

Best Practices in action: how to transfer, implement, and sustain effective health promotion interventions for children (0-12)

Module 3 - Smart Family: a Best Practice to support and empower families in promoting well-being and healthy lifestyle

Session 3.1 - Smart Family: General Overview

Unit 3.1.1 - "The Best Practice Smart Family from Finland"

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Slide 1 & 2

Welcome to lesson one of our Smart Family Best Practice series. In this lesson we introduce you to the Smart Family method from Finland, a proven practical approach to support families in promoting healthy lifestyle for children age 0 to 12. My name is Taina Sainio and I work as a specialist in the Smart Family method at the Finnish Heart Association.

Slide 3 – Smart Family – What is it?

Smart Family, what is it? It's a method that brings joy motivation and encouragement into everyday life of families; it helps families notice their strengths, build confidence and support healthy habits in a positive and respectful way.

Slide 4 – Parenting children to healthy lifestyle in today's world is far from easy

We always start with the families and children themselves, their everyday reality is the foundation of the Smart Family approach. Parenting and supporting healthy habits is not what it used to be. Food markets are overflowing with choices, finances are tight for many and digital devices often powered by addictive algorithms demand our attention. All this happens while families try to tackle work home life and parenting, there are no quick fixes even though parents know what's healthy making happen isn't always easy. This reality is what we always try to keep in mind when developing and implementing the Smart Family approach.

Slide 5 – Health-related skills are learned at all ages

Health-related skills are learned at all ages and in all areas of everyday life. They are saved in moments related to food, rest, body image, movement and daily interactions. In the Smart Family approach, we focus on seeing the good, encouraging strengths and building the idea that I'm valuable and worth taking care of. These small everyday experiences support a positive attitude toward health rights from early childhood.

Slide 6 - Smart Family in Finland 2025

The Smart Family method takes comprehensive view of well-being encompassing physical activity, nutrition, body image and children overweight, rest, screen time and family dynamics. By addressing health from multiple prospective, it promotes sustainable long-term changes, rather than concentrating on a single aspect of well-being. Families are provided with practical ways to integrate health into their daily lives. The same thematic areas are addressed with both families and professionals; however, professionals are also equipped with a wide range of tools and materials to support their work. In 2024 our website in Finland was huge popular. It

was visited more than 380,000-time users included both families and professionals. Smart Family method is a science to practice model that was launched in 2006 following the success of outcomes of the STRIP-study in Finland. The Special Turku Coronary Risk Factor Intervention Project (STRIP study) is the long-term study aimed at preventing coronary heart disease through dietary intervention initiated in infancy and continued into early adulthood. The Smart Family method was inspired by the intervention model of the STRIP study from the outset. Our aim was to translate this scientific model into a practical approach that professionals working with children and families could use as a part of the everyday work. We recognized early that it would be not feasible to replicate the studies intensive format when aiming to reach all families across Finland.

Therefore, we began implementation with Public Health nurses in maternity and child welfare clinics, professionals who have contact with nearly every family in the country. Today Smart Family in Finland offers its healthy lifestyle counselling method to a wide range of professionals working with children age 0 to 12 years and their families.

We provide comprehensive training, tools and materials to support their work. Additionally, we offer families information and communication that is delivered with a positive and encouraging tone. Smart Family has been officially recognized as a EU Best Practice since 2021.

Slide 7 – Multiprofessional Smart Family method for the help of professionals

Guidance from the healthcare sector alone is not sufficient to promote and sustain healthy lifestyle among children and families. A single professional group can achieve this alone. Smart Family is designed to be applicable across all professionals working with families and children. In Finland the method is currently evolving towards a more multi-professional approach. This kind of cooperation helps provide timely personalized support and makes real, lasting change possible for families.

