



My Star™

The Outcomes Star for children and young people

“ People really open up and sometimes it leads to whole new conversations

“ Service users really enjoyed the interaction – and there were statistical results!

“ I could feed back to my head office some really impressive results

It has made the support plans more imaginative and more individual

“ The Outcomes Star is an invaluable tool for our sector

“ Support is more systematic and structured

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“ We have incorporated it into assessment and three monthly reviews

“ It helps identify training needs for staff and volunteers

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“ We can now assist clients better - we love the Star!

“ Some people can't understand written reports, but can understand this

“ The Star is collaborative, rather than something that is done to people

“ It enables a clear direction for collaborating with a client

A holistic approach and direction to the support

“ The feedback was overwhelmingly positive and in some cases life changing

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Consulting Social Enterprise

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Please contact info@triangleconsulting.co.uk to enquire about buying a licence and training.

Licences are also available for those wishing to translate the document into other languages.

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

Many people have contributed to the development of the Outcomes Star over its long evolution and we would like to thank all the clients, workers, managers, funders, academics and commissioners who have generously given their time and expertise.

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We would particularly like to thank the following people and organisations for their contribution to this version of the Star:

- Family Action
- Growing Our Strengths programme, involving Action for Children, Eclipse, Counselling and Support for Young People, Kindred Carers, Children's Links, Women's Work, Preston United, Stonham Housing, Seasons, Safe and Sound Derby and practical support from Emma Healey
- Salvation Army Westcare, Melbourne, Australia
- Coram
- Westminster City Council Children's services
- Nick Karr and Jasna Tesevic, Outcomes Star Australia.

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Introduction

Introduction to My Star™

My Star is a version of the Outcomes Star, a suite of tools for supporting and measuring change when working directly with people.

The Star is an outcomes tool that enables organisations to measure and summarise change made by a range of people with different needs. It is also a keywork and coaching tool that can help people make changes by providing them with a clear picture of the journey they need to take, enabling them to take manageable steps and plotting their progress along the way.

The original version of the Outcomes Star was developed for the homelessness sector, and tailored versions are now available for a wide range of client groups including parents, people with learning disabilities and women experiencing domestic abuse. For further information please visit the Outcomes Star website – www.outcomesstar.org.uk.

My Star has been developed for use with children and young people¹ in a wide range of settings. The intention was to design a version of the Outcomes Star that is child-centred rather than context-specific. My Star is useful for working with children in vulnerable families, children in out-of-home care², and those with foster carers. My Star can also move with a child between different settings and can be used alongside the Family Star, where services and workers³ interact directly with both children and parents.

My Star covers eight key areas:

1. Physical health
2. Where you live
3. Being safe
4. Relationships
5. Feelings and behaviour
6. Friends
7. Confidence and self-esteem
8. Education and learning.

Each of the eight scales follows either:

1. **A Journey of Change**, for those areas where change depends mostly on the child learning new skills or doing things differently
2. **A severity scale**, for those aspects of life where it is most important to know how difficult or otherwise things are for the child, and where improvement depends on a change in the child's circumstances.

¹ We use the term 'child' for brevity throughout this document as the guidance is for workers only, but this should be understood to include both children and young people, with a recommended, but not exclusive age range of 7-14.

² The term for children in care in the UK is 'looked-after children' but throughout this document we will use the Australian term 'children in out-of-home care'.

³ We use the term 'worker' in this document to refer to the service staff, counsellors, mentors and others using My Star with a child or young person and also to ensure the terminology is broad enough to accommodate projects run by services with parents or other adults in their local community.

1. The Journey of Change:

Four of the eight scales in My Star follow a journey the child is making partly through their own efforts and partly as a result of the work of other people. Support is critical all through this journey, but it is the child's response to the support that enables them to make progress. This is more important than the environment around them changing. The journey has five stages:

1. At the red stage the child is **stuck** and their well-being is at risk. They may be acting out, withdrawn, confused. They may not know what to do or how they are feeling. The key point at this stage is that no one is offering support or support is on offer but the child won't accept it. Perhaps they don't see a problem, or it might all be too big to cope with. Perhaps the help being offered is not the right sort of help, or they don't like or trust the people offering it. Whatever the reason, things are **stuck**.
2. The first step forward happens when the child starts **accepting help**. This is the orange stage and means someone is helping them talk about what is going on and what support they need. If they need urgent help, it is being provided, even if there isn't much visible change yet. The child may be glad of support or may not want it, but will go along with it – perhaps because things have become so difficult that there is no other option open to them. They may feel anxious and upset about the situation, or lack confidence that there can be a positive future, but now they are not facing it alone.
3. The yellow stage is when the child and perhaps others are **trying** new ways of doing things. These are often difficult and lots of things the child tries may not work. However, they are working with someone to find ways to make life better and easier. Other people may be making things better as well, but it is the child's efforts that count.
4. At the green step the child is **finding what works**. They are discovering strategies that work for them and making some real changes in how they feel about themselves and relate to other people. Someone starting their journey at this stage still needs support from a service or at home to maintain behaviours and feelings.
5. The blue stage is when the child is **resilient**. They are coping with whatever turns up and are able to express their feelings in a way that is appropriate to their age. When things go wrong they can bounce back and find the support they need to make themselves feel better. This isn't the end of the child's journey, but you can be confident that for now the child has what they need without additional specialist support.

Completing the children's Star supported building up a bond with the child before completing any work with them.

Family Support worker

2. Severity scales

The remaining four scales cover areas where it is important to describe the extent to which the environment is safe, supportive and nurturing for the child. The child still has some influence on how they progress along the scale – especially older children who take more responsibility for themselves – but the key change that will allow them to make progress is an improvement in the quality of their environment.

For these severity scales, the first two stages are similar to the Journey of Change. However, from 3 onwards, it is about the severity of the problems faced and how that lessens, as follows:

1. The red stage is when there are **big concerns** about the child's well-being. The child is at risk of significant harm, neglected or deeply unhappy, and no one is doing anything about it.
2. At orange, there is still cause for concern but **someone is helping** to change things for the child. A parent, carer or worker is aware of the situation and trying to address the most serious issues. The child may not feel that very much is changing, but may at least feel listened to.
3. At yellow, there are **no big concerns**. All the serious problems have now been addressed, but there are plenty of things that need to improve.
4. At the green stage, things are **mostly OK**. More often than not, the child feels things are working reasonably well and that others are helping to make this happen. Depending on the child's age they may also be taking steps to improve things themselves.
5. At the blue stage, **things are good**. The situation is satisfactory, the child feels happy and things are OK for them. This is mainly due to their parents' or carers' support and attention, but depending on the child's age this may be due to their own efforts as well.

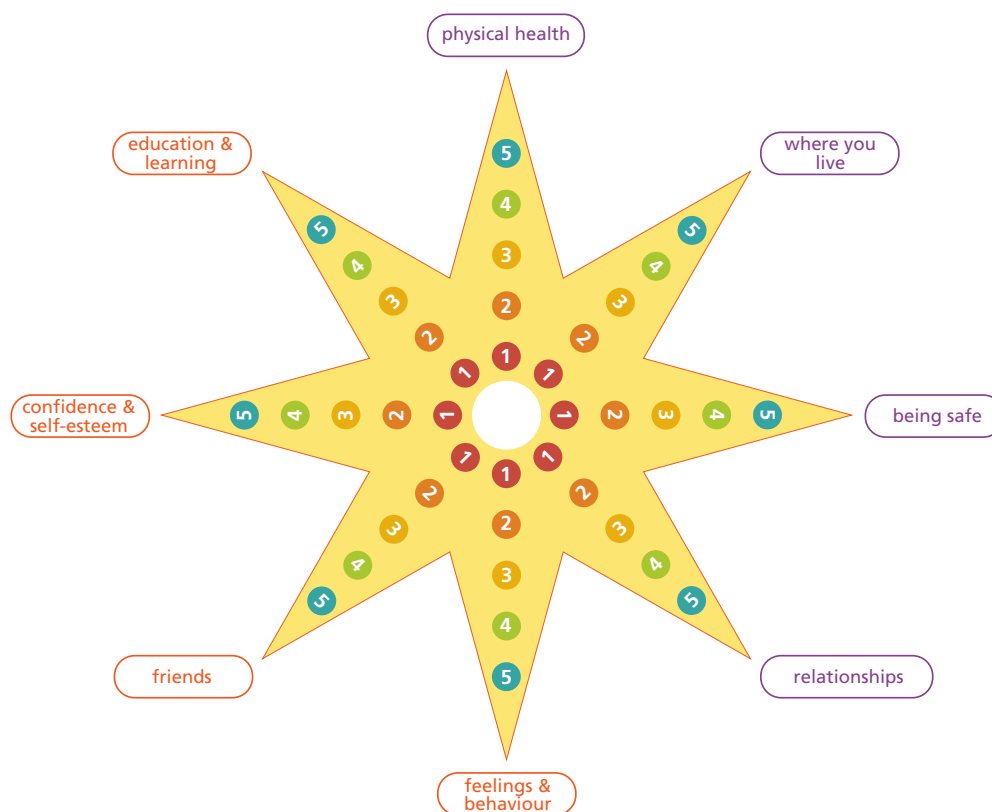


Figure 1: My Star

How it fits with other tools

The Family Star™

This is a version of the Outcomes Star developed by Triangle for use with parents and carers, either as a stand-alone tool or where My Star is being used with their children.

