



## Using the Family Star™ or Family Star Plus™

The Family Star is designed as an integral component of one-to-one keywork or support, and completing it is intended to be a helpful process that stimulates and focuses discussion and provides a useful basis for action planning. Both the Family Star and the Family Star Plus<sup>1</sup> are flexible tools that consist of:

- The Star Chart, Notes and Action Plan
- The User Guide, with short visual scales and detailed scales for each of the outcome areas
- This short Guidance for Workers
- The Organisation Guide for managers and workers
- A web application for online completion at [www.staronline.org.uk](http://www.staronline.org.uk)
- Background and further information at [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk).

**Make sure that you have received training in using the Family Star** and that you are familiar with the materials and know when and how it is used in your service. It is vital that you understand and use the Journey of Change (also known as the Steps to Effective Parenting) underlying the scales – **stuck, accepting help, trying, finding what works, effective parenting** – as this will support effective use of the tool with parents and help ensure reliable information for use by your service. You also need to be familiar with all the scales so you can unpack and rephrase them for parents.

**Introduce the Family Star to parents.** This can be done in a number of ways:

- By devising a short script to introduce the Star in a way that feels natural to you and clear for those you are working with
- If you meet with the parents you support in groups, it can be useful and save time to explain the Star to the group before starting one-to-one work within individual sessions
- By giving parents who are interested a copy of the User Guide to read before the session.

When introducing the Star:

- Explain that you can start anywhere on the journey, that you can move both up and down on the scale and that 10 is the top of the Star scales but not necessarily the end of the journey
- Be clear that it is not about parents getting an overall score but about building up a map of their world, experiences and journey.

Families we are working with are really responding to the Family Star. They love it. This is so much easier for them to understand. They just get it.

**Manager,  
Children's  
Assessment  
and Early Help,  
Buckinghamshire  
County Council**

Parents like the instant visual and you can have a huge discussion about where to go from here. They like it and I like it.

**Family support  
worker,  
Hampshire**

<sup>1</sup> In this guidance 'Family Star' means either the Family Star or the Family Star Plus.

**Complete the Star one to one with a parent** in a way that responds to their needs and abilities.

- Discuss each area. Let the parent decide which scale to start with or choose one that is concrete and may be easier to discuss, for instance, Education and Learning. Then either:
  - Start with the short version of the scale as a basis for discussion about that area, or
  - Have an open discussion about the area then, if appropriate, use the short, visual scale to place the parent on one of the Journey of Change stages.

It is motivating and informative for parents to see the whole journey.

**Family support worker,  
Camden**

**Use the Journey of Change when deciding where a parent is on their journey.** Without referring to the Journey of Change, one person's 3 could be another person's 8, so the completed Star will not support action planning and your service will not be able to treat collated Star data as reliable for reporting purposes. The short visual scales are designed to support using the Star collaboratively with parents. The detailed scales on the opposite page are intended as a resource for workers, so feel free to refer to specific points for clarification with parents if it is useful, but avoid reading them through with parents because of their length.

**If you do not agree, have a discussion** – this can help you learn about the parent and help them reflect on their situation and see it in new ways. If a parent is able to engage meaningfully and is at 5 or above for most of the Family Star areas, encourage them to take the lead in placing themselves on the scales. You may need to be more directive for parents in the **accepting help** stage. Those who are **stuck** in all or most areas will not discuss the Star meaningfully and you may need to do a worker-only reading.

This process requires good keyworking skills, some knowledge of the person and a relationship with them. You will need to encourage those people with low confidence to see their strengths, and others to be more realistic. Use your professional judgement if further discussion is not helpful.

**If you cannot reach agreement, record both scale points on the Star**, labelling which is the worker's view and which is the parent's. Use the Star Notes to record points from your discussion.

**When you have completed all of the scales, join the points to create a shape.** If working on paper, mark each scale point on the Star Chart and join the points. Encourage parents to do this and create the shape. If working on the Star Online, select the scale points and when all are entered, a button will appear asking you to generate a completed Star.

**If you are working with both parents**, choose the number for the parent where there is most difficulty in the area you are looking at. Alternatively you can choose to mark the number for each parent separately on the Star Chart and record the reasons in the Star Notes. In this case, it is the lower number that signals a need and should be used for the Action Plan and entered onto the Star Online or other system for reporting.

