

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

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.

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.

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.

Journey of Change stage	Goals of keywork
Managing well (9-10)	<p>At this stage a parent is enabling their children to thrive and does not need support from your service, so the main actions will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to reinforce the learning • Building and reinforcing support networks outside of the service • Ensuring they know how to spot the warning signs and seek help again if needed in the future
Finding what works (7-8)	<p>At this stage, parents are learning from experience what works for them and their family and their children are benefiting. The focus of support may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping them to reflect on how they have overcome problems and how they can learn from this • Celebrating their achievements • Supporting them to deal with manageable difficulties themselves and offering more support through setbacks or larger difficulties • If they have a child with ongoing support needs, making sure these are in place and working
Trying (5-6)	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering sufficient support and encouragement • Helping them to identify what is working and make changes where approaches are not working • Helping them to take actions rather than doing it for them
Accepting help (3-4)	<p>Parents at this stage are opening up to help but do not take the initiative. The approach may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving their situation by giving practical support • Setting up appointments and accompanying them • Helping the parent to set achievable goals with guidance on practical steps • Building on any signs of greater confidence and initiative
Stuck (1-2)	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on safety – preventing or minimising harm • Providing feedback and information • Providing practical and proactive help, perhaps directly with the children where needed, even where parents are resistant • Developing trust and starting to build a relationship

If someone is experiencing emotional distress:

- Make sure you know the referral pathway for emergency support in case a person expresses suicidal thoughts or you think they may harm themselves or others
- Understand your local referral pathways into therapeutic services and be ready to support a person to find the appropriate pathway
- Be aware of local therapeutic groups offering practical activities.

Revisit the Family Star™ at regular reviews

Make sure you know the timing and frequency of Star reviews in your service; these work best when integrated with support plan reviews and may happen every 2-3 months, for example. At each review, repeat the process of discussing each of the Star areas and agreeing where the person 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.

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

Family support worker, Camden

Encourage open discussion, looking at the new Star shape.

Possible review questions include:

- How do you feel about the shape of your Star now?
- Where do you see progress?
- What has helped you to make progress?
- What strengths have you brought to this? What can you learn from this and apply to other areas?
- What do you want to change now?
- 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 file the Star Chart and Action Plan and enter the data as required. You may need to give a copy of the Star Chart and Star Notes and Action Plan to the person to take away.

When positive change occurs, reviews can be very helpful in encouraging you and the people you work with, as the Star makes progress very evident. Seeing progress on the Star can help to encourage everyone involved and reinforce change.

Frequently asked questions

Using the Family Star may mean working with people in a different way. How natural and easy it feels for you will depend on your way of working prior to using the Star. Most workers find that the Star is fairly self-evident and feels familiar and comfortable after they have used it a few times, but the following questions often come up in training.

What if a person you are working with refuses to engage with the Star?

This may happen if someone is experiencing emotional distress or is very focused on one problem they are facing, making it hard to step back and look at their life as a whole. You may choose to do a worker-only assessment and share that with them later.

It is unusual for someone to engage with support but resist using the Star. If this happens, listen to their reasons, check they have understood how the Star works and how the information is used and answer any questions or concerns they have. You may also want to point out the benefits of the visual, shared picture as things change and emphasise that the Star is an integral part of how your service provides support.

What if someone doesn't want to discuss certain areas?

This can happen when a person feels that some of the scales are not relevant because they do not have an issue in these areas. If you also feel that a particular area poses no problems, simply place them at 10 for that scale and move on.

Some areas may be particularly sensitive or the person may not be willing to discuss them. Many workers find that seeing an area on the Star can be a helpful way to introduce sensitive topics that need to be discussed. However, the relationship of trust between the worker and person is more important than the Star. If it's not helpful to continue, opt for either 10 or 1, and move to the next scale.

How do I open up a conversation about mental health and well-being?

You may support people who experience periods of emotional distress, whether that is as a result of a diagnosed mental health condition, such as PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), anxiety or depression, or as a result of low mood or fear and worry about their situation and that of their family and friends. If a person is experiencing any kind of emotional distress and is not able to access appropriate support or treatment, this could prevent them making progress in other areas of their life. It is important to be aware of this when discussing the scales and completing the Star.

Sometimes it can be difficult to open up conversations about mental health and well-being, particularly if you know that a person is from a culture where mental ill-health carries shame and stigma or is not a clearly recognised concept. It may also be difficult to translate words that describe emotional distress. In addition, workers may fear that they are ill equipped to open up a

conversation about a person's mental health, especially if their service does not provide therapeutic services.

