



PODCAST WITH FOSTER CARE SOCIAL WORKERS

By Lisselotte Lowagie, Agency Growing Up, Flanders, 2022

PART 1: Presentation & participation general within foster care

Lisselotte

Good afternoon, we are sitting together this afternoon to talk about the participation of young children. My name is Lisselotte Lowagie and I will try to steer this in the right direction, but please introduce yourself first.

Katrijn

My name is Katrijn Verhulst, I have been working in Foster Care East Flanders for almost 7 years now, and I work part-time as a parent counselor in foster care and part-time as a family researcher. I also participate in the meeting group for children from 6 to 12 years old.

Ilse

My name is Ilse Grieten, and I am new to the organization of foster care in East Flanders. I work part-time as a foster care counselor and part-time as a coordinator of the participation work, and I organize and coordinate the various meeting groups.

Lisselotte

I hear a lot of participation. What exactly does this mean for you?

Katrijn

Within foster care, we work on participation in various ways. Most of it happens in our meeting groups, but we also pay attention to participation in the guidance work. Depending on the type of meeting group or the age of the children in the meeting group, this works differently.

Participation plays a role in the guidance work, but that is also mainly dependent on the child.

Lisselotte

You say it's different according to age. How does that approach differ?

Ilse

The approach changes according to age. We are going to invite a young child in a completely different way—to think along or to give his or her vision about the assistance. How does the assistance feel for the child?

With a parent, we will do that differently, and with a foster carer, in yet another way. So for us, participation really depends on the person sitting in front of us.

It is very important to be on an equal level and to be able to speak in their language.

With young children, this is mainly done playfully.

Lisselotte

And, how can I imagine that for a 3-year-old child?

Katrijn

We do not organize meeting groups for children under 3 years old, but we do for children from 6 to 12 years old.

With young children, we mainly look at the foster care supervisor. In any case, the supervisor regularly visits the foster family. By being present frequently, he manages to build a relationship of trust with the 3-year-old child. This relationship of trust is very important. **Only then you can ask their opinion** about the assistance or about the things that are important in their life. We build that **trust relationship** by playing together. First, ask the child questions such as "*What are you doing here?*" and "*What things are you playing with?*" and then ask if you can play along or read a book together. This usually happens in a safe environment.. Often, you also do that in combination with the conversation you have with the foster carers. Sometimes the children wait and see, especially during the first conversations that you have with them. That is also okay. You just say a "good day" to the child so that they get to know your face and get to know you. In that way, it becomes clear who the person is who suddenly comes into their house now and then.