The table below shows the areas of My Star and how they fit with those of the Family Star, or the Family Star Plus⁴.

My Star	Family Star
Physical health	Physical health Family routine
Where you live	Home and money
Being safe	Keeping your children safe
Relationships	Emotional well-being
Feelings and behaviour	Boundaries and behaviour
Friends	Social networks
Confidence and self-esteem	Emotional well-being (separated for children and parents in the Family Star Plus)
Education and learning	Education and learning

The Family Star is based on a ten-stage Journey of Change, so a 5 on My Star will be equivalent to a 10 on the Family Star. To facilitate comparisons, the five steps in My Star and five stages in the Family Star are colour-coded using the same colours and similar names where possible, as follows:

My Star	Family Star
Stuck or big concerns (1)	Stuck (1 to 2)
Accepting help or someone is helping (2)	Accepting help (3 to 4)
Trying or no big concerns (3)	Trying (5 to 6)
Finding what works or mostly OK (4)	Finding what works (7 to 8)
Resilient or things are good (5)	Effective parenting (9 to 10)

⁴ All references to the Family Star also refer to the Family Star Plus unless stated otherwise.

The CAF

My Star does not replace a risk assessment for children. In the UK, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) form or e-CAF is widely used by local authorities and the services they commission. The CAF is completed for the needs and risks for each child and covers 18 areas. There is a substantial overlap between the areas in My Star and the developmental needs outcomes in the CAF. The Family Star and My Star also cover most of the CAF outcome areas in relation to parents and carers and can open discussion about most of the family and environmental factors

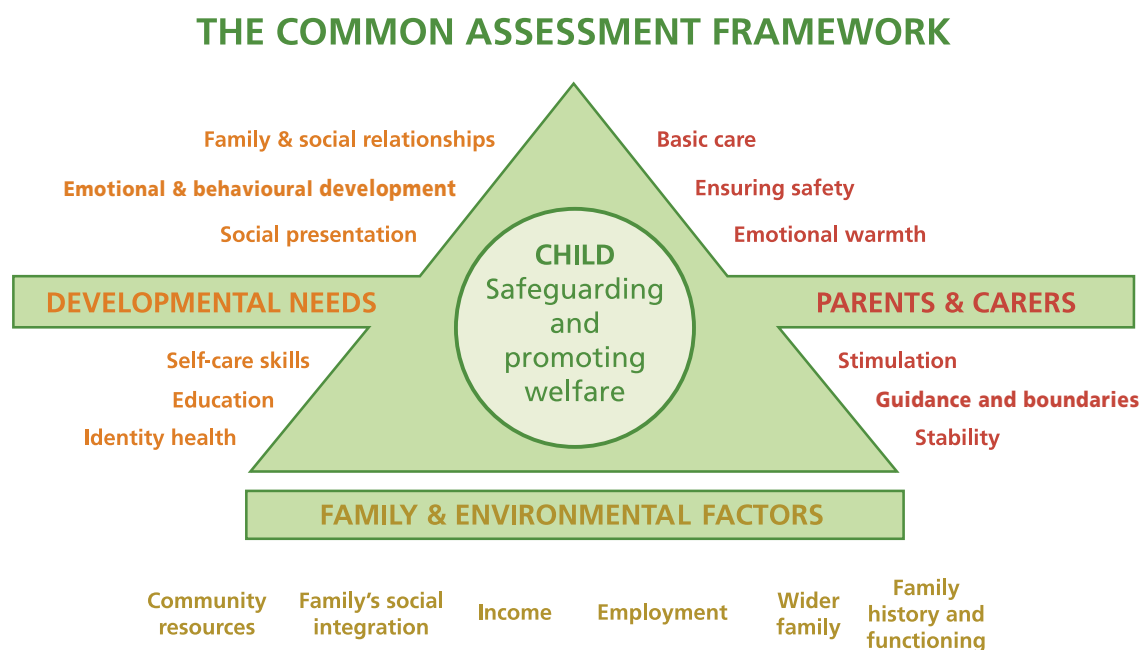


Figure 2: Common Assessment Framework developed by the Department for children, Schools and Families (DCSF)

There is information about how the Star can be used alongside the CAF in section four, part one of this Organisation Guide.

My Star™ resources

There is a range of resources available to help services use My Star effectively.

My Star™ Chart and Action Plan

The Star Chart and Action Plan is a four-page document including the Star Chart – on which the Star reading is marked – a space for notes, and a simple action plan for children. It is completed with children when using My Star as a paper-based system.

My Star™ User Guide

This is a guide for children to complete their Star with the worker, containing concise readable scales in a friendly format.

Illustrated Journey of Change – aliens or stickmen

There are two versions of this optional resource at the end of the User Guide, which summarises the five stages on the Journey of Change. Version one uses alien imagery, which may be more suitable for younger children. Version two uses stickmen imagery, which may be more suitable for teenagers and young people. These illustrated versions of the Journey of Change are recommended as an additional resource for all children and could be used instead of the scales with children who have difficulty with, or resistance to, reading.

Flash cards

These are simple cards with the name of each area on one side and a more detailed description on the other. Some children may want to create their own illustrations that have meaning for them.

The Star Online

My Star is available online via an intuitive web application called the Star Online. This application allows users to complete the Star with children on screen. It incorporates the scales and guidance for workers and children. Alternatively, the Star Online can be used in conjunction with paper versions of the Star. Workers and children can complete the Star on paper and then input the reading on the Star Online later.

The Star Online web application is secure and provides a wide range of features allowing organisations to analyse and report on the outcomes data that staff have added to the system, and to compare their outcomes with averages for similar services and client groups. It is available to organisations using My Star for an annual licence fee based on the number of workers using the Star.

For more information on My Star online, go to www.staronline.org.uk. You can sign up for an account or the 30-day free trial.

Training and consultancy

It is essential that workers receive training before using My Star and most organisations benefit from consultancy support with the implementation process. Triangle provides a range of consultancy support and in-house training courses, and runs a licensed trainer scheme for those wanting to cascade training within their service. For further details, please visit the Outcomes Star website – www.outcomesstar.org.uk – or email training@triangleconsulting.co.uk.

This Organisation Guide

The remainder of this introduction presents the theoretical foundations and development process of My Star.

Parts one and two thereafter support the implementation and use of My Star.

Part one is for those in a management role and provides guidance and good practice examples in implementing My Star across a project.

Part two presents guidance for workers using My Star with children or young people.

Outcomes Star™ website

The Outcomes Star website – www.outcomesstar.org.uk – contains information about all versions of the Star along with supporting information. Specific areas covered by the website include:

- How the Star was developed
- Research and validation on the Star
- What children and other people say about using the Star
- Good practice on implementation
- Use of Outcomes Star data for outcome measurement
- Use of the Star as a keywork tool
- Information for commissioners on using the Star.

Theoretical foundations

Values and assumptions underpinning the Outcomes Star™ and My Star™ in particular

New approach

The approach underpinning the Outcomes Star family of tools is, we believe, an original approach to assessment and outcomes measurement. It can be described as Participatory Assessment and Measurement because it draws on and extends Action Research and Participatory Action Research, both of which place empowerment, collaboration and integration at the core of research methods⁵. In the same way, My Star seeks to empower children and young people within a collaborative process of assessment and measurement that is integrated with support work, rather than being a separate activity.

Empowerment

Underpinning My Star is an understanding that, for children and young people, positive outcomes depend not only on their **external circumstances**, but also on the skills and attitudes they bring to the challenges they face – often referred to as **resilience**. For that reason, My Star both measures their external circumstances, and looks at how the child is responding to those circumstances. Measuring and supporting the development of resilience in children has been shown to be a key factor in enabling them to thrive, sometimes in spite of their circumstances. This is a more empowering frame of reference for keywork and measurement than approaches that only deal with circumstances that are often outside the child's control. My Star focuses the attention of the service provider and child on what they can do together to develop the motivation, beliefs and skills the child needs.

Those using versions of the Outcomes Star report that it provides a much more empowering context for their work where people are able to be active participants in the process rather than having assessment done to them. My Star involves children and young people in their own process of change – and in the validation of their experience and perceptions – which is often critical to helping them make the changes they seek⁶. Even for those not able to participate actively, because they are too young or have other needs, My Star is compatible with person-centred planning.

