

Using the Attention Star™

The Attention Star has been developed for use with children and young people aged 5-18 who have difficulty paying attention, learning and/or with their behaviour at school or in other situations, whether or not they have a particular diagnosis. It is a version of the Outcomes Star, a suite of tools for supporting and measuring change when working directly with people.

The Attention Star covers eight key areas:

1. School and learning
2. Your routine
3. Family
4. Friends
5. Being healthy
6. How you feel
7. How you behave
8. Attention and organisation.

The Journey of Change

Change doesn't happen in one go – it is a journey, and it can help to understand the steps along the way. The Attention Star scales are underpinned by a model of change that has five stages:

1. Stuck (blue)

At the start of the journey, life is difficult. The child's behaviour and/or learning is a major problem and it may feel as if this rules their life and that of their family. Perhaps they cannot sit still or concentrate, or they get into trouble or take risks a lot, and may have been excluded from school or other places. They may feel anxious, upset, frustrated, angry or hopeless a lot of the time. Perhaps they don't know why or what is wrong. Perhaps they have a diagnosis such as autism or ADHD but don't receive any support, or they or their family are not accepting the support offered. Things are not getting better, so they are **stuck**.

2. Getting help (red)

Things may be as bad as at stage 1, but at this stage the child and/or their family know things have to change or want things to get better and they are **getting help**. Perhaps they or their family are listening to suggestions and talking to professionals. The child's behaviour, learning or ability to pay attention is not altering a lot yet, but they and/or their family feel more supported and are ready to look at making changes.

It captures all the core information we need from young people but is so user-friendly.

**Outreach worker,
Newham Borough
Council**

Using the Star has led to a fundamental change in casework. We now look at the service user holistically. This was difficult for workers at first but the result has been very positive.

**Manager,
Single Homeless Project**

The children themselves are really comfortable with it.

**Consultant clinical
psychologist, Norfolk
Community Health and
Care NHS Trust**

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3. Trying things out (orange)

At this stage the child and/or others are trying out new ways to help manage their attention, learning or behaviour, such as trying to get up and go to bed at a regular time, but it is early days. The child and/or their family may feel motivated some of the time, but are not really sure what they can achieve. If the child is younger, it may be mostly the people around them who are **trying things out**, including their family, their school and health professionals. This may include ideas like a “time out” card, a reduced timetable or opportunities to be more active.

4. Finding what works (green)

At this stage the child and/or the people around them can see the difference that some new strategies are making and learn from any setbacks. The child can see some things they are good at, and so can people around them, so the child does not feel criticised all the time. The child and/or others understand their condition and feel motivated to change things. If the child is younger, it is the adults around them who are **finding what works**, but older children are **finding what works** for themselves, and building effective strategies to improve their attention, learning and/or behaviour. However, these strategies still need to become more established, the child and their family are not yet confident enough to stop having specialist professional support, and/or there are still some key areas where changes are needed.

5. Managing well (teal)

At the final stage of the journey, any difficulties with attention, learning and/or behaviour are mostly not a barrier to the child getting on with their life and doing the things they want to do in a socially acceptable way. Probably things can and will continue to improve, but they are now doing OK in school or training, and they are resilient and able to manage well enough. If they have a diagnosed condition, they may have medication and check-ups once or twice a year. If the child is older, they are mostly **managing well** by themselves, and if they are younger, they are **managing well** because their family, school and others support them and the child does what they can. They and/or their family know how to get the help they need if new challenges arise.

Recognising external factors

It is important to recognise that this Journey of Change focuses on how the child, family and service can work together to enable them to manage any difficulties with attention, learning or behaviour, but there may also be societal factors holding them back. These may include how the school responds to their behaviour, access to additional resources or support they need and/or lack of acceptance. These also need to be acknowledged and recorded throughout work using the Star. Your service may then be able to use this information to identify gaps in provision, plan future developments or raise issues with policy-makers.

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Attention Star™ resources

1. The Attention Star Chart, Notes and Action Plan
2. The Attention Star Scales
3. The Attention Star User Guide
4. This Guidance for Workers
5. A web application for online completion at www.staronline.org.uk
6. Further information at www.outcomesstar.org.uk.

The Attention Star was developed by Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise with Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust, through a process involving workers, managers and associated professionals, plus some of the children and their parents using the ADHD service during the pilot period.

