

Let's Talk about Children Logbook for Families of Children from 5 to 12 years of age

Tytti Solantaus
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LET'S TALK ABOUT CHILDREN INTERVENTION (LTC)

Letter of Welcome

Discussing the child in the flow of everyday life

Action plan

Let's Talk about Children (LTC) Network Meeting

ANNEX 1.

Factors at home and in day care that support child wellbeing and development

ANNEX 2.

What are strengths and vulnerabilities?

'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.

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

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LETTER OF WELCOME

Dear Caregiver/s,

You and your child 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 professionals support children's wellbeing, learning and development in collaboration with each other and the child. LTC intervention involves building a shared understanding around the child at home and at school, 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 school 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. Children's participation is decided by parents and the child, and children have to be treated as equal partners in the discussion. Caregivers can also discuss the relevant issues in this logbook with the child and bring their greetings to the sessions.

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 and also experiences with the child in everyday life. If shared, and with the child's contribution, everyone benefits.

In the course of the discussion, participants identify strengths and vulnerabilities in the child's life at home, school and in leisure time. Everyone's experience is respected. This makes it possible to cherish the strengths and find solutions for the vulnerabilities. **Every child, home and school have strengths that they might not recognize and give themselves credit for.**

Let's Talk About Children is a resource that helps home and school collaborate. It is also hoped that LTC helps caregiver/s and teachers appreciate even the smallest things that they do with the child in the course of the ordinary day.

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 (LTC)

1. **Words of welcome and introduction of participants**, a special welcome to the Child
2. **A brief overview** of the aims and what to expect during the discussion.
3. **Confidentiality** and how the discussion is documented at school, 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. **If the child attends, they have to be treated as full partners in the discussion.**

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

4. **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 your family? How was it for you to come to this session?
- **To the practitioner:** Would you like to share something about the day care setting? How was it for you to come to this session? would the Child like to say something?
- **To the Child:** Would you like to say something about yourself? For instance, what do you enjoy doing? What makes you laugh? How was it for you to come to this session?

To others: How would you describe the Child?
(lead this discussion to the next topic)

THE CHILD

2. The child's curiosity and interest in new things and learning

Discuss what the Child is interested in and would like to know more about. It might be making stories, creating new plays, computer games and creating one with peers, or focusing on nature. How do you respond?

The Child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The teacher

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

3. The child's wellbeing and health

A discussion about the Child's wellbeing and health, mood and energy. To the Child, perhaps: How are you, have you been well? ... What makes you feel good ... makes you feel bad? If the child is not present, would the adults like to respond?

The Child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The teacher

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

4. Worries about the Child?

Have you had worries about the Child? Would you tell more?

To the Child: What do you think, have you had worries about how things are going for you?

How do you feel?

Have you sought and received for help? Where? _____

The Child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The practitioner

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

CHILD AND SCHOOL

1. Starting school

It is a big step for both children and caregivers, when children start school. Children enter a whole new environment and they even gain a new identity, a student. They are expected to gradually manage without caregiver/s. Settling into school life might take a few years.

How has it been for you and the Child?

The Child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The teacher

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

2. School engagement and sense of belonging to the school community

Discuss how the Child feels about school, if they are respected and accepted for what they are, by teachers and peers. Does the Child feel a part of their student group? Is the Child committed to studying and doing the homework? Does the Child participate in school activities in their own way?

The Child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The teacher

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

A child's lack of engagement in school might be due to many issues, three common ones being

1. The child is a different learner, has learning problems or is talented beyond their class mates (see 7)

2. There is discrimination and bullying in the class in general or targeted at the child (see 10)

3. Home and school have different views about child upbringing and about school and its aims (see 16)

3. Learning and school achievement

The Child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The teacher

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

If there is a mismatch between the methods of teaching and support, and the Child's needs and ways of learning, discuss the needed action in the action plan (16). The Child's capacities might not be fostered, be it a child with learning or other challenges (e.g., mental health) or an exceptionally talented child.

A support person at school

To the Child: Is there an adult or adults at school you can turn to when needed?