Collaboration

When using the Star, the worker and child assess the child's needs together. Children base their assessment on their knowledge and understanding of themselves, and workers utilise their experience of working with other children generally, and their observations and reflections on this child's behaviour in particular. The intention is that the assessment emerges through a dialogue between child and worker and this may include both participants shifting their views. In this regard, My Star is neither a child-only self-completion tool nor a worker-only completion tool – it is a collaborative tool. However, given the difference in power between the worker and the child, My Star differs from some adult Stars by giving priority to the child's views and by hearing and strengthening their voice through supportive – and where appropriate, challenging – dialogue and inquiry.

5 O'Brien, R. (2001) "An Overview of the Methodological Approach of Action Research" in Roberto Richardson (ed.) *Theory and Practice of Action Research*, Joao Pessoa, Brazil: Universidade Federal da Paraiba (English version)

6 Burns, S., MacKeith, J. and Graham, K. (2008) *Using the Outcomes Star: Impact and Good Practice*, London: Homeless Link

My Star makes the model of change explicit and the information that is collected – the Star reading – is immediately presented back to the child in the form of a completed Star. This makes it possible for the child and worker to take an overview together and reflect on the completed Star as a basis for deciding what action to take.

This contrasts with extractive approaches to assessment and measurement in which the worker, in the role of expert, collects data from the child and takes that data away to make an assessment on their own. The expert may then decide what course of action is most appropriate and try to persuade the child that this is the best way forward for them.

Children were more truthful during the Star than other tools because the descriptors are more specific.

**Worker,
Family Action**

Integration

The process of completing My Star is an integral part of the journey, both for child and worker, and it is intended to support as well as measure change. Completing the Star, engaging with the model of change and reflecting on the data presented on the Star can, in and of itself, result in a change of attitude within the child. The process can have a similar impact on the child's worker. As a result, measurement is fully integrated into the keywork process, rather than being a separate activity which takes the worker away from their interaction with the child. In addition, discussions about where a child is on the Outcomes Star scales and Journey of Change naturally lead to thinking about next steps and action planning. This is why it is recommended that My Star is used as an integral part of coaching, mentoring or other support techniques.

This contrasts with traditional approaches where collection of data is seen as a separate process to intervention, and may be regarded as intrusive by workers and children.

How My Star™ was developed

My Star was developed in collaboration with the Growing Our Strengths Partnership, Family Action, Coram and Westminster City Council in the UK, and The Salvation Army Westcare in Australia. Growing Our Strengths was a partnership of Action for Children, Family Action, Action for Prisoner's Families and the Family and Parenting Institute, funded by the Department of Education to provide practical, tailored support to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations engaged in early intervention activity with children, young people and their families. Growing Our Strengths has supported the Voluntary and Community Sector to more confidently demonstrate its ability to provide positive outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

My Star was developed with staff working with vulnerable children and young people in a wide range of contexts – therapists working with children recovering from trauma and abuse, adoption and fostering services, young people affected by alcohol and substance misuse, residential services in Australia, family support and service based counsellors, and services providing

support for parents of children with physical and learning difficulties. It was piloted with a range of services run by The Salvation Army Westcare in Melbourne, Australia, Family Action, Action for Children, Coram, Eclipse, CASY (Counselling and Support for Young People), Kindred Carers, Children's Links, Dudley Young Carers, Seasons and Westminster City Council Children's services in the UK.

As with all versions of the Outcomes Star, the methodology was based on Action Research⁷ and the Existential Phenomenological research method⁸. Action Research is a collaborative process of identifying issues, trying out solutions and assessing what works. This phenomenological method places a strong emphasis on understanding the subjective experience of the person being researched and the meaning of the experience for them.

The My Star development process consisted of three main stages:

1) Data gathering

An initial one-day workshop was held in London in February 2012, with a working group comprising managers and workers from services throughout Action for Children and Family Action, Women's Work, Preston United, Stonham Housing, Safe and Sound, Eclipse, Kindred Carers, CASY, and Children's Links. The workshop explored the following key questions that are common to all versions of the Outcomes Star:

- What are the main areas in which the projects are seeking to create change? *These areas become the points of the Star*
- What is the desired end point of the change process? *This becomes the end point on the model of change that underpins all the scales*
- What model of change describes the steps that children take on the journey towards that end point? *This is described in a series of steps showing a clearly discernible, qualitative difference between each step of the journey.*

A range of techniques were used to draw out participants' experience and knowledge including:

- Using an Outcome Triangle tool to identify the overall aim of services, the specific changes they are trying to bring about, and the activities the service carries out to achieve these changes
- Bringing to mind an individual child who has undergone a substantial change and identifying the key areas of change for that child
- Structured questioning exercises to draw out the steps, one by one, in each outcome area. The focus with this session is on concreteness, drawing out information about the signs of change in detail.

2) Data analysis and the development of the draft My Star™

Triangle compiled all the material gathered at the workshop and reviewed it to allow meaning and common strands to emerge. Material used by participating services was borne in mind, along with the Family Star and other versions of the Outcomes Star, but the raw data was allowed to speak for itself rather than organised according to existing models or frameworks. On the basis of this material, a draft version of My Star was developed.

7 O'Brien, R. (2001) "An Overview of the Methodological Approach of Action Research" in Roberto Richardson (ed.) *Theory and Practice of Action Research*, Joao Pessoa, Brazil: Universidade Federal da Paraíba (English version)

3) Consultation and piloting

Through an iterative process of sharing, listening, refining and sharing again, the outcome areas, the Journey of Change and descriptions of the steps towards change within each outcome area were refined until they resonated with the support workers and managers participating in the development process. This process had four main steps:

- A second workshop was held in June 2012. Here, the first draft of My Star was presented to workshop participants and feedback was gathered. In light of this feedback, improvements were made and a prototype version was developed for piloting
- Workers and children tested the My Star pilot for three months from October 2012 to December 2012, gathering feedback questionnaires and Star data for analysis by Triangle
- Final workshops took place in January 2013 in London, Lincoln, and Melbourne, where the results of the pilot were reviewed. Participants shared their experiences of using the Star, and the value and meaning of the data generated
- Further revisions were subsequently made to My Star. The final stage involved editing and designing to ensure that the tool was clear, accessible and user-friendly in advance of the first edition being published.

It helps the worker to focus on the child rather than the referral issue, ensuring that they ask about all aspects of the child, not just the area referred to.

**Manager,
Action for
Children service**

The pilot process and findings

The pilot version of My Star had ten scales, four of which were environmental, and six developmental. It was tested using several approaches in a wide range of contexts, including the following:

1. Action for Children Projects – Disability London, Dudley Young Carers, Seasons
2. Family Action – Greenwich/Thamesmead, Lincolnshire team, Bradford, Southend
3. Coram, Eclipse, CASY, Kindred Carers, Children's Links
4. Westminster City Council Children's services
5. The Salvation Army Westcare, Melbourne, Australia.

My Star was piloted with over 160 children of whom 137 completed two readings. Star data for the 137 children was analysed using a simple spreadsheet.

Pilot feedback on the process of completing the Star™

The key points fed back at the end of the pilot workshop about the experience of workers using the tool were:

- The conversation takes time, but the result is worth it. The Star captures the child's view and gives them a voice. It gathers quality information when compared to other tools and gives insights into children's thoughts and experiences
- Children found it non-invasive and non-threatening, and at the same time workers found that they could explore areas they hadn't previously been able to discuss with children. It was a great trigger for exploration
- Workers found that children were more honest about what was going on
- Where action planning was used for the first time, it made change quicker. Goals became more specific and it was easier to review progress
- There was a reasonable fit with the Family Star
- It could be used with a range of ages, though it was probably best between 7 and 14, and it could also be used with children with learning disabilities depending on the nature and severity of the issue and the nature of the service
- It was rather over-long to use, even over two sessions, and should have fewer scales.

Pilot data highlights

137 children completed the Star twice during the pilot period – 85 in the UK, and 52 in Australia. The UK pilot was largely concerned with children in vulnerable families and the Australian pilot with children in out-of-home care. The pilot data should be treated with caution as the pilot process revealed some issues with the Star itself, and increased clarity about where it was most suitably used. These have been addressed in the final published version. The highlights of the data were:

Overall change

In the UK, where the focus was mostly on children in vulnerable families:

- 53% (45) of children showed an increase in their overall Star reading, of which eight showed a substantial change – over one-point shift on the scale of 1 to 5
- 43% (37) of children showed no change in their overall reading and four showed a reduction
- The overall average reading increased from 3.9 to 4.3 during the pilot period.

In Australia, where the focus was mostly on children in out-of-home care:

- 52% (27) of children showed an increase in their overall Star reading, of which one showed a substantial change – over one-point shift on the scale of 1 to 5
- 36% (19) of children showed no change in their overall reading and six showed a reduction
- The overall mean reading increased from 3.9 to 4.3 during the pilot period.

