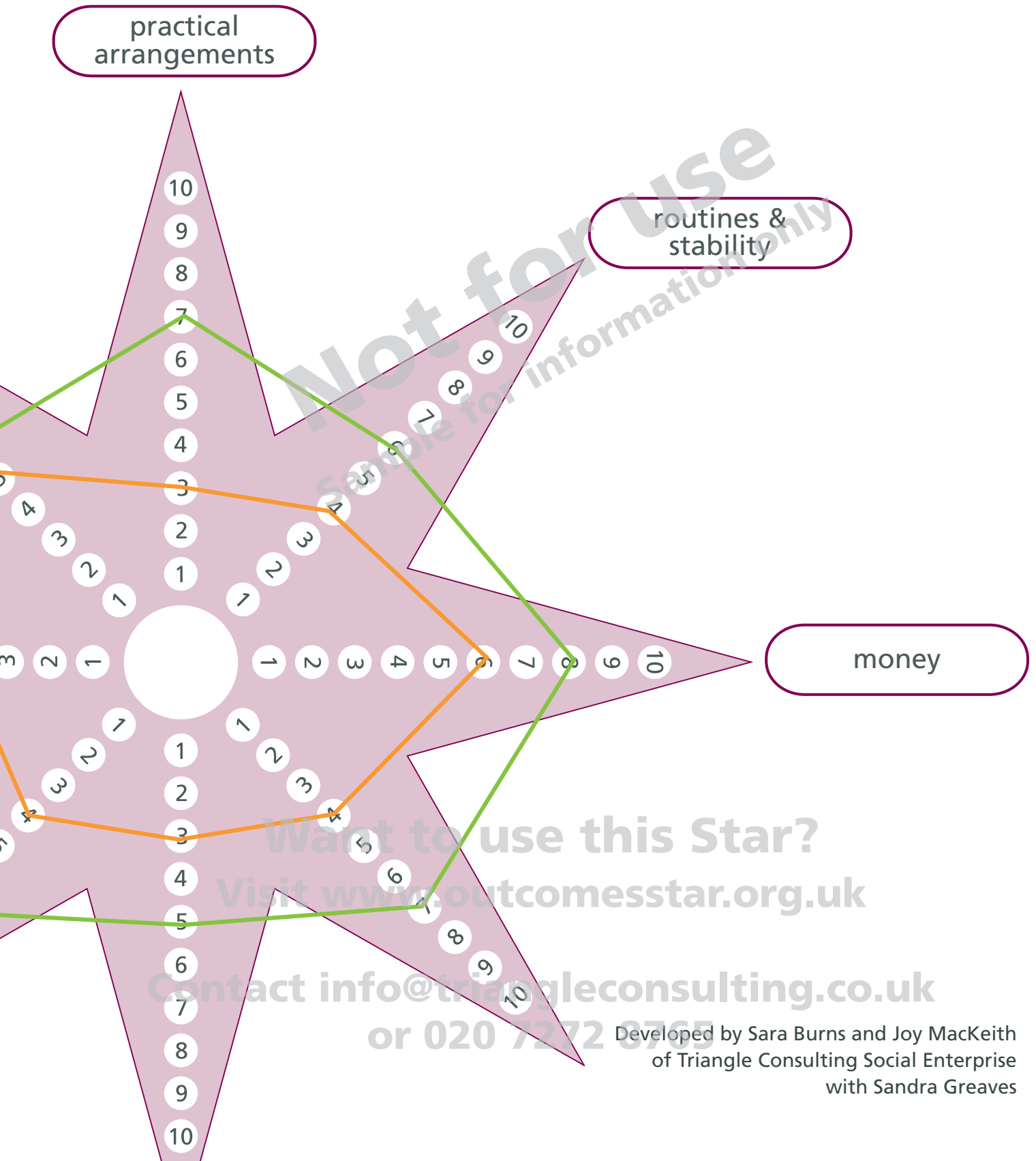




Family Star (Relationships)™

The Outcomes Star for protecting children from conflict between parents



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or 020 7272 8765

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The Outcomes Star™

This Star is part of a family of Outcomes Star tools. Each tool includes a Star Chart, User Guide or Quiz and guidance on implementation and some have visual and other resources. For other versions of the Outcomes Star, good practice and further information see www.outcomesstar.org.uk.