The young person

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregivers

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The teacher

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

HOME AND SCHOOL TOGETHER

1. Routines at home and school

The following discussion concerns daily routines at home and school. Routines are not much given attention to; however, they are the backbone of everyday life. They are new every day. When we both are happy and full of energy, the routines are carried out with smiles, while under stress, the tension and irritability show almost immediately in the routines and their atmosphere. This applies to home and school, to adults and children. Routines are important to us all. The home-related topics reflect issues that have an impact on the child's day also at school. A topic can be a strength in one and a vulnerability in the other. If the Child disagrees with adults, mark both options.

How do the daily routines run at home and school?

Do they run most often smoothly or do some of them create disagreements or conflicts?

Home

Leaving home and coming to school

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Issues concerning clothing

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Eating, mealtimes

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Lessons at school

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

N Transitions from one activity to another

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Play, physical exercise and outdoor activities

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Issues related to money

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Leaving school, coming home

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Screen time, social media

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Day-night rhythm, enough sleep and rest

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

School

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

2. Understanding the child at home and school

Understanding the overall situation of the child helps caregiver/s and school staff interact with the child in the best possible way. Possible courses of action are considered and decided under the action plan section.

- a. **Is there something at school that may be affecting the child's wellbeing and learning and should be considered by the caregiver/s and teacher when interacting with the child?**

For example, a disorderly class, bullying, multiple substitute teachers, lack of equipment e.g., for remote teaching, an atmosphere of stress and exhaustion among teachers, etc.

The teacher	Vulnerability ☐
The Child	Vulnerability ☐
The caregiver/s	Vulnerability ☐

- b. **Is there something in the child's life outside of school that you would like to mention, something that should be considered by the caregiver/s and teacher when interacting with the child?** For example, bullying outside of school/on the internet, lack of peaceful space or equipment for homework /remote learning at home, a stressful situation for the caregiver/s and family, an atmosphere of exhaustion at home, etc.

The caregiver/s	Vulnerability ☐
The Child	Vulnerability ☐
The teacher	Vulnerability ☐

How was it for you to discuss these issues together? Was it helpful for you or maybe uncomfortable?

1. **How do you feel about collaboration and communication concerning issues related to you/ the Child?**

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

2. **How do you feel about collaboration and communication concerning more general issues about home and school?**

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

CHILD AND SOCIAL WORLD

A discussion about social situations and interactions follows. Firstly, the focus is on the child's personal friends and activities and secondly, on social situations and interactions in a more general setting. The third topic concerns disagreements and conflicts. These topics are interrelated and can be discussed however is better.

Child's interests, friends and activities

1. **For instance, to the Child: Would you like to describe a little bit what you enjoy doing during your leisure time?**

The Child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The worker

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

2. **Social situations in a larger context at school**

To the Young Person, perhaps: What would you say, how do you get along with teachers and other students in general? ...

What is the school atmosphere like? Is it easy to get know new people and make friends, or not?

Is there bullying, discrimination, any negative attitudes and behavior?

Have you experienced such behavior, how about any of your friends? What you do in such situations?

The Child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The teacher

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

3. **Disagreements and conflicts at home, at school and with friends**

How do disagreements and conflicts arise? How do people behave?

Has anyone, a child or an adult, 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.

The child

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The caregiver/s

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

The teacher

Strength ☐ Vulnerability ☐

Two more issues before planning what to do!

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?

To caregivers and teacher: what would you say?

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

2. Goals and thoughts concerning child upbringing at home and school

These goals and thoughts are likely to be somewhat different at home and school. For example, at school, important goals include learning skills and social-emotional skills especially in classroom and groups. Children themselves might have a very different view on these issues. Their own goals and thoughts and a variety of cultural backgrounds can feature in this very important conversation.

Examples of Strengths: Goals and thoughts are similar ... complement each other there are differences, but not in conflict with each other

Possible Vulnerabilities: Goals and thoughts or some of them are in conflict

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

Making the action plan

Which strengths and vulnerabilities would you choose to be the foci of action and why?