The average starting point on the different scales on the Star varied between the ten Star areas. In both the UK and Australia, the initial readings were generally lower for the developmental scales – 3.1 to 3.9 – than the environmental scales – 3.8 to 4.0 in Australia and 4.0 to 4.3 in the UK. The lowest starting point in both pilots was 3.1 for Dealing with Feelings – revised to Feelings and Behaviour in the published version.

Areas of greatest and least change:

- The greatest change was in Dealing with Feelings, with an average increase of 0.7 in the UK and 0.5 in Australia, on a scale of 1 to 5. Among children and young people in the UK, 56% recorded an increase in this scale, while the figure in Australia was 50%. The greater change in the UK is likely to reflect the number of children in specific therapeutic interventions focused on dealing with strong feelings.
- The smallest change in the UK was recorded in relation to People who Care – revised to Relationships in the published version. 21% of children showed an improvement with an average increase of 0.2 on the scale. This probably reflects the relatively high starting point, with many children already at 5, so 72% showed no change.
- The smallest change in Australia was recorded in relation to Looking after Yourself, where 23% of children showed an improvement, with an average increase of 0.1 on the scale, and 69% of children showed no change. This scale was removed post-pilot because it was found not to be relevant to younger children. The areas covered were incorporated into Physical Health and Being Safe.
- Many children and young people in the pilot were placed on 4 or 5 in all areas. We would expect more realistic readings now that the scales have been revised, with more comprehensive training available, and greater clarity of the contexts where My Star is suitable for use.

I liked seeing how well I had done.

Child participant

It was a really great way to get the child's perspective across within the CAF.

**Manager,
Dudley Young
Carers service**

It points out the child's overall well-being and highlights areas to work on.

**Manager,
Action for
Children Young
Carers service**

Analysis of feedback forms from children and workers

Child feedback: Analysis of the 40 feedback forms completed by children from all sites showed that:

- 65% said that they had enjoyed doing it
- 92% said they had understood it
- 62% said that the shape helped them understand what is going well and where they need support
- 57% said that the Star showed the progress they had made.

Worker feedback: Analysis of feedback forms from 49 staff members is summarised in the table below. Workers were asked to agree or disagree with five statements about the process of using the Star with children.

	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
Using the Star helped me to get an overall picture of children's strengths and needs	69%	16%	15%
The scale descriptions help me to understand where to focus next with the children I work with	64%	18%	18%
I found it encouraging to see the progress that children had made between Star readings	60%	18%	22%
I found the process of completing the Star with children too long	50%	21%	29%
The flashcards for the Star areas and the Journey of Change helped children to understand the Star	15%	35%	50%

The overall conclusions from the pilot were:

- The focus of the Star is appropriate
- Generally children find the Star helpful and like completing it
- On the whole, workers like the Star and find it supports their discussions and work with children
- My Star showed change for some children, even during the relatively short pilot period, but is probably most useful when completed at longer intervals
- It isn't as appropriate for pre-school children, though it can be used with them
- It can be used with young people up to the age of 18
- It needed to be shorter and more appropriate for children in out-of-home care

As a result:

- The number of scales was reduced from ten to eight
- The name was changed from Children's Star to My Star
- Language and content were adjusted to ensure the Star was more appropriate for older children and adolescents, and to better reflect issues for those in out-of-home care
- The flash cards were simplified and the number reduced, doing away with picture flashcards for the Star areas as these did not pilot well.

It really captures the child's view.

**Worker,
Family Action**

It has been really positive for the professionals, feeding back in-team around the child meetings. Sometimes it's not what parents wanted to hear but it really made them change. The child said that they are now being heard at home.

**Manager,
Action for
Children Young
Carers service**

It helps me explain what I feel.

Child participant

Part one: Implementing My Star™ in your project

Implementing the Star effectively, and achieving the full benefits of using it, takes time, continuous attention, and a commitment to following the process through and addressing issues as they arise. For these reasons, we strongly recommend that the introduction of My Star is led from the top. Only in this way will the Star receive the profile and backing it requires for developments to be co-ordinated across a service. We also recommend nominating champions within projects and setting up an implementation group to oversee the introduction of the Star.

The rest of this section covers a checklist of eight steps for introducing the Star into your project. Many organisations find it helpful to have continuous support with planning and implementation, in addition to Triangle's essential training for workers and managers, and the Star Online web application. To discuss your needs and the option of a bespoke implementation package, please email Triangle at info@triangleconsulting.co.uk.

1 Review your reasons for introducing My Star™

There are a number of reasons why organisations decide to introduce My Star.

Internal reasons:

- They want to take an outcomes approach to their work in order to measure success for individual children, services and the organisation as a whole, and use this information to inform their service delivery
- They feel it will improve the support they provide to children.

External reasons:

- To demonstrate the value of the service to funders or commissioners
- Because a funder or commissioner requires that they use the Star as a condition of contract.

Triangle's experience and research indicates that implementation is smoother and satisfaction is higher when organisations are motivated primarily by internal reasons. Even if you are introducing the Star for external reasons, we recommend that you adopt it in the spirit of learning and service improvement and capitalise on the internal benefits too.

My advice is to see the implementation of the Outcomes Star as a change management process. It is vital to communicate to keyworkers how it will help them to do their job and that it will help the organisation as a whole to make its case to the outside world. It is also vital to integrate the Star fully into keywork processes and training.

Manager at St Mungo's

Refers to the Outcomes Star for Homelessness

2 Check that My Star™ is suitable for you

Firstly, you will need to be confident that My Star is the right tool for your service. There are two key questions that will help you do this.

i) Do you provide one-to-one ongoing support for children or young people?

My Star is designed to be used in situations where a child and worker are engaged in a one-to-one support relationship over a period of time. We would suggest at least six weeks. It may also be possible to use it with children or young people in a group, provided there is also some one-to-one time. If you only see a child once or twice, for a short period of time, or have little or no one-to-one contact with them, it is probably not suitable for your service.

ii) Do you work holistically with children or young people?

My Star is holistic, covering all the key aspects of life, and is designed to help you and the children you work with assess the changes they are making in their attitudes, behaviour and skills across all these areas. If your service focuses on one or two areas, for example specific learning difficulties or some therapeutic interventions, the Star will not be suitable. However, it should work well if you are aiming to support children in most, but not all, of the Star areas. If your service focuses on areas that are not in My Star, you can assess a child's progress towards these goals in another way alongside the Star.

If you have answered yes to these two questions, it is likely that My Star will be appropriate for your service. If not, you may wish to contact Triangle to discuss how to proceed. For example, where a service provides mainly respite care for families with disabled children, the Carer's Star may be a better fit, and there are versions for young people in a range of community-based services. If there is currently no version that fits your service adequately, please contact Triangle to enquire about the latest versions in development, or the possibility of working with us to create a new version to meet your needs.

Organisations are not permitted to make changes to the Star under the terms of copyright for the tool. For more information, please refer to the copyright statement on page two of this guide or the Outcomes Star website www.outcomesstar.org.uk.

Steps three, four and five below should be considered at the same time.

3 Run a pilot – try it out

Some workers may be resistant to the introduction of the Star, with understandable concerns about finding the time or introducing an additional tool or measurement. This was certainly the case at the start of the pilot. It may be advisable to pilot the Outcomes Star before rolling it out across your organisation. The benefits of running a pilot are:

- It enables you to test how the tool works for you in practice
- It helps you to answer the practical questions set out under point four below about how to integrate the Star into your ways of working prior to full implementation
- If it goes well, it creates a demonstration project and staff with experience of using the Star who can reassure, motivate and train others
- If there are problems, these can be addressed before the Star is rolled out across the organisation.

Research on the implementation of the Outcomes Star found that there was resistance from workers within over half of the 25 organisations interviewed. However, in nearly all cases this was quickly overcome. The following are examples of tried and tested options for addressing worker resistance effectively:

- **Taking time to allow people to realise the benefits** so that workers see the Star as making their job easier and better, rather than simply adding another administrative loop
- **Allowing people to express reservations and ask questions.** The Star represents a significantly new way of working and people may need to have their concerns and questions heard and addressed
- **A flexible approach at first.** Allowing the more willing and enthusiastic workers to give it a try can work well. If these workers come back to the team with positive experiences, this can enthuse others. In addition, feedback from the children they work with and from other professionals can provide invaluable concrete evidence of the benefits and popularity of the Star, and offset fears that children won't engage with it
- **Involving children in the process, where possible.** This not only means that children using the service understand and have a say in what is happening, but their enthusiasm also adds credibility and legitimacy to the use of the Star within the service.

Workers were unsure at first, but my approach was to give the Star to those workers likely to be most open and encourage them to just have a go with it in their own way. Almost immediately, positive feedback from those workers and their service users encouraged others to try it too.

