



## Sisukas - Supporting foster children in school

# What is Sisukas?

- **Sisukas is a collaborative model that connects child protection services and schools.** Local Sisukas teams coordinate the work with support from Pesäpuu ry.
- **It provides a clear structure for organising basic education for children living in foster care.** The model supports their learning and strengthens their mental wellbeing.
- **Sisukas has been shown to be effective in Finland since 2012.** Itla has published a research review on the approach.





# Why Sisukas?

- challenges between child protection and schools

- Foster homes and schools change often
- Local schools are not prepared
- Problems with information sharing and cooperation, work is too divided between sectors
- Roles, responsibilities and practices are unclear
- Lack of knowledge, skills and resources; staff turnover is high
- Focus on problems and labelling children
- A culture of "sending children away" instead of supporting them



**Children do not get the support they need**



# Children in foster care have a higher risk of...

- Underachieving at school
- Poor school performance and school absenteeism
- Reaching a lower level of education
- Unemployment later in life
- Mental and physical health problems

(Research: Vinnerljung 2010, Heino & Johnson 2010, Kääriälä 2020, Kouluterveyskysely 2024, Tackling Adverse Childhood experiences 2023, WHO.)

**General statements can be stigmatizing**

Lack of protective factors is more harmful than negative experiences themselves!



**Education is an important protective factor!**



<https://youtu.be/YOFDtWEAmoM?si=MxGHvN81fmwr3tbH>

# Goals and role of Sisukas

- Involving the child and helping them feel connected to school
- Supporting a successful foster care placement
- Providing pedagogical rehabilitation and learning support
- Bringing the network together and making sure information moves smoothly between adults
- Creating a shared understanding and shared goals
- Building a bridge between child protection and basic education
- Offering consultation in multi-professional cooperation
- Promoting a dialogical way of working

