



Using the Family Star Plus™ or Family Star™

The Family Star Plus¹ and Family Star are designed as an integral component of one-to-one keywork² or support, and completing a Star is intended to be a helpful, engaging and empowering process that stimulates and focuses discussion and provides a useful, shared basis for an action or support plan. Each of the Family Stars consist of:

- The Star Chart, Notes and Action Plan
- The User Guide, with brief visual scales and detailed scales for each of the outcome areas and a detailed description of the Journey of Change
- A short illustrated Scales document
- This Guidance for Workers (covering both Stars).

The Family Star is a flexible tool that relies on the skills of the professionals using it, as well as on a degree of understanding and trust between them and the person they are supporting. The Star is designed to be used one to one; the aim is to have a genuine interaction and complete it collaboratively.

To download preview versions of the Stars and for further information see www.outcomesstar.org.uk

Before you use the Family Star™

As a holistic keywork tool, the Family Star supports the opening up of conversations, by providing a framework to explore all aspects of a person's life. However, it needs to be used well.

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 the Star is used in your service. It's vital that you understand and use the Journey of Change underlying the scales – **stuck**, **accepting help**, **trying**, **finding what works**, and **managing well**. This will ensure consistent and reliable information as a basis for support planning and for use by your service. You also need to be familiar with all the scale descriptions, so you can unpack and rephrase them as needed, depending on people's culture, understanding and use of English.

Families we work with really respond 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

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1 In this guidance 'Family Star' means either the Family Star or the Family Star Plus.

2 Keywork may have another name in your service, but includes assessing someone's needs, agreeing goals and providing support and referrals to help them meet those goals. The keyworker is the person who is assigned special responsibility for working with that service user.

How to introduce the Family Star™

Before you introduce the Star to someone for the first time:

- Devise 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 people 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
- Consider giving people who are interested a copy of the User Guide or short, illustrated scales to read before the session. This relies on someone being comfortable with reading in English. It may be helpful to share the documents with an interpreter in advance.

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

When introducing the Star:

- Explain that people may start anywhere on the Journey of Change and can move both up and down on the scale. Point out that 10 is the top of the Star scales but not necessarily the end of the journey
- Be clear that this is about exploring where they are and building up a map of their world and experiences – it is not about being judged or being awarded an overall number
- Refer to where someone is on the scale or Journey of Change using the stage names, colours and/or numbers, depending on what works best for each individual. Avoid using the term “score” – replace with “where you are on the journey/scale” or other alternatives depending on the context
- Encourage people to ask questions so they feel as comfortable as possible about the Family Star and reassure them that they will have choices about the process and pace of completion
- Let the person decide which scale to start with, or start at the beginning. Some suggested phrases for introducing the Star include:

“The Family Star is a way of finding out about where you are now, your strengths and needs and then showing how things change.”

“The Star tells us how things are for you now and what needs to happen next, and it helps you and me plan our work together.”

Overall, the skills and approach needed to introduce and use the Family Star well are likely to be in keeping with being person-centred, trauma-informed and other good practice in your service.

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or 020 7272 8765**

For example, when responding to people who might be experiencing emotional distress:

- Listen and allow the person to settle – give them space and time and don't pressurise them into talking
- Be empathetic and demonstrate a caring approach
- Provide reassurance that emotional distress and the symptoms they are experiencing are normal

How to complete the Family Star™

Complete the Star collaboratively with people in a way that responds to their needs and abilities. The aim is to engage them in meaningful discussion, and to listen and learn about them, rather than to complete the Star as quickly as possible.

Use the scale descriptors as a basis for discussion about the chosen area, or have an open discussion about the area, and then use the scale to place the person on the Journey of Change. The brief visual scales in the User Guide are designed to be used directly with people. Although the detailed scales are intended primarily as a resource for workers, they are written to be accessible, so feel free to refer to specific points for clarification with people. Avoid reading them out in their entirety because of their length.

Always use the detailed scales and be aware of the Journey of Change when deciding where someone is on the scales. These are designed to reduce subjectivity – otherwise one person's 3 could be another person's 5 and the completed Star may not be a useful basis for completing the support plan, and your service won't be able to treat collated Star data as reliable for reporting purposes.

If you don't agree, have a discussion – this can help you learn about the person you are supporting and may help them reflect on their situation and see it in new ways. If someone is engaging actively (usually from "trying", step 5), encourage them to take the lead in placing themselves on the scales.

This process requires good keyworking skills, some knowledge of the person and a relationship with them. You may need to reframe some aspects or ask questions more specifically relevant to them, particularly if there is emotional distress or someone is reluctant to talk about difficulties in that area.

If you can't reach agreement, record both views on the Star, labelling which is the worker's view and which is the view of the person you are supporting. Use the Star Notes to record points from your discussion. Use your professional judgement to decide when further discussion isn't helpful.

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Recognise external and other factors. Making progress on the Journey of Change will rely on a combination of the work done by a service and the person doing what they can to make changes for themselves. However, there will also be factors and conditions beyond their control – and beyond the control of your service – which make it harder for things to improve.

External factors that may have a big impact on people are likely to include their housing, poverty, or the lack of suitable mental health provision or other services. These need to be acknowledged and recorded when using the Star. Your service may then be able to use this information to identify gaps in provision, plan future developments or raise issues with policy-makers.

Recognise other factors. While the emphasis in the Family Star is on where someone is now and how they can be supported to make progress, there may also be trauma, emotional distress or other factors that make things more difficult. As with external factors, these need to be acknowledged and may affect how you work with someone, in line with good practice in your service.

When you have completed all the scales, join the points to create a shape. Mark each reading on the Star Chart and join the points. Encourage the person you are supporting to do this themselves and to create the shape.

How to use the completed Star as the basis for a support plan

Look at the shape of the completed Star together and prompt the person to comment on it as a basis for agreeing what to do next. Ask questions such as:

- 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 isn't going well?
- What are the strengths that you bring to the areas that are going well? How might you apply those strengths in other areas of your life?
- What does your Star tell you about areas where you can make changes yourself or where you need support?
- What is 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 scale do you want to get to and by when?
- What needs to be done to bring about that change?
- Who is responsible for these actions? When can they be completed?

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