**Manager,
Croftlands Trust**

Refers to the
Outcomes Star for
Homelessness

4 Integrate My Star™ into your ways of working, paperwork and IT

My Star works best as an integral part of the process of working with a child or young person, with Star readings linked to reviews. It is important that the Star is fully incorporated into this process so that it does not unnecessarily duplicate other discussions, paperwork or IT. This probably means you will need to amend existing ways of working.

How will the information be recorded and summarised?

Stars can be completed with children on paper, using the Star Chart and Action Plan, or online, using the Star Online. This web application run by Triangle is available for an annual licence fee. The Star Online enables you to record Star readings, notes and action plans on screen, and analyse your outcomes data at individual, caseload and service level. It also enables you to summarise outcomes across a number of services and to make comparisons, both within your organisation and nationally.

Where laptops, iPads, smartphones and other mobile devices are available, children may find the interactive experience of completing the Star online

more engaging than using the paper version. A notable advantage of online completion is that the data is simultaneously captured, eliminating the need for data entry later, and providing immediate, up-to-date, service-wide reports for analysis. Visit www.staronline.org.uk to sign up or for a free trial or contact info@triangleconsulting.co.uk with your questions.

It is sometimes also possible to integrate the Outcomes Star with other software using the Star Online's integration system. If you are considering integration, please visit www.outcomesstar.org.uk to find out more about the process and set-up costs or email info@triangleconsulting.co.uk.

If you operate paper-based files, it is advisable to keep a copy of each Star reading and Star notes on the child's file. They may also want to have their own copy. The Star is not intended to increase the amount of paperwork that children and workers need to complete. If the Star action plan is used, this should be instead of any existing action plans, and services should explore other ways in which My Star might fully or partially replace existing paperwork.

When to use My Star™

It is up to your organisation to set a policy specifying when children should complete the Star and how that fits with other processes. This policy may depend on the length and intensity of a service. For most types of service, we recommend a first reading at the point of developing an action plan once there is some relationship. If it is done at a first meeting or very early on, it works better where the worker already has some information about the child.

There is a balance between getting to know a child or young person, and the need to record an accurate start point before too much change happens. If a child is not willing or able to engage in meaningful discussion of the Star areas early on, workers can complete a worker-only initial reading to provide a baseline. This can be recorded as such on the Star Chart and when entering the data on the Star Online.

It is usually most effective to repeat the Star every 6 to 12 weeks, linking it to action plans or reviews. Comparing the first and last Star will give a clear picture of the outcomes for that child. Using the Star in services of less than six weeks in length is not recommended.

Using the Family Star™ with parents and My Star™ with their children

Organisations working directly with both parents and children, and using both the Family Star and My Star, will need to develop a policy for when and how these are completed. Ideally, the Family Star reviews with parents and My Star reviews with children would be co-ordinated so that the two Stars relate to each other, making it possible to track the outcomes for parents and children together. Using both versions of the Outcomes Star also opens opportunities for parents to understand the effect their behaviour can have on their children.

Triangle is exploring ways to automatically link the results for children and their parents on the Star Online. However, this is currently only possible by drawing out the outcomes for each separately and comparing them manually.

5 Train staff to use My Star™

The Star will only be as good as the workers who use it, so it is vital that all members of staff working directly with children receive training. This is provided by Triangle – see the resources section of this guide for details.

It is important to make clear how the Star fits with other initiatives and training that staff have received. For example, if your organisation uses Motivational Interviewing, it will help workers if you can integrate the Star into this approach. For example, Triangle's two-day Outcomes Star and Keyworking course contains a focus on Motivational Interviewing.

Effective use of the Star requires that those using it are skilled in working with children and confident in appropriately challenging and supporting a child and/or their family to change. Introducing the Star may be an opportunity to review the training needs of your staff in this area and address any outstanding concerns. Email training@triangleconsulting.co.uk for details.

It made me focus on key areas of the child's development and needs and see clearly any improvements that the child has made.

**Worker,
Action for
Children**

6 Ensure quality and consistency in the use of My Star™

Star data will only provide an accurate picture of progress if those using it have a good understanding of the tool, and apply the scales consistently. This is particularly important for service level data – it is only possible to meaningfully collate the data across a service if workers understand and have used the defined scales. We recommend that you ensure this happens in the following ways:

Staff supervision

When discussing a worker's caseload, draw on the completed Stars of the children they are working with – either using all of them or a sample, depending on the caseload. This will help managers to ensure that the Star is being used as planned and is completed accurately, with an understanding of the scales. It can also provide the manager with a quick, visual overview of a worker's caseload.

File auditing

As part of the normal process of auditing files, managers should ensure that Star records are present, accurate and stored confidentially.

Team meetings

When discussing children in team meetings, look at their Stars and explore where they are on the scales. This kind of discussion enables the team to develop a shared understanding of how to use the scales and to become familiar with the framework.

Data quality

Users of the Star Online will soon need to confirm that the quality of the data being entered is ensured through the measures described above, or that plans are in place to do this. You can also talk to Triangle about Star quality tools.

7 Analyse and interpret the data

Star data can be used for routine monitoring of a service or community project and for periodic research into its effectiveness. Collated Star data provides a rich source of information about the needs of children coming to your service and the progress they make. Comparing average outcomes could highlight areas of success or concern that can be explored further.

We suggest that for routine monitoring purposes you compare the child's initial reading with their most recent reading.

The tables below show fictional data on the final, post-pilot version of My Star over a period of six months for children in a children's service, and are designed to illustrate the formats for reporting and learning from Star data. These are the tables used within the Star Online's reports.

Table 1: Starting points, change and end points

This table shows the average readings in each of the Star areas:

- At the first reading, averaged across all children
- At the review point six months later
- The amount of change over the period (outcomes).

Star area	First reading	Review	Change
Physical health	3.9	4.4	0.5
Where you live	4.0	4.3	0.3
Being safe	4.2	4.4	0.2
Relationships	4.1	4.4	0.3
Feelings and behaviour	2.3	3.5	1.2
Friends	2.9	3.9	1.0
Confidence and self-esteem	2.5	3.3	0.8
Education and learning	3.5	4.0	0.5
Average	3.4	4.0	0.6

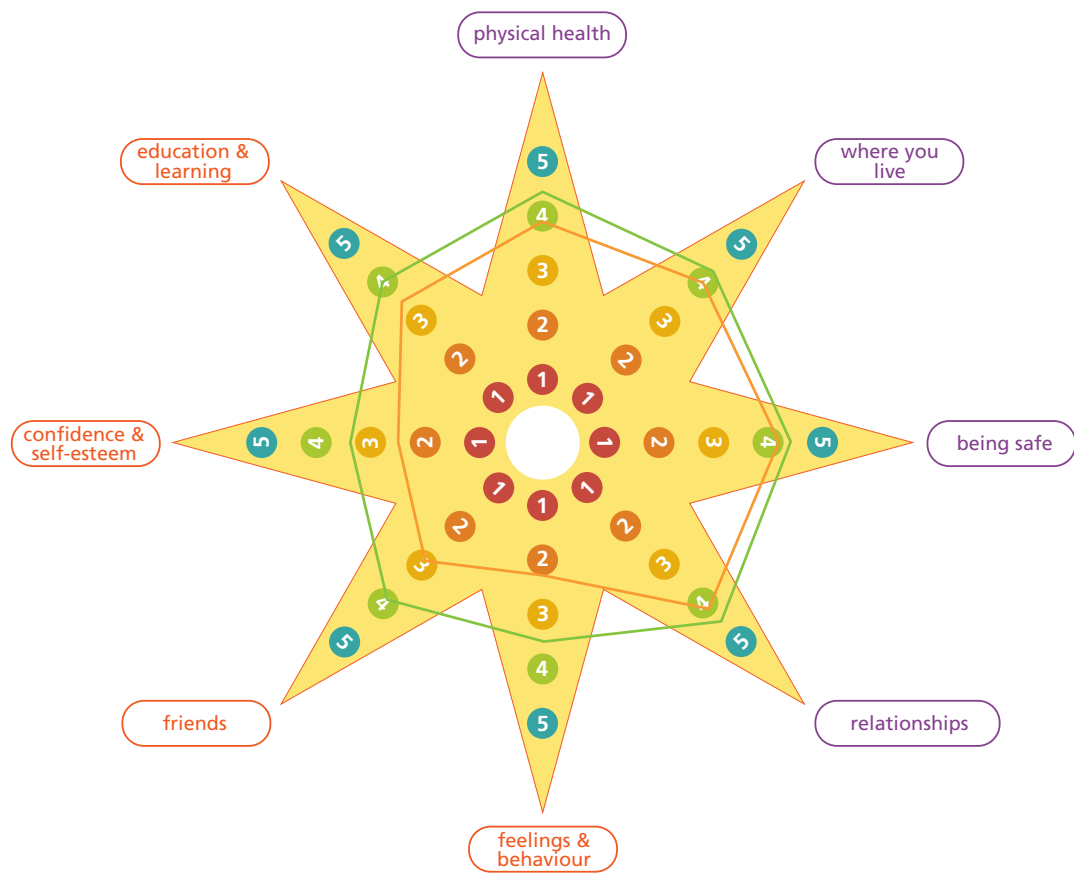


Figure 3: The average across two readings displayed visually on the Star (data taken from Table 1)

Table 2: Percentage of children showing change

This data is for the same children over the same period as Table 1. In each of the eight Star areas, it shows the proportion of children who made positive progress, stayed the same or dropped back.

