Involving the whole family and day care group in the action plan

Any action planned for home concerns the whole family. It is recommended that caregiver/s talk about the action plan with all family members, listen to what children of different ages have to say, encourage them to find more ideas and involve them in the planned courses of action. The same applies to day care.

ENDING THE SESSION

How was it for you to make the action plan together?

What do you think of LTC as a whole /until now, if Network Meeting is still to come?

What do you think, has it been helpful for you, the caregiver/s and practitioner? In what way?

Was it a disappointment? In what way?

Was there something problematic that you would like to go back to?

The author has one wish. You have discussed a large variety of topics and there has not been time to talk about them thoroughly. My wish is that if there is anything in your mind that you would like to discuss further, you would make an effort or even organize a way to continue the discussion. I refer to any issue sparked by these sessions, not only problems. **Overall, it is hoped that LTC serves as a spring board to interesting and innovative collaboration among caregivers, children and members of day care personnel.**

A reminder: Let's Talk about Children can be repeated at any time, especially if there are changes within the family, at day care or in friendships which may put the child's wellbeing at risk. The initiative can come from the teacher, caregivers and of course from child itself.

Thank you everyone!

Planning Let's Talk about Children Network Meeting

- Explanation of the meeting process
- Parties agree on the topics, choose the relevant strengths and vulnerabilities and agree also on which topics the family does not wish to discuss
- Parties agree on who is to be invited and by whom

Chosen strengths and vulnerabilities, other topics?

- People to be invited and by whom

- The date and time of the meeting _____

1. The caregiver/s and/or the practitioner bid the participants **welcome**.
2. The leader of the meeting describes **the outline of the meeting and describes how it has been prepared**.
3. Family members and/or the practitioner, in agreed order, describe **the reasons for the meeting and the areas of desired action**.
4. **Discussion: caregiver/s 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 and agree on them.
5. **Write a memorandum** stating the agreed courses of action (template below). Use a flip chart or project the memorandum on a wall. **All participants should receive a copy of the memorandum** at the end of the meeting, based on the caregiver/s' agreement.
 - a. Service workers are usually at the top of the list, followed by the family's social network and the family members. This way, the family can plan their own actions based on the overall effort. If called for, the order can be changed.
6. **Set up A follow-up meeting and agree who will be there.** The follow -up meeting begins with a short outline of the current situation and a look at whether the plans have been realised. Then, discuss what everyone has learned for the future while implementing the plan. If further action is called for, write a new memorandum stating what courses of action should proceed as they are and what else you wish to do. **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 the number of meetings depend on the overall situation.
Set up the date and agree on who will be there.
7. The leader of the meeting makes a summary, gives everyone the memorandum, thanks the participants and declares the meeting closed.

*Template for memorandum:

Date _____ Topics (for example 1-4)	Topic 1: Topic 2: Topic 3: Topic 4:	
Participants	I agree to do the following: What (specific action)/When (e.g. date, time of day)	Follow-up meeting, date

FACTORS AT HOME AND DAY CARE THAT SUPPORT CHILDREN'S WELLBEING AND DEVELOPMENT

1. **Warm and functional relationships among family members. The child is cherished as an important member of the family.** The family has relationships with the extended family, if possible, and activities with a circle of family friends.
2. **The child has hobbies and friends to their liking.** Activities are constructive and also include physical exercise and outdoor activities. The child has friends also at day care and feels part of the peer community. Adults are interested in and aware of the child's whereabouts.
3. **The caregivers care about the child's life at day care,** show interest in the day care day, discuss homework and what the child is learning, show support when something feels difficult and celebrate achievements.
4. **The teachers' relationship with the child is positive and productive.** The child feels that the teachers appreciate, understand and support them and are interested in their affairs. The child's achievements are noted, even small ones. When having difficulties, the child can ask for and receive help, and feels supported.
5. **A day-to-day life at home and day care that is as functional as possible.** This includes daily routines and interaction starting from morning activities to evening routines, sleep and rest. The child is aware of the rules at home and day care. They have their own tasks to carry out and to be proud of.
6. **The child's ordinary day** includes joy and achievement as well situations, when the child feels liked, valued and special. These feelings come from the way adults look at the child, their facial expressions, gestures and tone of their voice, and the way they stop to listen and talk when the child has something to say. They are also expressed in the way adults speak of the child when they are not present. This applies to both home and day care.

7. **In case of problems affecting life at home, day care and leisure time environments**, the child is helped to make sense of what is happening and to cope with the situation.
8. **Engagement in and a sense of belonging to day care**. The child feels motivated to go to day care and is valued by the teacher and appreciated in the student group.
9. **The child's feelings, mood and behaviour are understood**. Home and day care co-operate to support them through difficult times, while delights and successes are reasons for common celebration.
10. **Even if the child has problems**, they are not branded as problem children.
The following is understood:
 - a. Any problems that the child may have **do not define the child or their future**
 - b. Negative labels will **influence the way the child is treated** and affect their learning and development
 - c. **Problems in the child's life and coping with them are the result of interplay**, which adults can have an effect on.
11. **The child's caregivers and family background** are discussed in a respectful and warm manner at day care, and the same respect is shown when talking about **the teachers at home**. The child feels that any differences in the child itself or in their family are understood and respected at day care. The child feels safe and trustful at home and at day care.
12. **Good parent-teacher co-operation**. Every child needs to feel that the adults in their life co-operate and respect one another. This is especially important for children who are having difficulties.

What are strengths and vulnerabilities?

1. **Strength.** In the LTC approach, strength means something that functions well in the child's day-to-day life. When discussing what the child's day looks like, the answer 'It's okay, I guess' reveals a strength. Situations that increase joy and pleasure also count as strengths. **Focusing on strengths is important for everyone, but more-so for anyone facing challenges. In such cases, strengths and nurturing them are acts of resilience.**
2. **Vulnerability.** In the LTC approach, a vulnerability is a situation that contains problems or can lead to problems if nothing is done. Vulnerabilities often arise when a change in the child's environment touches a particularly sensitive area in the child's life.

Example 1. In a child with a strong and quick temperament, a restless classroom can lead to behavioural and learning difficulties, which can also manifest as irritability at home. If a child is timid, a home environment that has become isolated due to caregiver/s' depression, can make the child even more reserved at day care. **Situations like these are vulnerabilities.** It is important to identify them and to take them into account in the child's everyday life at home and at day care (re. LTC action plan), before possible problems develop.

3. **Strengths and vulnerabilities are not inherent to the child itself.** They stem from the interplay between the child and the environment. Children's temperaments and behaviours differ without children intending problems in themselves. However, a temperamental characteristic might lead to difficulties depending on the environment. **It usually concerns a problem in the match between the child and the environment.** Therefore, it is important to understand that 'vulnerability' does not mean a problem in the child itself and that adults can have an impact upon them.

Example 2. A sensitive and shy child might become or has already become isolated and lonely in a very active and outgoing student group. Therefore, their shyness is marked down as a vulnerability. The aim is to raise adults' awareness: **The child and the student group need extra support and attention to help the shy student establish their place in the group and the group to learn to include someone who is different.** How to do this is part of the action plan. In another kind of environment, shyness might be a strength.

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