Acknowledgements

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- Essex County Council
- Hertfordshire County Council

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Introduction to the Family Star (Relationships)[™]

It is normal for couples to have arguments or disagree from time to time, but if those arguments become intense, frequent, aggressive or unresolved, they can have a lasting effect on your children – as well as on you.

Research shows that children exposed to this type of unhealthy conflict between parents are more likely to have emotional, behavioural or developmental difficulties.

The Family Star (Relationships) has been developed for parents and others with a key parenting role who need support to tackle disagreements in a healthy way and to help their children to thrive.

It is designed to be completed with each parent separately, whether or not they are together as a couple. It may also be used with other family members with a parental role where appropriate. It is a version of the Outcomes Star, a suite of tools for supporting and measuring change when working with people.

Outcome areas

The Family Star (Relationships) covers eight areas and there is a scale for each:

1. Practical arrangements
2. Routines and stability
3. Money
4. Meeting emotional needs
5. Boundaries and behaviour
6. Relationship skills
7. Managing strong feelings
8. Your well-being

Areas 1–6 are about how well you are managing any conflict so that your children are shielded from possible harm. Areas 7 and 8 are about you and how you are coping and dealing with things.

How does it work?

For each of these eight areas, there is a scale. Each follows the same pattern, or Journey of Change, with five stages.

To complete the Star, look at each of the eight scales one by one and talk them over with your worker. You can discuss how you see the relationship between you and your co-parent¹ in each area, and how that might impact on your children. Then mark the number on the Star Chart and connect the points to create a snapshot, including the areas that are working well and the ones that are causing difficulties.

This will help you and the person supporting you understand where changes are needed. From there you can start thinking about the actions you want to take and the support that would help you to carry them out.

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1. Throughout the Star we have used the word 'children' to cover one or more children, and 'co-parent' to cover anyone in a parenting relationship with you – this may be your partner, ex-partner or others in a parenting role, and you may have more than one co-parent.

Your journey

You and the person supporting you will come back to the Star after some time. You can look at the scales again, agree where you are, and plot a new shape on the Star Chart. Over time, this will help you to see where you have come from and how things have changed for you and your children. This can help you to view things in a new way – to put the difficulties into a bigger picture.

It also helps us get an idea of the effectiveness of the service overall and understand where people make the most changes and where we may need to provide more help or do things differently.

Journey of Change

Change doesn't happen in one go – it's a journey and it can help to understand the steps along the way. Everyone makes changes in their own way but the pattern is often similar.

The areas in the Family Star (Relationships) are underpinned by a five-stage Journey of Change. This journey focuses primarily on what you can do and where you have some control, rather than focusing on what your co-parent is doing. However, in the first six scales, which focus on the impact of conflict on your children, reaching **effective co-parenting** (stage 9-10) relies on some cooperation with your co-parent or things being in place; without that, the top of the scale for you is **finding what works** (stage 7-8). In scales 7 and 8, where the focus is on you, you could be at **effective co-parenting** regardless of their actions.

1-2 Stuck (red)

There are a lot of difficulties and unhealthy conflict in the relationship between you and your co-parent, whether or not you are together, and this is likely to be having a negative effect on your children. You can't see how you could do anything to improve the situation and don't go along with help if it's offered, so things are **stuck**. Perhaps you don't understand the risk of harm to your children's development, you are overwhelmed by other difficulties, see your co-parent as solely responsible for the problems or don't see how things could be different. You may not want others involved, feel unfairly criticised or afraid to talk about problems or not trust those offering support.

You take a step forward to 2 when you occasionally consider that you could do something to change things, but you don't yet engage with help.

3-4 Accepting help (orange)

As for 1-2, conflict between you and your co-parent or other difficulties in your relationship are likely to be having a negative impact on your children but at this stage you are **accepting help**. You may not know what to do or you may feel hopeless or unable to cope, but you are open to help and will go along with suggestions, mediation or other interventions from others – professionals, friends and/or family. However, you don't really believe things can improve and don't take the initiative. Perhaps you feel you have to cooperate with the people who are helping.

At 3 you sometimes recognise you need to be part of the change and start to be open to help. At 4 this is more consistent.

5-6 Believing and trying (yellow)

You recognise that there are things you can do to shield your children from the impact of conflict or other difficulties in the relationship. At this stage, if not before, you know that conflict can harm your children's development and start to take responsibility to minimise that. At 5 there is an internal shift

towards **believing** that you yourself can make a difference for your children, even if it seems that most changes need to be from your co-parent and you can't change their behaviour. This can be a noticeable turning point or realisation, or it can be a gradual shift to recognising there are things you can do.