Star area	Positive progress	The same	Dropped back
Physical health	33%	65%	2%
Where you live	27%	69%	4%
Being safe	21%	75%	4%
Relationships	22%	72%	6%
Feelings and behaviour	62%	31%	7%
Friends	52%	40%	8%
Confidence and self-esteem	51%	43%	6%
Education and learning	35%	56%	9%

Table 3: Proportion improving on their overall Star

This table shows the number and percentage of children who made a large or moderate improvement, or had no significant change in their overall Star reading:

Large increase (>1 on average)	Moderate increase (0.25-1)	No significant change	Decrease (> -0.25)
15%	48%	33%	4%

What does the data show?

This data provides a wealth of information and can help your service by providing a number of insights:

- The starting point when children are first referred and whether or not referrals are appropriate. If they are not, you may need to review referral routes and selection processes, or your ideas about who the service is intended for
- The level of progress children make while they are with the service and whether or not it is what you would expect
- Areas of success provide an opportunity to look at good practice, celebrate and report achievements to boards, funders and anyone else who is interested
- Any areas for concern, such as negative outcomes, or where very little change is taking place. This data can be a useful starting point for further exploration and may prompt changes to the service's practice or decisions to more clearly define what the service can and cannot achieve.

These insights are best regarded as food for thought and exploration, rather than as 'judge and jury' on what is good or bad about your service.

The fictional data presented above indicates the following assumptions and hypotheses. The service could verify these insights by looking at the raw data:

- The greatest areas of need for children joining the service are Feelings and Behaviour and Confidence and Self-esteem
- Overall, children are progressing well at the service with nearly two-thirds making positive progress
- Children are making particularly good progress in relation to Feelings and Behaviour and Friends
- Being Safe, Where you Live, and Relationships show the least change, but these are all areas with relatively high starting points
- There may be room to improve the progress made by children in relation to Education and Learning, and Physical Health.

Star data can be used to explore a range of more in-depth questions. It is helpful to periodically develop some hypotheses, and then use the Star data to put these theories to the test. However, many factors contribute to progress and it is not possible to reliably attribute success to a particular intervention, so outcomes information from the Star should be used as a basis for discussion and further exploration.

Comparing average outcomes with similar services can be useful in identifying areas where you have good practice to share and areas where you could learn from others. If you are using the Star Online, you will have instant access to an anonymous average of similar services and children.

Academic researchers are showing increased interest in the Outcome Star family of tools. Triangle is supporting a number of research institutions that are submitting their findings for publication in academic journals. If you have an interest in formal research, please email info@triangleconsulting.co.uk.

Comparing Family Star™ and My Star™ data

If your service is working directly with both parents and children and is using My Star in addition to the Family Star, this provides an opportunity to cross-analyse and investigate the relationship between outcomes for parents and outcomes for children. This cannot yet be done automatically on the Star Online so the data would need to be downloaded using a CSV file, and analysed using other software, or manually in the case of small numbers.

The scale on My Star is 1 to 5, not 1 to 10 as in the Family Star. The five steps in My Star and five stages in the Family Star use the same colours to make them easy to compare. However, organisations may find it helpful to double the readings gathered using My Star to facilitate numerical comparisons between data from the two Stars.

8 Share and act on the learning

There are a number of different audiences for Star data:

- **Local authorities** – where they are responsible for the service, Star data can capture and provide evidence of the true nature of what you do. You can draw on Star data when tendering to deliver services, use it as part of your routine reporting or as a one-off exercise to demonstrate the value of your service. It should add to your credibility and show that you are taking the initiative when it comes to measuring your outcomes.
- **Management team** meetings are an important forum for exploring effectiveness and highlighting difficulties. Once the Star is implemented, the management team might want to review the data regularly at their meetings.
- **Colleagues and other workers** – sharing data with workers helps to keep them motivated to collect the information. It also provides a boost to morale if it shows positive change. If the data shows that there are areas for development, change will be easier to implement if workers are aware of the problem themselves.
- **Trustee Boards** receive regular financial reports but often get only anecdotal information about children's progress. You might want to present them with Star reports on an annual basis.
- **Annual reviews and websites** – bring your annual review and website to life by including key outcomes statistics. You can also feature a visual of the collated data for your service on a completed Star and maybe quotes from children about how the Star has helped them understand and make progress in their journey.

Part two: Guidance for Workers

My Star™ as an integral part of work with children and young people

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 following guidance is designed to help you use the Star well so that it is a positive experience for both you and the child. This guidance is intended to support rather than replace the skills of those working 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. The tool should never be used in a way that undermines the effectiveness of your work with children.

The Star is designed to be accessible and engaging on a one-to-one basis. We are not prescriptive about the setting in which the Star should be completed or how long it should take – the aim is to have a genuine interaction with the child.

How My Star™ can help

- Engaging the child – the Star provides a clear focus for conversation and the visual aspect can help to draw children in
- Demonstrating and reinforcing progress – seeing the change set out in a visual way can be very encouraging to children and workers
- Helping with goal-setting – the Journey of Change helps to break change down into small, manageable steps
- Creating a more holistic approach – the Star requires conversations about many aspects of life and can help raise issues that might otherwise get lost
- Making support more systematic and consistent – the Star creates a consistent framework for supporting vulnerable children in families and out-of-home care.

1 Before you use My Star™

It is essential that all those using My Star with children receive training – as a minimum, the one-day Introduction to the Star course, although your organisation may want to explore the two-day Keyworking and the Star course to build and reinforce skills in working with children towards change. This will help provide the essential knowledge and skills you need before you use the Star, including:

- A good understanding of the steps underlying the scales. These include the Journey of Change – **stuck**, **accepting help**, **trying**, **finding what works**, **resilient** – and the severity scales – **big concerns**, **someone is helping**, **no big concerns**, **mostly OK**, **things are good**
- Familiarity with the eight areas, so that the worker can unpack and rephrase them if the child is having trouble understanding them
- Familiarity with the steps for children and detailed scale point descriptions. Practise using the scales by thinking of one or two children you have worked with and consider where you would place them on each

scale. It's helpful to do this together with a colleague who has experience of using the Star and to check your understanding with theirs

- Knowing how to introduce the Star to children. The introduction at the beginning of the User Guide presents key information in a child-friendly way and the section below provides some options for introducing the Star to children
- Knowing how the Star is being used in your organisation, including:
 - When it is first completed with new children
 - How often readings are taken
 - What happens to the completed Star Chart and the data
 - What to do if you need help with any aspect of using the Star
 - Familiarity with the Star Online, if your organisation is using it
 - How the Star fits with any other tools used in your organisation.

We recommend finding opportunities to present My Star and discuss the language and ideas with groups of children before using it with them one to one.

2 Set-up, context and introduction of the Star™

The process of completing the Star is intended to be helpful for children as well as providing useful outcomes data for the service. How the Star is introduced is important in encouraging a child to engage and can be done in one of a number of ways:

- By 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
- Where you are working with children in a home setting, you might discuss the ideas with the child and their family before the session
- If you meet with the children you support in groups, it can be useful to explain the Star to the group to help children understand the areas and scales and to save time within the one-to-one sessions
- By giving older children who are literate and interested a copy of the User Guide to read before the session.

When introducing the Star it is important to:

- Be friendly and encourage children to say if they do not understand the words
- Use the illustrated Journey of Change to explain the stages step by step
- Explain that 5 is the top of the Star scales
- Be clear that it isn't about getting an overall top score out of 40, but about building up a map of their world, experiences and journey
- Emphasise that 5 is 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.”

“We are here to help you make the most of the opportunities and support available for you to enjoy learning and feel confident, so that when you leave our service you can be your own person, able to do what interests you.”

“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.”

“It will track your progress and you choose where you are.”

“It is a progress Star. It’s about you, about going step by step on a journey and we will do it together.”

“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.”

For older children you may want to explain that as well as supporting the child’s progress, the Star is also necessary to help the service learn what it is doing well, and what it is not doing so well. However, it is best not to mention terms like monitor, measure or data analysis.

Where to do it

Think carefully about where you will complete My Star. Ideally, find a space that the child regards as neutral, and where you will be undisturbed and able to concentrate. If you are completing the Star in the child’s home, you will need to consider strategies to support some level of privacy from other siblings and parents. If your relationship prior to this has been largely with the parents or carers, it may be helpful to prepare the parents for the need for privacy, and explain that they will not be your main focus of attention for this period.

