



## PODCAST WITH FOSTER CARE SOCIAL WORKERS

By Lisselotte Lowagie, Agency Growing Up, Flanders, 2022

### PART 8: Working with the life box

Ilse

I think the life box that we designed is a very nice method to work with children from the age of 5 to 6 years.

It consists of a box that is playfully designed. In the box are all kinds of tokens and stickers and a whiteboard with a weekly schedule, on which you can stick things. The box belongs to the foster child himself. It gives the child the space to actually draw out their own life path. There's a kind of friend book in there. There are also interview questions for the foster carers and the parents to get started with their own life stories. That way, they can use words and images. They can collect photos and other things in it.

That box is personal. They can take the box with them to any home they go to. They chose what they did with it. A parent can join in to do something with, and/or the foster carer, a supervisor. It happens at the rhythm of the child. The box stays with the child and helps to make things more visual, like the story. Who is all around me? Who is in my power tree? Who comes my way?

Nele:

Do you shape it together?

Ilse

That's possible.

Katrijn:

It also depends on the age of the child, how much you support this.

Ilse

With the young children, I give this to the foster carers, and they introduce it to the child. The child gives it a place. The child often discerns different things from it. There is a poster with a tree or a rainbow. There are all kinds of sticky things, from pets to police officers to ordinary people, men, women, young and old. And then the kids start pasting. This is me, and who is standing around me here? Some are a little further, some are a little closer. And so a conversation can arise, or not at all. In this way, the child takes this process into their own hands, and you can connect where necessary or possible.

Lisselotte

These are serious assignments to shape one's life path. For a six-year-old who has already experienced a few tragedies, such as a placement, it is not easy to do this.

Nele

That is precisely why this is so valuable.

Ilse

Yes, that's why it's so important. So many figures have already been cut out

Lisselotte

It offers a different way to come up with a story, to form a story

Ilse

Yes, but it also offers the opportunity to show that there are still many people around the child. "You're still very much liked. Yes, and you're worth it too. You have a somewhat different story and a lot of things have happened.

Katrijn

And children who have been placed in foster care at a very young age do not always know where the decision came from.

Sometimes the children also feel guilt. Then it's just right to go and see with mom and dad, if possible. Okay, how are we going to tell that story here. Are there any pictures from when you were born, can we put them in the box and give them more story? That way, you can take away the guilt that a child feels. And that it becomes clear to the child, "That is the reason why I live here; it is not my fault." That they realize that there was joy once, when they came into the world, when they were born. Sometimes they don't even remember that there was once something cheerful around them.

Lisselotte

Because the placement is not always up to 18, is it? Surely it is possible that the parents can take care of the child again?

Katrijn

Foster care is always temporary. We always look at whether there is a possibility for a return home. But there are so many factors at play.