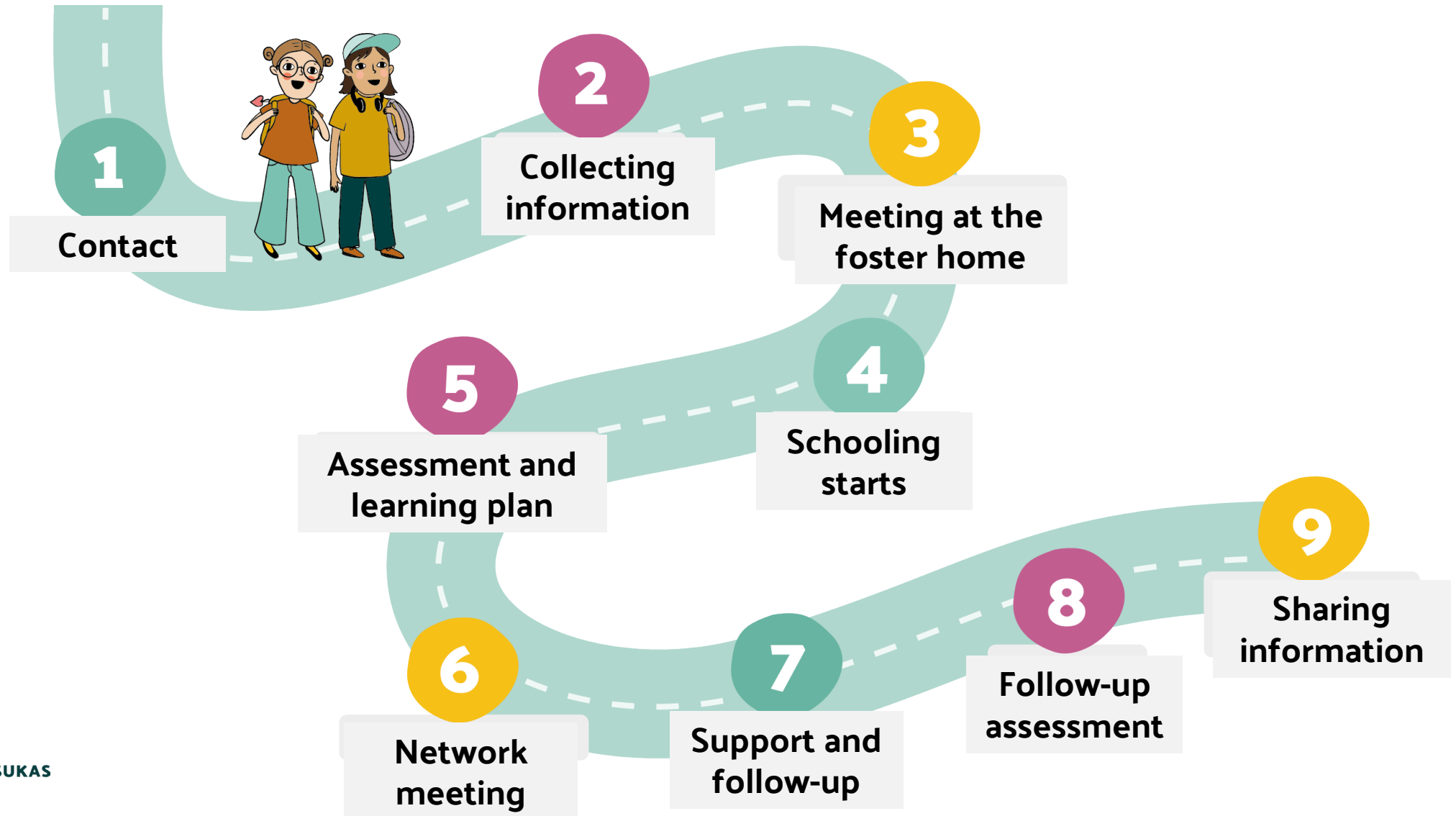




## Key principles

- Participation
- Individual support and flexibility
- Strength-based approach
- Multi-professional work and dialogue
- Trauma-informed and safe practices
- Ability to evaluate and show impact

# Sisukas-malli





<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbmDFaMXRHQ>

# Steps of the Sisukas model

 = support material



## 1. Contact

- Contacting the Sisukas team (by the social worker or foster home)
- The Sisukas team receives the first basic information and needed contact details

## 2. Collecting information

- Gathering the information needed to organise schooling
- Contacting the child's network: responsible social worker, foster home, previous school/teacher, birth parents
- Building an overall picture of the young person's situation

## 3. Meeting at the foster home

- Getting to know the child and building a relationship
- Hearing the child's wishes, thoughts and past school experiences
- Involving the child in planning their own schooling

# Steps of the Sisukas model



## 4. Starting school

- School begins as soon as it is possible for the child
- Teaching arrangements are based on the child's individual needs
- Getting to know the school and sorting out practical matters

## 5. Assessments of learning and school readiness

- Planning how teaching will be organised / pedagogical decisions
- Pedagogical and psychological assessments and a health check, if needed

## 6. Network meeting

- The Sisukas team invites everyone and guides the discussion; ground rules are agreed at the start
- Goal: to understand the whole situation, share information, and identify support needs and strengths
- Making sure everyone understands their role and what they are responsible for

# Steps of the Sisukas model



## 7. Support and follow-up

- Support close to the child
- The Sisukas team offers consultation and brings people together every 1-2 months, or when needed
- Checking if the support is enough and adjusting it when necessary
- Follow-up continues until the end of basic education

## 8. Evaluating impact and collecting feedback



- Possibility for interviews with Sisukas pupils
- Sisukas teams collect yearly statistics about the pupils
- Annual feedback survey for Sisukas municipalities / wellbeing services counties to help improve the work
- Statistics and feedback results can be used to assess the need for the work and the resources required

## 9. Future plan and information transfer

- The Sisukas team and the child's social worker make sure information is shared when the child changes school or moves to a new stage

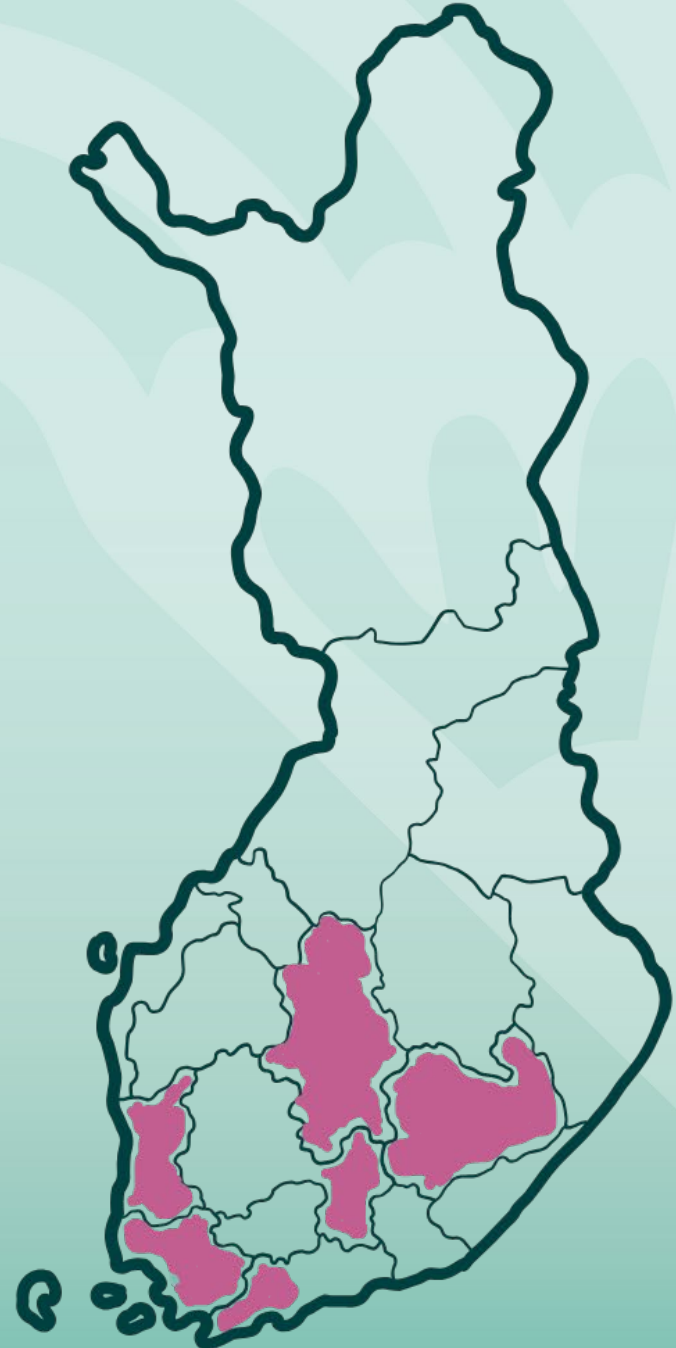
# Sisukas – a shared model across Finland