While the Star will usually be completed collaboratively with a worker in a one-to-one setting, workers are encouraged to experiment with different approaches, particularly during a trial or pilot period.

Who should do it?

Are you the right person to be completing the Star with the child? The Star should be completed by the person who will be taking forward the work with the child. If your work is largely with the parents, and someone else is working with the child, this worker is better placed to complete the Star with the child. Consistency is critical to ensure action planning links into the Star, to develop a relationship, and to ensure future Stars are comparable.

When to do it and for how long

Set aside enough time for this, ideally around 45 minutes, though the length of time will vary. Allow for completion over more than one session if appropriate. Consider factors that may impact on a child's participation, for example, sports, homework, or how tired they are. If working in a school setting, the time available may be particularly limited. For family support workers planning to work with more than one child in a family, this will need careful scheduling.

You can be flexible in how much you do in one session. Covering eight areas may be too much for some children, especially with limited time, if there are difficult issues to discuss, or the child is finding it hard to concentrate. If you can arrange two sessions reasonably close together, this will allow a coherent picture to emerge, and enable you to move onto action planning with the child. Spreading the reading over more than two sessions risks loss of focus and a delay in moving to actions that address the issues raised.

3 Discussing and completing My Star™ with a child

The Star is a flexible tool that workers can use in a way that responds to the needs and abilities of each child, and to your own experience and skills. 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.

For children with a developmental age of seven or over, the aim is to complete the Star collaboratively, selecting appropriate examples from the scales. Scales 1 to 4 are primarily about their environment and the behaviour of others towards them, while scales 5 to 8 focus on their own attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviour. However, in both sets of scales, the extent to which the child can take responsibility for how things are, and the examples that will be relevant to them, will depend on their age. For example, appropriate levels of care and supervision in and out of the home are clearly age-dependent, and references to keeping safe around drugs or alcohol are primarily included for older children.

The Star can be used as a discussion tool with children under seven and can be helpful in drawing out their views, using techniques such as illustrations. It can also be supplemented by adults who know them. However, it is unlikely that children under seven will have sufficient cognitive understanding to place themselves accurately in the steps underlying the scales.

Children and young people with a developmental age of twelve or over may want to complete the Star by themselves. This could be an option, provided it is explained to them beforehand and fully discussed afterwards to ensure that both you and the young person have a full understanding of the Star they have created, and that any differences of perception are recorded.

Be creative and use a range of resources

Workers in the pilot used drawings, the alien cards, tokens that could be moved around the Star to represent the child – edible ones went down well – the jelly baby tree to explore family relationships, and mind-mapping. Some people created blown-up versions of the Star to have something bigger to move tokens around on. For those children who don't like paperwork or can't read, it is possible to just use the Star Chart and illustrated Journey of Change and work through each of the Star points verbally, describing the underlying steps to guide the child towards agreeing where they are on 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. Some children might want to design their own flash cards for the scales or for their journey.

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, especially if the child has started to form an attachment to them. The worker's aim is to assist the child in gaining insights into their own world, and this needs to be done skilfully. What may seem to the worker as a tentative suggestion may well be received as a factual statement that is either accepted entirely by the child, in place of their own view, or angrily denied.

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.

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 some children with low self-esteem might place themselves unrealistically high on the journey. 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.

However, if you cannot agree on a scale point, and you decide it is not helpful to discuss it further, record both readings on the Star, clearly labelling which is which.

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. Overly high readings may well reflect:

- A child's natural optimism
- A desire to be right and get the highest score
- A wish to please the adult
- A lack of trust or discomfort with the adult and/or the process, and a hope it will end quickly if no problems are identified
- Loyalty to their parents/carers and fear of external involvement.

It may be fine from their perspective – they may well be happy in an overcrowded house with irregular food and washing, where they are not always having an eye kept on them. Or a child may choose a high scale point for Relationships, even though you know that their mother is an alcoholic and struggles to provide physical or emotional care for her children. The extent to which you challenge is a matter for professional judgement. 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 have done all you can to reassure the child appropriately, build trust and encourage a realistic assessment, you can choose to record their view and also your own version of the Star. This can be done in the session with the child or in the background. The emphasis would then be on building your relationship with the child to reduce some of these potential causes of inaccuracy in future discussions. As the child comes to trust you more, they may be more willing to explore their concerns and fears about their home situation.

Finally...

Whatever approach you choose, it is vital that the discussion and agreed scale point is based on the defined scales. Without using and understanding the steps, one person's 3 could be another person's 5, and although the process may still be helpful on a one-to-one basis, the collated Star data will not be useful. If a child appears to fall between two scale points, maybe because they are fluctuating between **trying** and **finding what works**, choose the point where they are for most of the time, or opt for the lower of the two points. Avoid placing children between the scale points.

This conversation may well have quite an impact on the child, so ensure the session finishes positively, and that the next steps are clear.

4 Using the completed Star Chart to agree actions and next steps

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. Once you have the completed Star, either on paper or on screen, look at it together and prompt the child to reflect on it as a basis for what to do next, asking 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:

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

Worker,
Eclipse

Children are aware of topics that will be discussed so sessions can stay focused.

Worker,
Eclipse

It got me speaking about me.






Child participant,
Family Action

- ? 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?
- ? Is it appropriate to set a deadline for completing them?

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 next table.

It is time to spend with young people in a non-pressuring way to find out about their background feelings and emotions. It supports sensitive topics of discussion and takes the focus directly off the young person. It promotes discussion and exploration of feelings so that you are able to set targets for review and can clearly see if any change has occurred.

**Manager,
Dudley Young
Carers**

Journey of Change stage	Possible approaches and actions that could be agreed
<p>Resilient</p> 	<p>At this stage a child is on track and a 5 signals that they no longer need additional support, so this can be ended appropriately. It does not mean everything is perfect – continued growth and development is still needed, as for all children and young people. The main approach will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the success to date and reinforce confidence to manage without the additional support • Focus on the future and emphasise support from family, friends and universal services as appropriate • Ensure they know they can access the service if they need to in the future, and how to do this.
<p>Finding what works</p> 	<p>When children reach this stage the emphasis will be on having the right level of challenge and support so it is manageable for the child and builds their skills and resilience. The focus of keywork may also include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping the child to reflect on how they have overcome barriers and how they can learn from this • Building resilience by supporting them to deal with difficulties themselves • Celebrating their achievements and agreeing appropriate goals or challenges. <p>In relation to the child's context, the emphasis at this stage will be on the areas where improvements are still needed.</p>
<p>Trying</p> 	<p>Children at this stage are trying new things and may give up easily when they don't always seem to work. There is a need to build new skills and find strategies, so approaches and actions may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping them to plan what they are going to do, with an emphasis on short-term goals and manageable steps • Exploring strategies with them, including who to talk to, discussing "what if?" scenarios to help them develop strategies for themselves • Not expecting too much, as the new skills and strategies are not yet consolidated, and giving a variety of rewards, praise and encouragement to find what works best with each child. <p>Although there are no big concerns In relation to the child's context, so no need for urgent safeguarding or protection actions, substantial improvements need to be planned and implemented.</p>
<p>Accepting help</p> 	<p>Children at this stage are likely to have significant difficulties but are open to help. The approach is likely to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding out what they like and what motivates them, and the options available, but avoiding the temptation to jump in with too many suggestions • Accepting that the support needs to be worker-led, with texts and other reminders or picking them up to attend activities or services • A light-touch if appropriate, with opportunities to try out a single session of a new activity rather than signing up for courses or substantial commitment. <p>In relation to the child's context, there are big concerns and an urgent need to work with the family or carers to ensure that the child is safe and adequately cared for. There is likely to be a statutory order or framework.</p>
<p>Stuck</p> 	<p>Since children at this stage will not be engaged or interested in changing, the approach will be on building a relationship with them to develop a level of trust, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivating them to attend the service, possibly using incentives and/or rewards, and being clear about the consequences of not engaging, where that is relevant • Finding age-appropriate ways to engage them in talking and to find out what they like. <p>If there are big concerns In relation to the child's context workers should urgently address the child's immediate safety and well-being, engaging the family or carers where possible, or exploring other options, probably within a statutory order or framework.</p>

5 Revisiting the Star™ at reviews

The Star is designed to be completed at least twice to show progress. The timing and frequency needs to be agreed within your service when implementing the Star – see part one of this guide for more information on this. 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. We recommend you do this initially without reference to the previous Star reading in order to focus on a snapshot in time without being influenced by previous assessments. Once the new Star has been completed, it is helpful to compare the two to give an instant visual picture of change. You can then use this to encourage discussion:

- 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.

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. We weren't great at reviewing plans before and this has bought a start, finish and a purpose.

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

6 Frequently asked questions

Using the Star may mean working with children and young people in a different way. How natural and easy it feels for you will depend on your ways of working prior to the introduction of the Star. Most children find that the Star is fairly self-evident and feels familiar and comfortable after being used a few times, but the following questions are most frequently asked in training.