At 6 you act on that belief and take the initiative to make changes such as **trying** to establish new boundaries or ways to communicate, or handling difficulties in a healthier way so things can be sorted out to prevent harm to your children. This behaviour is new and often things don't go well at first, so this stage can be a tough place to be. Perhaps your co-parent resists the changes you are trying to make and things may feel worse for a while until you find what works.

7-8 Finding what works (green)

You are **finding what works** and what doesn't in relating to your co-parent, and shielding your children from the impact of difficulties. You are gaining in confidence and your children are benefiting from this. However, there is more to learn and some things are not working well yet, so you still need help to reflect and learn lessons as well as to make sure you don't slip back when faced with additional difficulties.

At 7 you are just starting to find what works but there is a way to go. At 8 this behaviour is more established but a few things need to change. You can progress to this point on all the scales whether or not your co-parent is cooperating, arrangements are working and/or they are also doing what they can to protect your children.

9-10 Effective co-parenting (blue)

As you find what works, you move towards the final stage of **effective co-parenting**. At this stage there are no concerns about any conflict in your relationship having a negative impact on your children. Things may not always be easy or harmonious, but you and your co-parent cooperate well enough to protect your children and they get what they need to develop in a normal, healthy way, including security and emotional support. If you and your co-parent are not together and are not able to communicate directly, or this is not appropriate, arrangements are in place and you are both going along with them well enough.

At 9 things are mostly sorted but you need support with occasional issues. At 10 you are able to sort things out as needed and have any support you need to do that without the service.

For the last two areas, the ones that are about you, you can progress to 9 or 10 when you have the skills and are doing all you can, regardless of how your co-parent is behaving.

For most parents this will not be the end of the journey and you may want things to improve a lot more. However, if your children are protected and able to thrive, you no longer need extra support and can build on what you have by yourself or with the help of family or friends.

A note on domestic abuse

Although this Star includes reference to early signs or risks of domestic abuse, this version is not suitable where there is sustained domestic violence over time or controlling abusive behaviour. In those circumstances, practitioners will probably be referring people to specialist domestic abuse services and we would recommend use of the Empowerment Star or a different assessment and support planning tool.

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1 Practical arrangements

Parental roles, practical tasks, contact arrangements, handovers

Key points

- If you and your co-parent are not together, the focus is on practical arrangements such as contact time and handovers
- From 7 you have some arrangements in place
- By 9 these are working well and your co-parent is keeping to them

9-10 Effective co-parenting

Things are sorted in terms of practical arrangements

7-8 Finding what works

I'm finding what works in terms of practical arrangements, but there are a few things to sort out

5-6 Believing and trying

I want to sort out roles, contact or other practical arrangements and am trying, but it's hard

3-4 Accepting help

I know we need to sort out roles or practical arrangements and I accept help when it's available

1-2 Stuck

There is a lot of conflict over our roles or practical arrangements. I can't change that

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1 Practical arrangements (detail)

This scale is about having practical arrangements in place for your children so that parenting tasks, roles and responsibilities are not a source of unhealthy conflict. If you are together this covers practical tasks in the home and giving your children the help they need. If you are separated, it covers agreements on the time they spend in each home and well-managed handovers between parents.

9-10 Effective co-parenting

Things are sorted in terms of practical arrangements

- You and your co-parent have arrangements for parental responsibility, roles, contact time and handovers and/or how you behave when with the children
- These may not be what you would choose, but you feel OK about them and they are not a source of conflict and don't have a negative impact on your children
- Choose 9 if you have arrangements but need support with occasional issues. Choose 10 if you can sort things out without support from the service

7-8 Finding what works

I'm finding what works in terms of practical arrangements, but there are a few things to sort out

- You have functioning arrangements over some parental roles and tasks and/or contact arrangements but there are still a few issues
- You are learning what works best for the children in terms of your roles or other practical arrangements. You may be learning to negotiate this with your co-parent
- Perhaps you have some agreements in place, such as contact arrangements set by a court hearing, but your co-parent isn't yet keeping to them
- Choose 7 if you are just starting to find what works but there is a way to go. Choose 8 if this is more established but there are a few things that need to change

