



# Using the Support Star (Parents)™

The Support Star (Parents) is designed to support parents of children facing cancer or other serious illness. It is a version of the Outcomes Star, a suite of tools for supporting and measuring change when working with people.

Completing the Support Star (Parents) is intended to stimulate and focus discussion and to help identify what support a family needs. It is a flexible tool that relies on the skills of the professionals using it, as well as some trust between them and the parents they support. The aim is to have a helpful discussion.

The Support Star (Parents) resources consist of:

- The Support Star (Parents) Chart, notes and Action Plan
- The Support Star (Parents) User Guide, with both brief visual scales and detailed scales
- The Support Star (Parents) short illustrated scales (an alternative to the User Guide)
- This Guidance for Workers
- The Star Online web application for online completion and data analysis.

Background and further information about the Outcomes Star suite of tools can be found at [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk).

**Make sure that you have received training in using the Support Star (Parents)** and that you are familiar with the materials and know when and how the Star is used in your service. It is vital that you understand and use the Journey of Change underlying the scales – **not able to respond, taking it in, trying to respond, finding a way through, managing well** – as this will ensure consistent and reliable information for use by your service and as a basis for planning. You also need to be familiar with all the scales, so you can unpack and rephrase them as needed.

Seeing the Star visually helps me to see that I'm changing, that things are happening.

Service user

Want to use this Star?  
Visit [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk)

Contact [info@triangleconsulting.co.uk](mailto:info@triangleconsulting.co.uk)  
or 020 7272 8765

**Introduce the Support Star (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 there is a parent support group or similar, it can be helpful to explain the Star to the group before discussing and completing it in one-to-one work with parents
- By giving parents who are interested a copy of the User Guide or short illustrated scales to read.

When introducing the Star:

- Explain that people may start anywhere on the journey, that they can move both up and down on the scale and that the journey underpinning the Star doesn't follow the treatment journey – parents may be **finding a way through** very soon after diagnosis in some areas and **taking in** further implications in other areas later on
- Be clear that 5 is the top of the Star scales, indicating that parents are doing all they can and have the right support, but doesn't mean that things are OK or that it's the end of treatment, for example
- Let the parent decide which scale to start with, or choose one that is concrete and may be easier to discuss. Be clear that the Star isn't about 'scores' but about building up a map of their world now their child is ill and identifying where support might help.

The following phrase was one of those suggested by a CLIC Sargent social worker for introducing the Star:

*"To support you as well as we can, we need to get a picture of your life and then we can look at what you need. We look at how you manage at home and in the ward. We will keep coming back to it to see if there is anything more we can help you with."*

**Complete the Star collaboratively with parents** in a way that responds to their needs and abilities. The aim is to engage them in meaningful discussion and draw out their concerns about the areas covered, not to complete the Star as quickly as possible.

**Use the scale descriptors to stimulate discussion** about that area, or if parents are keen to talk, listen and then use the scale descriptors to help them place themselves on each scale. Choose either the brief visual scales in the User Guide or the short illustrated scales. The User Guide has the benefit of including the detailed scales on facing pages alongside the brief descriptors; this detail will be helpful for many parents and can be referred to for clarification. However, it is best to avoid reading the detailed scales out in their entirety because of their length.

**Always use the scales** – otherwise, one person's 2 could be another person's 4 and the completed Star won't be a useful basis for completing the action plan and your service won't be able to treat collated Star data as reliable for reporting purposes.

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**If you and parents don't agree, try to have further discussion.** Listen and encourage people to see their strengths and where they are managing well, but also to recognise the challenges so they can get the help they need. If parents are at 3 or above for most of the Star areas, they can often take the lead in placing themselves on the scales. You may need to be more directive if people are just **taking it in**. If parents are **not able to respond** in most areas, it's probably not the right time to complete the Star with them collaboratively, though you may want to complete a worker-only reading based on what you know.

**If you can't reach agreement, record both readings on the Star,** labelling which is your opinion as the worker and which is the parents', using the Star notes to record points from your discussion. Use your professional judgement about when further discussion is helpful or not.

**When you have completed all of the scales, create a shape.** Mark each point on the Star Chart and join the points. Encourage parents to do this and create the shape.

**If you are working with both parents in a family,** choose whether to complete a joint Star for the family<sup>1</sup> or, if parents are responding differently to each other, opt to complete a separate Star with each parent. Looking at their completed Stars together may help you and them see their relative strengths and where they each most need support, opening the potential for increased understanding.

**Use the completed Star as the basis for a support plan or next steps.**

Look at the shape together and prompt the parent to reflect on it as a basis for what to do next. Ask questions such as:

- Is the shape of the Star an accurate picture of how things are for your family now?
- What does it tell you about what is and isn't going well?
- What are the strengths that you bring to manage in the areas that are going well? How might you apply those strengths in other areas?
- What is it most important to address first?
- What support do you need? What can you do to shift things in that area?

**Complete the Support Star (Parents) 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 for each stage:

Completing the Star empowered them and gave them insight into how well they have coped.

Social worker,  
CLIC Sargent

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<sup>1</sup> Please note: if you are using the Star Online system, you will only be able to record that the Star has been completed by a 'service user' and not whether this is one parent or both parents in a family. If you do need to track whether the Star has been completed by one parent or both, you could set up specific service user IDs, one for each parent separately and one for them together.