Plan specific and concrete courses of action based on the participants' possibilities and resources and the worker's job description. **Use Annex 1, the factors that support a healthy development as a planning aid.** Also consider whether additional resources are needed somewhere and whether a network meeting should be called. **In terms of strengths, the individuals agree on the following courses of action:**

At home

At school

Leisure time

Additional resources? For what and by whom?

In terms of vulnerabilities, the individuals agree on the following courses of action:

At home

At school

Leisure time

Additional resources? For what and by whom?

If Network Meeting is not needed, **proceed to Ending the session (16.).**

If Network Meeting is needed, proceed to its planning and come back to 16, **Ending the session**

Ending the session

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

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

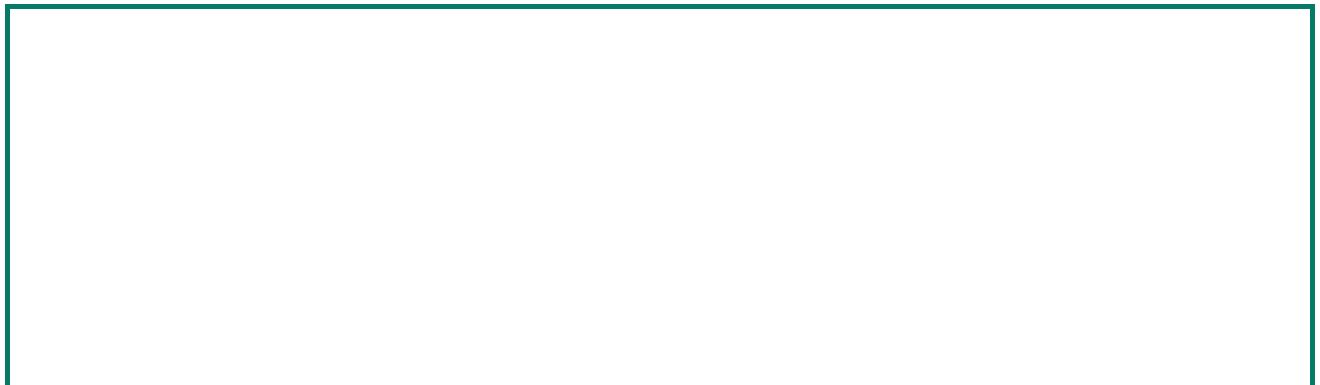
Has it been helpful for you, the caregiver/s, Child, teacher? In what way?

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. The wish is that if there is anything in your mind that you would like to discuss further, you would find a way or even organize a way to continue the discussion. It is hoped that LTC serves as a spring board to interesting discussions among caregivers, children and teachers.

A reminder: Let's Talk about Children can be repeated at any time, especially if there are changes within the family, at school 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

1. Explain the meeting process and how it has planned
 2. Participants agree on the topics to be discussed, choose the relevant strengths and vulnerabilities and agree who introduces the topics (often caregiver/s, if they agree).
 3. It is also agreed on which topics the family does not wish to discuss.
-

4. Participants identify and decide to invite people who are likely to be able to contribute to the aims of the meeting. Remember also the child's own support people.

a. Chosen strengths and vulnerabilities, other topics?

b. Time for the meeting and people to be invited and by whom

- c. If the Child is not present now, invite them to the Network Meeting afterwards. Explain to the child what is being planned and why, and who will participate. Invite the Child to suggest participants. If the Child does not want, or is too young to participate, afterwards **explain to them regarding what was decided and why, and include them in carrying out the action plan at home, school and leisure time.** The young person can also send their suggestions about actions to be included in the action plan.

Begin by warmly welcoming everyone and making introductions.