**Use the completed Star as the basis for a support plan.** Look at the shape together and prompt the parent to comment on it as a basis for agreeing what to do next. Potential questions are:

- Is the shape of the Star an accurate picture of how things are for you now?
- What does it tell you about what is and is not going well?
- What are the strengths that you bring to the areas that are going well? How might you apply those strengths in other aspects of parenting?
- What does your Star tell you about areas where you need to make changes or where you could do with more support?
- What is it most important to address first?

Once you have chosen the areas to be included in the support plan, further questions for each area include:

- Where on the journey do you want to get to by the next review?
- What will that look like for you?
- What needs to be done to bring about that change?
- Who will do those things?
- Would it help to set a deadline for these things?
- Do we need the help of other people?

**Complete the Family Star Action Plan** or use your organisation's support planning documentation. The Journey of Change provides valuable pointers for thinking about the goals of support with the parent and achievable, realistic actions:

Journey of Change stage	Goals of keyword
<b>Effective parenting</b> <b>(9-10)</b>	At this stage a parent is helping their children to thrive and does not need support from a service, so the main actions will be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing to reinforce the learning</li> <li>• Building and reinforcing support networks outside of the service</li> <li>• Ensuring they know how to spot the warning signs and seek help again if needed in the future</li> </ul>
<b>Finding what works</b> <b>(7-8)</b>	At this stage, parents are learning from experience how to be effective and their children are benefiting. The focus of support may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping them to reflect on how they have overcome problems and how they can learn from this</li> <li>• Celebrating their achievements</li> <li>• Supporting them to deal with manageable difficulties themselves and offering more support through setbacks or larger difficulties</li> </ul>
<b>Trying</b> <b>(5-6)</b>	At this stage parents are taking responsibility and trying new things. This can be difficult as children may react negatively to some changes, and parents may give up or struggle to keep going, so goals and actions may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offering sufficient support and encouragement</li> <li>• Helping them to identify what is working and make changes where approaches are not working</li> <li>• Helping them to take actions rather than doing it for them</li> </ul>
<b>Accepting help</b> <b>(3-4)</b>	Parents at this stage are opening up to help but do not take the initiative. The approach may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving their situation by giving practical support</li> <li>• Setting up appointments and accompanying them</li> <li>• Helping the parent to set achievable goals with guidance on practical steps</li> <li>• Building on any signs of greater confidence and initiative</li> </ul>
<b>Stuck</b> <b>(1-2)</b>	At this stage, children are not able to develop well or are at risk, but parents do not recognise the problems or willingly accept help. Actions may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focusing on safety – preventing or minimising harm</li> <li>• Providing feedback and information</li> <li>• Providing practical and proactive help, perhaps directly with the children where needed, even where parents are resistant</li> <li>• Developing trust and starting to build a relationship</li> </ul>

**Revisit the Family Star at regular intervals**, usually around every three to six months and timed to coincide with support plan reviews. Repeat the process of discussing each of the Star areas and agreeing where the parent is on each scale, preferably without reference to the previous Star readings. Once completed, you can display the current and previous readings to give an instant visual picture of change. If you are using the Star Online you can select up to three Star readings to display simultaneously on the Star.

**Encourage open discussion, looking at the new Star shape.** Possible questions include:

- How do you feel about the shape of the Star?
- Do you see the achievements you have made?
- What has helped you to make progress? What strengths have you brought to this? What can you learn from this and apply to other aspects of parenting?
- What areas do you want to address now – the same as before or new ones?
- Where do you want to get to by the next review? What actions will it take to make this happen?

**Complete a new action plan** and, if working on paper, file the Star Chart and Action Plan and enter the data as required. If using the Star Online, the data will have already been captured – just print and file the Star, Star Notes and Action Plan if your service also keeps paper records.

When positive change occurs, reviews can be very helpful in encouraging and motivating you and the parents you work with as the Star makes progress very evident. Seeing progress on the Star can help reinforce change.

## Recognising external factors

When using the Family Star it is important to recognise that although the Journey of Change is about parents and the changes they can make, they may also be facing barriers or difficult conditions beyond their control. These may include poor housing, lack of work opportunities or not having access to benefits, health or other services they need. Use the notes section to record those external factors when creating or reviewing their action plan. Your service may then be able to use this information to identify gaps in provision, plan future developments or raise issues with policy-makers.

**This document gives brief guidance for workers. For fuller guidance and advice on implementation of the Family Star, please see the Organisation Guide.**

The Star shows improvement and where people need more support, it reinforces to staff the progress made and helps engage service users in their own process.

**Manager,  
Croftlands Trust**