Sisukas worked with 556 children in 2025

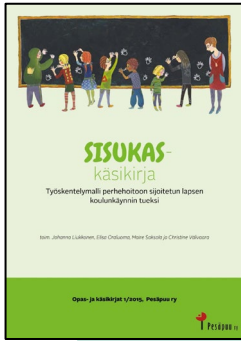
- **Etelä-Savo (1)**
  - ✓ Mikkeli
- **Keski-Suomi (4)**
  - ✓ Jyväskylä, Laukaa, Äänekoski, Hankasalmi
- **Länsi-Uusimaa (9)**
  - ✓ Raaseborg, Inkoo, Kirkkonummi, Siuntio, Lohja, Karkkila, Hanko, Vihti ja Kauniainen
- **Päijät-Häme (1)**
  - ✓ Lahti
- **Satakunta (1)**
  - ✓ Pori
- **Varsinais-Suomi (6)**
  - ✓ Turku, Kaarina, Paimio, Naantali, Raisio, Rusko
- **Kymenlaakso (1)**
  - ✓ Kouvola
- **Etelä-Pohjanmaa (1)**
  - ✓ Ähtäri

In total: 24 regions and municipalities

- 15 already running Sisukas
- 9 starting the work



# Support from Pesäpuu for starting and running Sisukas



## Support for starting Sisukas work

- Guidance and advice
- Key-person info sessions
- Training
- Materials and Logos



## For municipalities already running Sisukas

- Free mentoring for Sisukas teams
- Meetings for Sisukas network
- Annual surveys for professionals and pupils to assess impact



## National coordination

- Further development of the model
- Influencing
- Communications
- International cooperation

# National network of Sisukas teams

## Goals

- Sharing experiences and expertise
- Supporting Sisukas work in each city / wellbeing services county
- Building connections between teams
- Strengthening skills and knowledge
- Developing Sisukas further
- Influencing society together

## Meetings

- 4 times a year



# Helmi`s story

<https://youtu.be/buBFoAEwRQE?si=QULKLE5LowmPNYH3>



# Starting the Sisukas Model

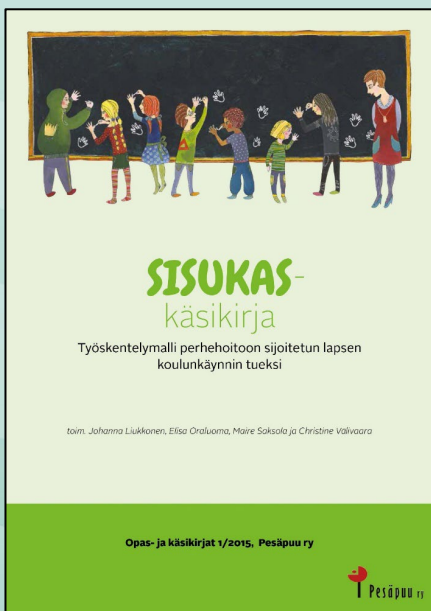


\* Kuntaliiton ohje: <https://www.kuntaliitto.fi/yleiskirjeet/2024/lastensuojelun-vuoksi-sijoitetun-oppilaan-kotikunnan-korvaus-vuonna-2024>

# Materials and further informations

- Sisukas and Pikku Sisukas - training courses
- Resources, support materials, guides, tools and further information
- videos (Youtube: Pesäpuu ry > Sisukas)

<https://pesapuu.fi/toiminta/koulun-ja-lastensuojelun-yhteistyö/sisukas>





# More information about Sisukas and Pikku Sisukas:

[www.pesapuu.fi/sisukas](http://www.pesapuu.fi/sisukas)

[www.pesapuu.fi/pikku-sisukas](http://www.pesapuu.fi/pikku-sisukas)

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