Families are always at the center. Around them different professionals like nurses, teachers, social workers and therapists play key roles; each uses the Smart Family method in a way that fits their setting. Whether it's a maternity clinic, a school or oral health care, it's important to recognize that this image reflects the context of Finnish professionals working with families. When adapting the Smart Family method to another country, it is essential to identify the relevant professionals who align with the local service structure and cultural context.

Slide 8 – Family centered, strength based, solution- and resource-focused approach

What then is the essential core of the Smart Family method that makes it adaptable and transferable across different countries and professional context?

At the core of the Smart family method is a consistent, evidence-based approach to working with children and families. This foundational principle applies across all professional fields, whether in healthcare or education or nutrition or any other context involving families.

If there is one key message to remember from the Smart Family method let it be this: “focus on the positive”. The most essential aspect is to recognize and strengthen the positive, the truly listen to the family's unique voice and situation and to build upon the existing strengths of both the child and the family. The tools, materials and everyday practices of the Smart Family method may vary depending on the professional context, for instance healthcare and early childhood education have very different settings, however the fundamental principle guiding our professionals engaged with and support children and families remain consistent across all applications of the method.

Slide 9 & 10 - Focusing on the process of positive development. The elements of effective lifestyle counselling

And here it is, this picture presents the central idea of the Smart Family approach supporting the process of positive development within families.

Slide 11 - Focusing on the process of positive development. The elements of effective lifestyle counselling

The process begins by encouraging families to observe their own everyday habits and health behaviours. The professional's role is not to instruct or advice from outside but walk alongside with the family by listening, asking open ended questions and helping them to identify their own strengths always within respect.

Slide 12 - Focusing on the process of positive development. The elements of effective lifestyle counselling

When this happens, families begin to recognize what they already do well and what they are capable of.

Slide 13 - Focusing on the process of positive development. The elements of effective lifestyle counselling

This build self-efficacy expressed in this mindset: We can! We know! We do!

Slide 14 - Focusing on the process of positive development. The elements of effective lifestyle counselling

As a result, their motivation to maintain good habits and try new things naturally increases.

Slide 15 - Focusing on the process of positive development. The elements of effective lifestyle counselling

In turn, this supports an overall improvement in the family's well-being. In short, Smart Family is not about quick advice or one-sized fits all guidance, it's about creating a space where families can grow from their own strengths with professional support that respects the individual values and everyday life. By focusing on strength and practical solutions, the Smart Family method effectively promotes healthy lifestyles in a sustainable and family centered way.

Slide 16 - Training professionals and co-creation with professionals are key elements for success when implementing Smart Family

Training professionals and working together with them in cooperation is up at the heart of success. Implementation must always be tailored to the local context. So, when starting it's important to identify the key professionals in your country, those who work directly with children and family. Begin with the pilot phase: a mix of professionals are involved from the start. Select tools and materials that match the specific environment whether it's maternity clinics, schools, day care or direct to families. Training is a key element to ensure that method is understood and applied consistently. And finally, remember change takes time not only for families but also for professionals. Supporting them through that change is critical.

Slide 17 - The Smart family assessment framework is structured into three phases and sub-categories under each phase

In the Health4EUKids Joint Action we apply the implementations strategy, originally tested in the Chrodis+ Joint Action which is explained in more detail in our presentation number 2. One of the key outcomes of this process is the development of this framework, a more detailed task list to guide the implementation of the Smart Family method. This framework has been co-created together with the participating countries to ensure it fits various national contexts.

Slide 18 - Tools and materials for professionals

Here I now present you the practical tools available for professionals using the Smart Family method. They are self-assessment tools for families and visual material like posters, pictures and videos to support discussion especially with children. For educational settings there are food dedication educational resources and Paper&Pen activities to use directly with children. We also created supportive materials for addressing sensitive topics like overweight in a respectful way. All materials are available through a professional website that includes a resource bank and guidance for implementation. These tools help professionals apply the method in their everyday work effectively.