All workers need training before using the Attention Star, from Triangle or a licensed trainer.

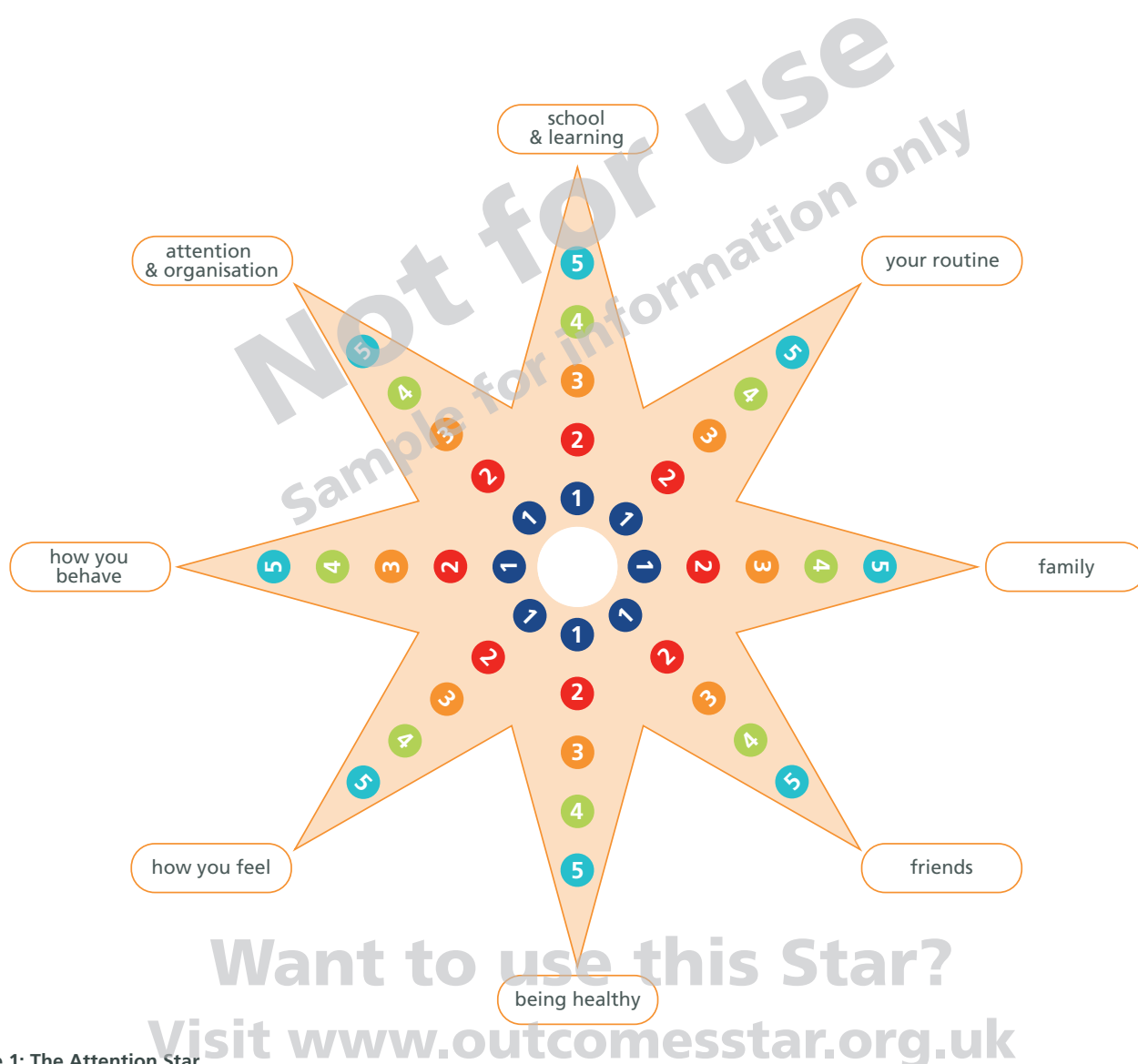


Figure 1: The Attention Star

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Using the Attention Star™

Using the Star is meant to be a helpful process that stimulates and focuses discussion and provides a useful basis for action planning. This guidance is designed to supplement training and to help you use the Attention Star well, so that it is a positive experience for both worker and those they support.