1. Clearly outline the agenda and purpose of the meeting and explain how it has been prepared
2. Have the caregivers or the worker describe the reasons for the meeting and areas of action
3. Encourage a discussion among family members and invited participants using the following **guidelines:** (Remember to involve the child as an equal participant)
 - 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.
4. Write a **memorandum (template, next page)** stating the agreed courses of action by every participant. Use a flip chart or project the memorandum on a wall for everyone to see. Record what participants agree to do. Workers are usually at the top of the list, followed by the family's social network and family members. This way, the family can plan their own actions based on the overall effort. If called for, the order can be changed. **All participants should receive a copy of the memorandum at the end of the meeting, if family members agree.**
5. **Set up a follow-up meeting.** At least one follow-up meeting is recommended to let the involved parties note what has been achieved and whether continued action is called for. Agree on the date, time and participants.
6. **The follow-up meeting follows the structure above.** Begin with a short outline of the child's situation and state whether the plans have been realised. Keeping the future in mind, what useful lessons did you learn in the course of pursuing the plan? If called for, write a new memorandum stating what the participants decide to do next. **The time between meetings depends on the overall situation. In case of a longer process, the meetings build up a functional scaffolding around the child.**
7. **Ending the meeting**

How was this meeting for the participants?

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

The leader of the meeting makes a summary, gives everyone the memorandum, thanks the participants and declares the meeting closed.

***Memorandum**

Let's Talk about Children Network Meeting: _____ (date)

Topics (e.g., 1–3)	Topic 1: Topic 2: Topic 3:	Follow-up date
Participants	I agree to do the following (specific action):	When (e.g., date, time of day)

FACTORS AT HOME AND SCHOOL THAT SUPPORT CHILD WELLBEING AND DEVELOPMENT

Family relationships are characterized by goodwill and warmth. Each child is cherished as an important member of the family. If possible, there is amiable contact with the extended family and the family has activities with family friends.

1. **The child has interests and friends to their liking.** Activities are constructive and also include physical exercise and outdoor activities. The child has friends also at school.
2. **The caregiver/s care about the child's life at school,** show interest in the school day, discuss homework and what the child is learning, show support when something feels difficult and celebrate achievements together.
3. **The teacher-child relationship is positive and productive.** The child feels that the teacher appreciates, understands and supports them and is interested in their affairs. The child's achievements are noted. When having difficulties, the child can ask for and receive help, and feels supported.
4. **A day-to-day life with its routines is as functional as possible.** This includes daily activities, encounters and interactions at home and school as well as in the child's own social environment. The child receives positive feedback. The child is aware of the rules and has their own tasks to be proud of.
5. **The child's ordinary day** includes joy and achievement as well as moments, 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 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 the child is not present. This applies to both home and school.
6. **In case of problems affecting the child's life,** the child is helped to make sense of what is happening and to cope with the situation.
7. **The child's feelings, mood and behaviour are understood.** Home and school co-operate to support the child through difficult times, while delights and successes are reasons for common celebration.
8. **Engagement in and sense of belonging to school.** The child feels motivated to go to school and is valued by the teacher and appreciated in the peer and student group. The school atmosphere and ethos cherish goodwill and responsibility for others.

9. **Even if the child has problems**, they are not branded as problem children. The following is understood:
- (1) any problems that the child may have **do not define the child or the child's future**
 - (2) negative labels will **influence the way the child is treated** and affect the child's learning and wellbeing
 - (3) **problems in a child's life and coping with them are the result of interplay with the environment**, which adults can have an effect on.
10. **The child's caregiver/s and family background** are discussed in a respectful and warm manner at school, 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 the child's family are understood and respected at school. The child feels safe and trustful at home and at school.
11. **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 have difficulties.

What are strengths and vulnerabilities?

It is said that “Strengths and vulnerabilities are identified in LTC sessions”, but what are they?

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.

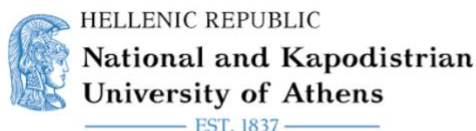
Example 1. In a child with a strong and quick temperament, a restless classroom can lead to behavioural and learning difficulties, which can also manifest as irritability at home. If a child is timid, a home environment that has become isolated due to caregiver/s’ depression, can make the child even more reserved at school. **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 school (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. Their shyness is a vulnerability in this environment and marked down as such. 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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