If a person seems reluctant to talk about emotional distress, rather than asking "How do you feel?" you could try to incorporate questions that help build a picture of how they manage day-to-day routine and activities and whether they have any coping strategies (positive or negative). The person might then share their worries, but even if they do not, their answers could provide an indicator of emotional distress.

Emotional distress may manifest in physical symptoms such as pain, feeling unwell or holding a lot of tension in the body. Sleep, eating patterns and concentration may be affected and some people may struggle to connect with others socially.

Consider asking questions such as:

- How are you sleeping?
- Are you eating regularly?
- It sounds like you have a lot going on at the moment. Do you have people to talk to about things?
- It sounds like you have a lot of stressful things happening at the moment. What do you do when you feel really stressed? What helps you to cope? Is there anything that helps you feel less stressed or helps you feel better? What do you do to relax?
- How is your health at the moment?

Look out for answers that show problems in these areas or where people can't think of anything to say, which may indicate not having coping strategies or feeling overwhelmed.

What if we don't agree on where someone is in an area?

This is a helpful starter for discussion and it's important to listen carefully to what the person has to say. However:

- If people are not confident and particularly if they are in steps 1-4 on the Journey of Change, you may need to take more of a lead
- If you suspect they don't want to acknowledge difficulties they are experiencing in some areas, use your professional skill and judgement in the same way as you would without the Star. Unless there is a realistic picture of how things are, the person may not get the support they need
- If you and the person still don't see things the same way after discussion, record both views on the Star Chart, either during the session or afterwards. Your views may converge later.

If things don't improve for people, will that reflect badly on me?

The purpose of the Star is to help people see what needs changing and where to go next. It will also help your service see where it is assisting them to make positive changes and identify areas that may need further attention. When people do not show improvement on the Star, there are many possible explanations. It is not about judging the work of individual members of staff. However, this may be something to raise in supervision, for support where things are difficult.

Won't people be demotivated if they go back down the scales?

When things get worse, workers are sometimes concerned that seeing this so clearly on the Star will be demotivating. Usually, however, people are only too aware of this and acknowledging it can be a first step in addressing it. It can be helpful to point out recent changes that could have made things harder for a while and to reassure people that if they were at **finding what works** or **managing well** before, they probably have what they need to tackle the new situation and things will improve again.

Someone may be lower on a scale in a review than in an initial assessment because they have developed greater trust or self-awareness or perhaps because you have been able to get to know them better. It is important to recognise that moving down the scales may not be a slip-back at all but the reflection of a closer and more productive relationship.

How do I use the Family Star™ when someone has very limited English?

There are a number of possible scenarios:

- If a person's English is very limited, you will probably have an interpreter to help them, as you would for any assessment or support planning with them. The interpreter will need to translate and explain the Star areas and Journey of Change, so make sure they have a good understanding of the tool and if possible, send it to them in advance
- If they have enough English not to need an interpreter, you may need to paraphrase in simplified language to support their understanding.
- If someone has good spoken English but limited literacy in English, you could give them the Star Chart and the short illustrated Scales and read out the statements in the scales that you feel are closest to where they are at that time. You may also read out some of the bullet points in the User Guide where that is helpful

Whichever approach you need to use, make sure you still refer closely to the detailed scales in the User Guide yourself.

Why do the bold statements say “I” and the detailed bullets say “you”?

The bold statement at the start of each detailed scale stage is an “I” statement/ first person, and is the same as the statement in the brief visual scales in the User Guide, and in the short Scales where provided – these are in the person’s voice, to support them to talk about and recognise where they are on the scale. The bullet points below are worded as “you”/second person, as in your voice talking to them.

Not all the bullet points in the detailed scales are relevant for the person – does that matter?

Some of the bullet points are written as an absolute statement and some are prefaced by “you may” or “perhaps”. All the absolute statements need to apply in order for someone to be at that stage. Those prefaced by “perhaps” may or may not apply for a particular person – these statements are there to suggest possible reasons for someone being at a given stage and to help people recognise where they are on the scale.

The examples of behaviours or context given in the bullet points can never be exhaustive. Use whichever examples are most relevant for the person you are with and feel free to add further examples verbally. Not all the examples will run through the full scale – some examples will only apply towards the start of the scale and others become relevant higher up.

The Journey of Change