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

This is a rich starter for discussion. Part of the process of making changes in an area that isn't working for us, is developing a realistic picture of how we are doing at the moment. Here are some pointers:

- Listen carefully to what the children have to say – it will help you to understand their perceptions. They may also have information you are not aware of that will change your view.
- If it is a scale following the Journey of Change, present evidence for why you see things differently explaining why you think they are at a different point on their journey. This will work best if you present specific examples rather than general statements. For example, "You tried out the new anger management techniques twice last week and they didn't work quite as well as you had hoped", rather than, "You're still getting into fights". If the child is underestimating their progress, provide specific evidence of their achievements. For instance, "You decided what you were going to say to the friend who was bullying you, you said it, and she is now treating you with a lot more respect. That seems like quite an achievement."
- Take into account the child's current situation. In the early part of the journey, the child is likely to be less self-aware and this can result in a higher personal rating.

If you and the child still disagree after discussion, record both scale points on the Star Chart.

How do we use the Star™ if we have no one-to-one time to work with the child without the parents being present?

If parents or carers are reluctant to leave you alone with the child, either through anxieties, lack of space, or their own needs, or you do not have a specific remit to support a child directly, you will probably not be able to use the Star with the child except as part of a process of working with the family jointly. In that case, it may be a helpful starter for discussion between the child and parent and a tool for use in considering the effect of any family issues on the child. This may, of course, change as trust grows in your relationship with the parent or carer.

What if the child can't or won't engage with the Star™?

Children who are **stuck** in most or all areas of the Star will not, by definition, engage meaningfully with the Star. You may choose to share your worker-only assessments with them later, when they co-operate with keywork, in order to demonstrate progress or to prompt learning and discussion.

It is unusual for children to engage with keywork but to resist using the Star. If this happens, ask why and check they have had a sufficiently detailed introduction to the Star and have not misunderstood how it works or how the information will be used. Make sure they understand the key points and answer any questions or concerns they have. You may also want to point out that the Star is an integral part of how your service or project provides support.

Are there any particular considerations when using the Star™ with children in out-of-home care?

There are a number of differences in using the tool with children in out-of-home care. Key to this is that the child is likely to have two homes – their original family home and their current placement. If a child is exclusively looked after by a foster carer, the severity scales – 1 to 4 – will relate to the placement. However, where a child is moving between a placement and their family home, they should refer to whichever place they are living in at the time the Star is being completed.

If children don't make progress, will my performance be in question?

The purpose of My Star is to help children see where they have come from and where to go next, and to help give your service an overview of where it is assisting children in making positive changes, and identify areas which may need further attention. When children and young people do not make progress on the Star, there are many possible explanations. It is not about judging the work of individual members of staff.

However, this may indicate that you have a particularly difficult caseload or need additional support or further training. You may want to discuss this with your manager.

What if the child or young person doesn't want to discuss certain areas?

This can happen when a child feels that some of the scales are not relevant to them because they do not have an issue in that area. If you also feel that this area poses no problems, simply place the child at 5 for that scale and move on.

Some areas may be particularly sensitive or the child may not be willing to discuss a problem. Many workers find that simply having an area as a scale on the Star can be a helpful way to introduce sensitive areas that do need to be discussed. However, the relationship of trust between the worker and child, and the goal of supporting the child's progress, are more important than the Star. If it is not helpful to continue, opt for either 5 or 1, and move to the next scale.

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

When negative change occurs, workers are sometimes concerned that seeing this so clearly on the Star will demotivate children. Usually, the child is only too aware that they have moved further away from their goal and acknowledging this can be a helpful first step in reversing that trend. In these instances, it can be helpful to remind children that change is difficult and that it isn't a linear process.

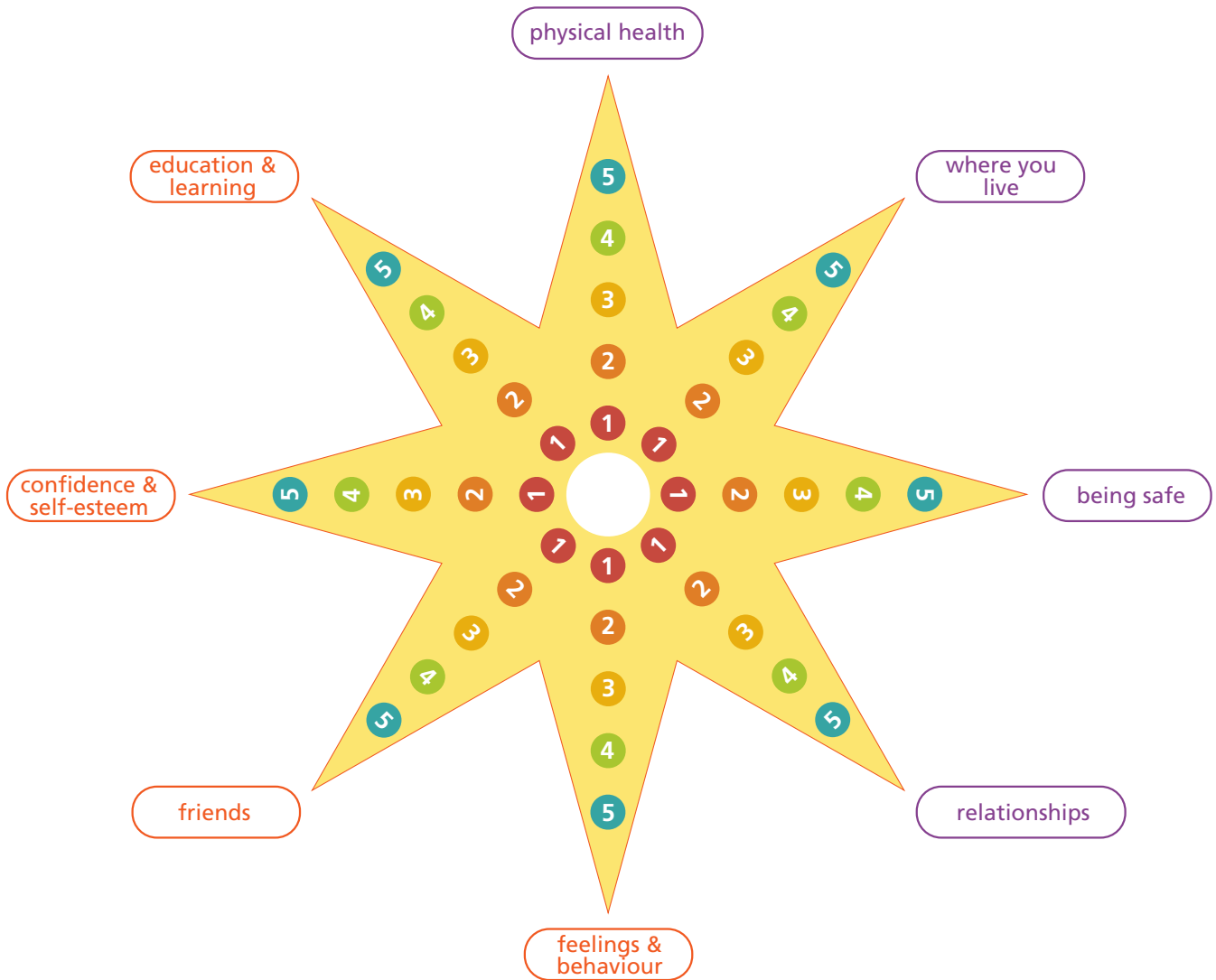
It is also possible that children may choose a lower scale point in a review than in an initial assessment. This can be a positive step that is indicative of greater self-awareness and trust. It is therefore important to identify why their readings are showing a decrease and whether this is a slip-back or the result of greater self-awareness and honesty.

What if a child has limited literacy and/or English?

The Star materials are designed to be used flexibly. If a child's English is limited, you may need to paraphrase the text in simplified language to support their understanding. If a child has limited literacy, you could use the Star and alien visuals and explain the five stages verbally. You could read out the descriptions of the stages you feel they are closest to at that time.

If you have a question that isn't answered here, or you have any concerns about My Star, you are encouraged to raise them with your manager. It is important that you have the chance to discuss your views as the Star will only work well for you and the children you work with if you feel comfortable using it.





My Star™ is a version of the Outcomes Star™, a family of tools developed by Triangle for supporting and measuring change when working with people.

This Star is one of a growing family

See our website for:

- Versions tailored to different people, settings and sectors
- The evidence base that supports the Star
- Testimonials and case studies from Star users

www.outcomesstar.org.uk

How to use the Outcomes Star

- Sign up for Star licences including the option to use our Star Online web app
- Ensure all members of staff attend Star training and explore specialist courses
- Access Star materials, other tools and ongoing support from Triangle

Go to www.staronline.org.uk for a free 30-day demo