5-6 Believing and trying

I want to sort out roles, contact or other practical arrangements and am trying, but it's hard

- At 5 you can see there are things you could do to sort out practical arrangements in a way that protects your children from harm. This may include your roles if you are together, contact time and how handovers are done if separated
- At 6 you are acting on that belief and taking steps to improve things but it's early days and you haven't yet found what works

3-4 Accepting help

I know we need to sort out roles or practical arrangements and I accept help when it's available

- As for 1, there is conflict over your roles or practical arrangements, but you are talking to someone about this and may go along with suggestions. However, you don't yet believe real change is possible and don't take the initiative
- You may allow someone to act on your behalf for pressing issues such as contact arrangements
- Choose 3 if you sometimes recognise the need for change and go along with help if it's offered. Choose 4 if this is more consistent

1-2 Stuck

There is a lot of conflict over our roles or practical arrangements. I can't change that

- If you are together, there are a lot of problems over the division of roles or tasks. If separated, you don't have effective arrangements for parental responsibility or contact with the children
- You can't communicate or attempt to sort this out without conflict that blocks any progress. You may blame your co-parent for this or not recognise the negative effect on your children
- Choose 1 if things seem completely stuck. Choose 2 if you occasionally consider what you might do differently but don't accept help if it's offered

2 Routines and stability

A stable home, bedtime, meals and other routines, getting to school

Key points

- Whether you live together or apart, you both need to have routines and stability when your children are staying with you
- From 6 to 8 you are doing what you can to provide this yourself, even if your co-parent doesn't
- At 9 or 10 both you and your co-parent provide enough routine and stability when the children are with you

9-10 Effective co-parenting

Our children have the positive routines and stability they need to thrive

7-8 Finding what works

I'm finding ways to give our children positive routines and stability, but there are a few issues

5-6 Believing and trying

I'm trying to sort out routines and stability for our children, but it's hard

3-4 Accepting help

I know our children need better routines or stability and I accept help when it's available

1-2 Stuck

Our children don't have suitable routines or stability. I can't change that

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2 Routines and stability (detail)

This scale is about your children having a stable, suitable home and a supportive family routine, whether you as parents are together or not. It covers children having enough sleep and healthy food, washing, having suitable clothes, and being on time. This includes you having stability and routines, being organised enough and encouraging children and young people to take responsibility for their routines.

9-10 Effective co-parenting

Our children have the positive routines and stability they need to thrive

- Your children have suitable meals, bedtimes and other routines, at least during the week. If at nursery or school, they eat breakfast and arrive mostly on time, clean enough and with suitable clothes
- Your children have enough stability at home, whether you and your co-parent are together or not. Their home(s) are clean and organised enough, with food in the kitchen
- Choose 9 if your children have positive routines and stability but you need support with occasional issues. Choose 10 if you can sort things out as needed without support from the service

7-8 Finding what works

I'm finding ways to give our children positive routines and stability, but there are a few issues

- You are finding ways to keep your home organised and to have supportive routines. This may include bedtimes, healthy food and/or getting children to nursery or school on time
- You may be learning how to work better with your co-parent in this area
- If your home was at risk or unsuitable, you have sorted this out or moved to new accommodation
- Choose 7 if you are starting to find what works but there is a way to go. Choose 8 if routines are established but there are a few things that need to change

5-6 Believing and trying

I'm trying to sort out routines and stability for our children, but it's hard

- At 5 you can see it's possible to sort out positive routines and stability in a way that reduces conflict and you know this is up to you as well
- At 6 you are trying to put things in place such as regular bedtimes or meals, but it's not yet working well. You may find your children and/or your co-parent resist change, so things may feel worse for a while
- You may be trying to sort out your housing situation or get more suitable accommodation

3-4 Accepting help

I know our children need better routines or stability and I accept help when it's available

- As for 1, but you are talking to someone about this and may go along with suggestions. However, you don't yet believe real change is possible or take the initiative
- You may allow someone to act on your behalf for pressing issues such as repairs
- Choose 3 if you sometimes recognise the need for change and go along with help if it's offered. Choose 4 if this is more consistent