Slide 19 - Smart Family Card

In lifestyle counselling, self-assessment is a powerful starting point. It helps families recognize what they value, whether it is satisfied and where they might want change. This is the Smart Family Card, a self-assessment tool to help families reflect on their eating and activity habits. Each habit is marked with a color: green means it matches national recommendations; yellow means it's partially aligned; red means it differs on it. Positive attention! The goal isn't to get all greens but the spark reflection on what habits are we happy with and what might we want to change? The Card helps highlight strengths and open up positive respectful discussions between professionals and families.

Slide 20 - The Star of our Family

This is another example of another kind of self-assessment tool: The Star of our Family. It's a visual self-assessment tool that helps families reflect on the everyday life together. Each family member rates topics like eating, resting, screen time or doing things together. By connecting their scores in the Star shape they get a clear, not just a means of view, of their current situation. It's not about right or wrong, it's about understanding their own experience which is key for motivation and change. It's also a positive visual way to start meaningful conversation in the family.

Slide 21 - The star tool for a child's movement

For professionals it's important to remember that the tools are not for evaluation or screening but, for example, in the Star tool for child physical activity, a supportive way to identify the child's strengths and areas that might benefit from more encouragement and practice.

Slide 22 - Breakfast & Snack

These are examples of Smart Family Picture Tools. These illustrated food pictures to support discussions about breakfast and snacks choices. They help families and children explore a variety of options: fruits, veggies, grains, proteins and dairy, feasibly and positively. Instead of focusing on restriction we focus on what can be included. These materials work well in counselling, group settings or classrooms. They make it easy to talk about everyday meals in a concrete and encouraging way and support children involvement, too.

Slide 23 - Food Education pedagogy and materials for educational settings

We have a huge food education online service with tools and food education materials developed especially for early childhood education and school settings. There's the food education idea bank with games, playful exercises and over 200 activity cards. A data bank for background knowledge with theory and methods for food education and online course to support education skills as well. The materials are based on positive food education efficacy where learning about food happens through play, experience, and curiosity - not pressure or control. These tools help professionals integrate food education naturally into everyday routines.

Slide 24 - Exercise - Yummy! - Sleep

These are examples of our playful work seats. They help the children reflect on their daily habits in a positive way. They support self-expression and open conversation, great tools for engaging children and families in healthy routines.

Slide 25 - Website and social media for families

Our website and social media offers families easy access to tips tools and everyday inspiration. Everything is presented with a warm encouraging tone. Professionals are encouraged to serve and promote these resources in their work.

Slide 26 -

Next, I will show you a few examples from the content of our web pages. Here you see examples of practical family friendly articles available on our website. Topic rates from picky eating and positive meal time talk, to nutrition during pregnancy. The content is easy to understand and decide to support families in real life situations.

Slide 27 -

These articles provide simple and encouraging tips for physical activity in daily life, whether it's supporting children's motor skills, moving during pregnancy or adding fun like circus plays at home. All materials are designed to be encouraging, doable and easy to apply.

Slide 28 -

These articles support holistic family well-being from dental care and emotional skills to smoke free pregnancy and healthy routines. The goal is to empower families with practical everyday tools and encouragement.

Slide 29 - Social media for Finnish Families at Instagram @neuvokasperhe

We also reach Finnish families through Instagram. Our posts share fun encouraging and creative content like playful food ideas, positive parenting messages and seasonal activities. Everything is designed to inspire small positive steps and changes in everyday life.

Slide 30 - Focus on Smart Family approach – use the tools and materials wisely

To conclude, the heart of Smart Family is not just about using tools, it's about applying them with intention and want focus on the approach highlights strengths, encourage small steps and build trust. The tools support the process but your interactions make the impact. And remember, we are here to support you, feel free to contact us.

Slide 31 - Thank you all for your participation!

Thank you all for your participation it's been a pleasure sharing the Smart Family abroad and tools with you. Let's continue supporting families in everyday life once more positive step at a time.