



## Meeting place at the Family Centre

### *The Meeting Place in a nutshell*

- Welcomes all children, adolescents and families.
- Facilitates spending time together, peer activities and peer support, children's play as well as builds communality.
- Gathers and shares different actors' knowledge and expertise and helps participants to find additional support with a low threshold.
- Ensures children's, adolescents' and families' access to activities as well as their participation in planning, monitoring and evaluating the activities.

The family centre model refers to the integrated whole of services for children and families. The Family Centre provides services for children and families that enhance wellbeing and health and promote growth and development, as well as early support, care and rehabilitation. At the Family Centre, each child and family receive the support and help they need.

The Meeting Place is part of the Family Centre. The Meeting Place strengthens participation, interaction and resources of children and families and supports families' good everyday life. The activities enhance children's, adolescents' and families' health and wellbeing.

### Children, adolescents and families

The open Meeting Place welcomes all children, adolescents and families. Encountering and hearing children, adolescents and families, respect and inclusion as well as the entire community's accepting attitudes and atmosphere lay the foundation for the Meeting Place's operating culture. Through participation in the activities, the goal is to promote:

- building up parenting resources
- establishing peer relationships and friendships
- reducing experiences of loneliness
- making everyday life easier for families with children
- offering play activities and playmates for children
- adolescents' feeling of being encountered and helped
- integration of immigrant families
- building togetherness
- increasing the equality of families.

### Communal peer activities

The Meeting Place offers all children, adolescents and families local, open, low-threshold place where they can meet. It provides families with opportunities for informal socialising, peer activities and activities that build togetherness. The Meeting Place offers:

- open activities and socialising
- peer activities and peer support groups
- themed evenings, events and meetings
- open early childhood education and care and play activities
- low-threshold activities and support for adolescents
- an operating environment for voluntary activities.

Author:

**Marjatta Kekkonen**

Senior Researcher, National  
Institute for Health and Welfare

### Low-threshold help and support

The Meeting Place employees are skilled in recognising and bringing up concerns and problems associated with a child or a family. They are trained to encounter the family immediately when a need for help emerges. Opportunity for discussion and support can be offered in questions related to a child's or adolescent's growth and upbringing, parenting and relationship issues, and difficulties encountered by a family. The Meeting Place employee works closely together with other employees at the Family Centre and, if necessary, also with other services. When required, the Meeting Place can offer the following types of low-threshold support for an individual child and a family:

- knowledge and expertise
- guidance and counselling
- assist a family in accessing other support and services
- outreach services.

### Network of actors

The Meeting Place provides a setting for cooperation between NGOs, parishes, open early childhood education and care, activities aiming to enhance health and wellbeing, services for children and families as well as stakeholders and volunteers in the area.

The Meeting Place actors may be co-located, or their activities may be based on networks between actors located in different physical facilities. The network may include:

- an open day-care centre / open ECEC centres
- an NGO's family house /family café
- a club for children and families run by the parish
- a residents' park or a playground
- a virtual meeting point
- a meeting point for adolescents.

The Meeting Place may be co-located with a Family Centre premises but also with an open day-care centre, an NGO's family house, a maternity and child health clinic or a school. The Meeting Place facilities should be accessible and suitable for the needs of children, adolescents and families and for communal peer activities. Well-functioning facilities also make it possible to offer additional help for individual children or families.

### Criteria for a Meeting Place

The operation of a Family Centre's Meeting Place is directed by quality criteria which help Family Centres and local actors to organise and develop the activities in line with the Meeting Place's objectives and tasks. These criteria guide the operation and network of the Family Centre's Meeting Place as a whole rather than the activities of an individual actor.

The criteria applicable to a Meeting Place are:

➤ **Integration with the Family Centre**

The Meeting Place activities are part of the Family Centre's operational plan.

The Meeting Place is an operative part of the Family Centre and the service network. The Family Centre and the Meeting Place have a prearranged division of duties.

The Family Centre's social and health services, ECEC services, welfare and health promotion activities, NGOs and the parish jointly agree on securing the resources and other operating preconditions for the Meeting Place.

➤ **Systematic operation**

The Meeting Place activities may be provided by the county, the joint municipality, the single municipality, NGOs, the parish or other actors. The activities are based on an agreement between the actors, shared goals and an operational plan.

The activities are planned, evaluated and developed regularly with children, adolescents and families based on their needs.

Additionally, volunteers and other actors participate in the planning, evaluation and development from their viewpoints.

The activities are monitored and evaluated regularly.