1-2 Stuck

Our children don't have suitable routines or stability. I can't change that

- Your children don't have an effective routine for bedtime and meals, often miss school or nursery or are late, or don't go out in clean, suitable clothes. If you are not together, this may be in one or both homes where they spend time
- Perhaps there are problems with your home or your co-parent's. Perhaps there is a risk of losing it, it is in poor repair or it doesn't have the space your children need
- Choose 1 if things seem completely stuck. Choose 2 if you occasionally consider what you might do differently but don't accept help if it's offered

3 Money

Negotiating over money and possessions, fulfilling financial responsibilities

Key points

- Money is often a source of conflict within a relationship. This scale is not about how much money you have beyond the basics but about sorting out any conflict over money
- If you are not together, this includes agreeing maintenance and making regular payments. By 9 or 10 there are no problems with this

9-10 Effective co-parenting

We have addressed money issues as well as we can and money does not cause unhealthy conflict

7-8 Finding what works

I'm finding ways to sort issues over money, but there are a few problems

5-6 Believing and trying

I see there are things I can do to sort out conflict over money and I'm trying, but it's hard

3-4 Accepting help

I know things need to be done to reduce conflict over money and I accept help when it's available

1-2 Stuck

Money is a problem and the source of a lot of conflict. I can't change that

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3 Money (detail)

This scale is about managing money well enough so that your children have the basics they need and it is not a cause of unhealthy conflict. This includes you and your co-parent talking about money, meeting financial responsibilities as parents, paying child maintenance if required and agreeing on the main priorities for spending if money is tight.

9-10 Effective co-parenting

We have addressed money issues as well as we can and money does not cause unhealthy conflict

- You may have some financial problems, such as debts, but your children have the basics that they need and you have sorted things out as well as possible under the circumstances
- Money isn't a source of unhealthy conflict between you and your co-parent. If together, you mostly agree on the priorities for spending and can negotiate where there is disagreement
- If you are paying or receiving child maintenance payments, there are no problems with this
- Choose 9 if things are good enough but you need support with occasional issues. Choose 10 if you can sort things out without support from the service

7-8 Finding what works

I'm finding ways to sort issues over money, but there are a few problems

- You have mostly dealt with important issues relating to money or possessions and are finding ways to protect your children from any conflict in this area. You also may be finding ways to negotiate with your co-parent over money and spending priorities
- If you are paying or receiving child maintenance, you have an agreement in place or are managing to develop one
- Choose 7 if you are starting to find what works but there is a way to go. Choose 8 if this is more established but there are a few things that need to change

5-6 Believing and trying

I see there are things I can do to sort out conflict over money and I'm trying, but it's hard

- At 5 you see it's possible to sort out money issues or prevent conflict over money or possessions, but you are not yet taking action
- At 6 you are trying out ways of doing this, but it's not yet working well. You may be trying to sort out debts, rent, mortgage, or spending priorities but not yet found what works
- If you are not together, you are trying to sort out child maintenance arrangements but these are not yet in place or are not being paid regularly

3-4 Accepting help

I know things need to be done to reduce conflict over money and I accept help when it's available

- As for 1, there is a lot of conflict over money, but you are talking to someone about this and may go along with some suggestions. However you don't yet believe real change is possible or take the initiative
- You may allow someone to act on your behalf for pressing issues such as debts
- Choose 3 if you sometimes see the need for change and go along with help if it's offered. Choose 4 if this is more consistent

1-2 Stuck

Money is a problem and the source of a lot of conflict. I can't change that

- There are significant financial problems such as unmanaged debts or unpaid rent, mortgage or child maintenance
- And/or there may be enough money for basics but you and your co-parent have different priorities
- Money is a significant source of unhealthy conflict
- Choose 1 if things seem completely stuck. Choose 2 if you occasionally consider what you might do differently but don't accept help if it's offered

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4 Meeting emotional needs

Connection, attention, helping your children grow up happy and resilient

Key points

- This is about your children's emotional well-being and making sure they can thrive, even if you are finding things difficult yourself
- From 6 to 8 you are doing what you can to ensure they have emotional support
- At 9 or 10 your children feel able to love you and their co-parent and key family members without conflict

9-10 Effective co-parenting

Our children get the attention and emotional support they need to thrive

7-8 Finding what works

I'm finding ways to meet my children's emotional needs, but there are a few issues

5-6 Believing and trying

I want my children to have the emotional support they need and I'm trying, but it's hard

3-4 Accepting help

I know our children don't get the emotional support they need and I accept help when it's available

1-2 Stuck

Our children don't get the emotional support they need. I can't change that

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