

# Using My Star™

Completing the Star is meant to be a helpful process that stimulates and focuses discussion and provides a useful basis for agreeing actions with children. The Star is a flexible tool that relies on the judgement of the professionals using it, and on a degree of understanding and trust between child and worker. Although the Star is designed to be used one to one, we are not prescriptive about the setting or how long it should take – the aim is to have a genuine interaction with the child. It consists of:

- The Star Chart and Action Plan
- The User Guide with easy-read and detailed scales for each of the eight outcome areas
- Flashcards for the Star areas and the stages of the Journey of Change
- An Organisation Guide.

**Make sure that you have received training in using My Star** and that you are familiar with the materials and know when and how they are used in your service. It is vital that workers using My Star understand and use the two Journeys of Change underpinning My Star as this will support consistent results and reliable outcomes data for your service to use.

**Introduce My Star to children and young people** using the resources flexibly, including:

- Talking the child through the points in the introduction to the User Guide
- Devising a short script to introduce the Star in a way that feels natural to you and clear for those you are working with
- Using the illustrated Journey of Change to explain the stages step by step
- Using any opportunities to introduce and discuss the Star before the session in which it is completed, whether in a family or group setting
- Giving older children who are literate and interested a copy of the User Guide to read before the session.

Emphasise that 5 is the top of the Star scales but not the end of the journey and people should continue to improve after they have reached this stage. Some suggested phrases for introducing the Star include:

***“This is about hearing your voice and what you think about your life so that we can work out together what support you need.”***

***“My Star is a way of tracking your journey and finding out about your strengths and needs – there are no right or wrong answers.”***

***“It shows us where you are now and where you want to be in the future.”***

***“The Star tells us what you need in key areas in order to improve where you are now, and it helps you and the service make that improvement.”***

It got me speaking about me.

**Child participant,  
Family Action**

It is time to spend with young people in a non-pressuring way to find out about their background feelings and emotions.

**Manager,  
Dudley Young Carers**

For children with a developmental age of seven or over, the aim is to complete the Star collaboratively, selecting appropriate examples from the scales. Some children will want to approach the tool cognitively, reading it through and discussing their life in terms of scales. Others might be able to explore aspects of their life less directly through storytelling, drawing pictures or therapeutic play techniques. The Star spans a wide age range, so the way you are likely to work will vary according to age.

### **Be creative and use a range of resources**

Workers have used drawings, tokens that could be moved around the Star to represent the child – edible ones go down well – and blown-up versions of the Star. It is possible to just use the Star Chart and work through each of the Star points verbally, describing the underlying steps to guide the child. Some children might want to design their own flash cards for the scales or for their journey.

The alien flash cards may be helpful for explaining and illustrating the Journey of Change for the developmental scales (5 to 8), where the focus is more on the child learning and making changes. You or the child can create a story around the alien.

### **Use My Star™ to encourage self-reflection**

This can be done by asking children to explain why they think they are where they are on the scales, taking the time to challenge them appropriately and discuss their views. Whilst the approach is collaborative, it is vital that the worker is aware of their higher status. The worker's aim is to assist the child in gaining insights into their own world, and this needs to be done skilfully.

### **Be positive and non-judgemental**

Used well, the Star will support a conversation that covers many potentially sensitive aspects of a child's life. Ensure that the child does not feel they are being judged, and clarify that, unlike school, the aim is not to get the highest score possible, but to understand their life at this moment, where they might need help, and celebrate what they have achieved. It is their voice and it is important.

### **Use the Journey of Change when deciding where a child is on their journey**

There are two versions of each of the eight Star scales; the brief visual scales include easy-read text, colours and numbers to support using the Star collaboratively with children and young people. The detailed scales are intended as a resource for workers but feel free to refer to specific points for clarification with children if it is useful.

### **It is important to recognise external factors**

Although the Star focuses on the child and family, there may be societal factors holding them back. These may include limited access to decent housing, work, benefits and/or support. Acknowledge these in the discussion and use the notes section to record them. Your service may then be able to use this information to identify gaps in provision, plan future developments or raise issues with policy-makers.

### **Differences of opinion are helpful starters for discussion**

If a child struggles with low self-esteem, they might place themselves towards the start of the journey and need reminding of their achievements. Others might not recognise or admit how they are behaving and might place themselves unrealistically high. Workers may then present evidence of discrepancies between their behaviour and their views, paving the way for a meaningful discussion or working relationship, and a more realistic assessment from which progress is possible.