➤ **Coordination of activities**

The activities are professionally coordinated and led, continuous and regular. The network actors meet regularly to agree on the Meeting Place's tasks, objectives and activities.

The Meeting Place network has jointly agreed cooperation practices. The activities are coordinated and organised by a designated person.

➤ **Accessibility**

The activities are open for all children, adolescents and families. The Meeting Place is located close to families and on good transport connections, and participation is accessible.

The facilities are safe, permanent, welcoming and suitable for children of different ages, adolescents and adults.

The opening times are regular, flexible and versatile, and they meet the users' needs.

Clients can participate in the activities without appointments or registration. As a rule, the activities are free of charge.

Substance abuse and violence are not tolerated.

➤ **Building togetherness and communality**

In order to build togetherness, children, adolescents and parents are offered opportunities for participating in carrying out the activities.

For this purpose, the Meeting Place offers facilities for local organizations and volunteers and open activities, informal socialising, peer group activities as well as play environments for children.

Adolescents participate in activities intended for them.

## LITERATURE

Abrahamsson, A & Bing, V (2012) Föräldraskapande och professionell följsamhet på familjecentralers öppna förskolor – en programteori. *Socialmedicinsk tidskrift* 2/2011.

Abrahamsson, A & Bing, V (2011) Familjecentralen. Mervärde för alla föräldrar genom samlokalisering? *Socialmedicinsk tidskrift* 2/2011.

Hoshi-Watanabe, M & Musatti, T & Raynald, S & Vandenbroeck, M (2015) Origins and rationale of centres for parents and young children together. *Child and Family Social Work* 2015, 20, 62–71.

Paju, P (2015) "Ihanaa aikaa poissa kotoota". *Iisalmen Perheen Talo – yhteistyö*. Emma & Elias –ohjelma 2015.

<https://www.emmaelias.fi/hillockelari/ihanaa-aikaa-poissa-kotoota/>

Pokela, S (2018) Perheteri. Perhekeskustoiminnan kehittäminen osana KP LAPE –muutosohjelmaa. Thesis. Social services, health and sports. Master's degree in social services and health care. Health promotion. Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences.

Skjesol Bulling, I (2016) Stepping through the door – exploring low-threshold services in Norwegian family centres. *Child and Family Social Work* 2016.

Reference to this publication:  
Kekkonen Marjatta:  
Kohtaamispaikka  
perhekeskuksessa. Research in brief  
2. January 2019. Finnish  
Institute for Health and Welfare,  
Helsinki.

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare P.O. Box 30  
(Mannerheimintie 166)  
FI-00271 Helsinki, Finland  
Telephone: +358 29 524 6000

ISBN 978-952-343-262-8 (web  
publication)  
ISSN 2323-5179

<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-343-262-8>

[www.thl.fi/](http://www.thl.fi/)

## ➤ Encounters and support

Each participant is encountered with respect, made welcome and said goodbye when they leave.

A human touch as well as sensitivity to children's, adolescents', parents', individuals' and groups' needs shine through in the activities.

The atmosphere is accepting and tolerant.

The encounters strengthen clients' feeling of security, trust, resources and ability to talk about their concerns.

The activities support the daily lives and coping of families with children.

## ➤ Information about activities

Information about Meeting Place activities is systematic and provided through multiple channels.

Ethnic and linguistic minority groups and other special groups are taken into consideration in the information activities.

Employees in other Family Centre services are aware of the Meeting point activities and help children and families to them.

If necessary, Meeting Place employees know how to guide and assist a family in accessing other support and services.

## ➤ Competence and professional attitude

The Meeting Place has expertise and competence for implementing communal activities.

If necessary, professional competence and services that enable families to access early and low-threshold help, advice and support can be integrated in the Meeting Place.

Volunteers and experts by experience may operate at the Meeting Place providing they receive professional guidance.

## Working together in the best interest of families

Meeting Place activities are based on an agreement between the actors, shared goals and the Family Centre's operational plan. The resources and operating preconditions of the Meeting Place are jointly provided for by the Family Centre's social and health services, municipalities' open childhood education and care services and local NGOs and parishes. Volunteers and stakeholders contribute to the resources. The Family Centre's Meeting Place model has been developed nationally as part of the Programme to Address Child and Family Services (2016–2018). The criteria for the open Meeting Place activities were prepared in cooperation between the Perheet keskiöön (Families to the Centre) project and the following NGOs working with children and families: Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters, Central Union for Child Welfare, Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, Save the Children, Martha Association, SOS Children's Village, Vamlas Foundation and Äimä Association; as well as with parishes, early childhood education and care, and Family Centre actors.