### **Listen and challenge appropriately but agree to differ if necessary**

You might feel that the Star does not accurately show the child's situation, or even their own view of their situation, for reasons including a desire to get the highest score or loyalty to their parents/carers and fear of external involvement. Or it may be fine from their perspective.

Where the primary focus is on the child's environment – the first four scales – the child's view of how good or bad things are is important, and a positive view may be an important aspect of their defensive and coping strategies. So sometimes the emphasis may be on increasing the child's expectations and understanding of the care they receive. At other times, challenging their view might be less helpful in these scales than in scales 5 to 8, where they have greater control.

**If you cannot reach agreement, record both readings.** This can be done in the session with the child or in the background. As the child comes to trust you more, they may be more willing to explore their concerns and fears about their home situation.

**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. If working on the Star Online, when all areas are completed a button will appear asking you to generate a completed Star.

**Use the completed Star as the basis for an action plan** The visual of the completed Star provides an excellent basis for agreeing the changes and actions that are needed. These actions can be noted on the action plan or on the Star Online. Ask motivational 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 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 areas of your life?
- What is it most important to address first?

Once the areas are agreed, further questions might include:

- Where on the journey do you want to get to and by when?
- What actions are needed in order to bring about that change?
- Who is responsible for those actions? When can you or they complete them?

**Complete My Star Action Plan** The step the child is at can provide valuable pointers about the things they need to work on, the role of the worker and the likelihood of following through on actions independently. Some key pointers are summarised in the table on the next page.

The action plan based on the completed Star has enabled workers to make changes quicker than otherwise. It has enabled us to be really specific about actions. This has brought a start, finish and a purpose.

**Worker,  
Action for  
Children Young  
Carers Project**

The children's Star allows us to stay focused on issues and gives us a clear care plan.

**Worker,  
Eclipse**

It supports sensitive topics of discussion and takes the focus directly off the young person.

**Manager,  
Dudley Young  
Carers**

Stage	Goals of keywork
<b>Resilient</b>	At this stage a child is doing well and is on track so the main actions will be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep going</li> <li>• Build on the success to date</li> <li>• Focus on the future</li> </ul>
<b>Finding what works</b>	When children reach this stage the focus of keywork may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebrating their achievements. Helping the child to reflect on how they have overcome barriers, and how they can learn from this</li> <li>• Supporting them to deal with difficulties themselves</li> </ul>
<b>Trying</b>	Children at this stage are trying new things and may give up easily when they don't always seem to work, so goals and actions may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping them to plan what they are going to do and develop strategies for themselves</li> <li>• Helping them to learn and reflect on what has worked for them</li> </ul>
<b>Accepting help</b>	Children at this stage are starting to open up to help, and need encouragement and support, as well as assurance that some of the practical things that are of concern to them are addressed.
<b>Stuck</b>	Since children at this stage will not be engaged or interested in changing, the focus could be on building a relationship with them – finding out what might interest them, drawing, making up stories, playing games to develop a level of trust, and ensuring that they are safe.

**The Star is designed to be completed at least twice to show progress.** Make sure you know the timing and frequency within your service. It usually makes sense to integrate the Star with times when children are creating personal action plans.

At each review, repeat the process of discussing each of the Star areas and agree where the child is on each scale, preferably without reference to the previous Star. Compare the two readings to give an instant visual picture of change and encourage discussion, such as:

- Does what the child sees on the Star fit with their own sense of how they have changed?
- How do they feel about what they see, especially where they have moved up one or more of the scales?
- What has helped them make progress? What strengths have they brought to this? What might they learn from that to help them in other areas?
- What areas do they want to address now – the same areas as before or new ones?
- Where do they want to get to by the next review? What actions do they want to agree to make that happen?

**Then complete a new action plan** and, if working on paper, file the Star Chart and Action Plan, entering the data as required. If you are using the Star Online, the data will already be captured – just print and file the Star Chart, notes and Action Plan.

When positive change occurs, reviews can be very helpful in encouraging and motivating both the child and the worker, as the Star makes progress very evident. Change is hard, particularly at the **trying** stage and children can be easily put off by difficulties that arise. Seeing progress on the Star can help to encourage children and reinforce change as they start to try out new ways of doing things. You can use your discussions with children and young people to help point this out.

**This document gives brief guidance for workers and is intended to supplement training and act as a reminder. For fuller guidance and advice on implementation of My Star, please see the Organisation Guide.**