The Star is a flexible tool that relies on the judgement of the professionals using it, as well as on a degree of understanding and trust between a worker and those they support. It should never be used in a way that undermines the effectiveness of that work.

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.

How the Attention Star™ can help

- Engaging the child or young person – the Star provides a clear focus for conversation and its visual aspect can help to draw people in
- Demonstrating and reinforcing progress – seeing the change set out in a visual way can be encouraging to both 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 be missed
- Making support more systematic and consistent – the Star creates a consistent framework for supporting children with attention, learning or behaviour problems.

1 Before you use the Attention Star™

It is essential that all those using the Attention Star receive training – as a minimum, the one-day Introduction to the Outcomes Star course. This will help provide the essential knowledge and skills you need before you use the Star, including:

- A good understanding of the Journey of Change underlying the scales – **stuck, getting help, trying things out, finding what works, managing well**
- Familiarity with the eight scales, so that you can unpack and rephrase them if the child is having trouble understanding them
- Familiarity with the steps for children and the detailed scale-point descriptions. Practise using the scales by thinking of one or two children with attention, learning or behaviour problems that you have worked with and consider where you would place them on each scale. It is helpful to do this together with a colleague who has experience of using the Star and to check your understanding with theirs
- Knowing how the Star is used in your organisation, including:
 - When it is first completed with children and young people approaching the service
 - How often readings are taken

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- What happens to the completed Star Chart and its associated 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

2 How to introduce the Attention Star™

How the Star is introduced is important in encouraging a child with attention, learning or behaviour problems to engage and can be done in a number of ways:

- By devising a short script to introduce the Star in a way that feels natural to you and clear for those you are working with
- If you meet with the children you support in groups, it can be useful and save time to explain the Star to the group before starting one-to-one work within individual sessions
- Where family members are involved in the support sessions, making sure they understand the Star too
- By giving children and their families a copy of the scales to read before the session, if they are literate and interested enough.

When introducing the Star, it is important to:

- Be friendly and encourage children to say if they do not understand the scales
- Explain that 5 is the top of the Star scales but not the end of the journey and children should continue to improve after they have reached this stage
- Be clear that it is not about the numbers, but about building up a map of their world, experiences and journey.

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 so that you can enjoy life, achieve what you want to achieve and do what interests you."

"The Attention 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 decide where you are."

"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."

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.

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3 Discussing and completing the Attention 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 their own experience and skills. Some children will want to approach the tool cognitively, reading it through and discussing their life in terms of the scales. Others might focus more on the visual aspects of the Star.

The aim is to complete the Star collaboratively, selecting appropriate examples from the scales.

Children 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 the worker and the child have a full understanding of the Star they have created, and that any differences of opinion are recorded.

Be creative and use a range of resources

The short scales and the Star Chart, Notes and Action Plan are all designed to be used with children. Some workers in the pilot also created and used flashcards with the short statements for each scale, one statement per card, inviting the child to choose the statement that best fitted them.

Use the Attention Star™ to encourage self-reflection

This can be done by asking children to explain why they think they are at a particular point on the scales, and taking the time to challenge them appropriately and discuss their views. The Star can be used within a coaching interaction, where the worker's aim is to assist the child to gain insight. This needs to be done skilfully. For example, a tentative suggestion offered by a worker may be perceived by the child as a factual statement – to be either accepted entirely, in place of their own view, or angrily denied.

Be positive and non-judgemental

Used well, the Star will support a conversation that covers potentially sensitive aspects of the life of a child with attention, learning or behaviour problems. Ensure that the child does not feel they are being judged, and clarify that the aim is not to get the highest number possible across the scales, but to understand their life at this moment, find out where they might need help and celebrate what they have achieved.

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 place themselves unrealistically high on the journey. Workers may then present evidence of discrepancies between the child's behaviour and views. This paves the way for a more meaningful discussion or working relationship, and a more realistic assessment from which progress is possible.

I find it helpful in terms of conversations with the children to look at the areas and go through them in a structured way.

**Assistant
psychologist, Norfolk
Community Health and
Care NHS Trust**

I use it in depth to get to know somebody.

Occupational therapist

It showed me all the things I was doing OK at and the stuff that I have to change.

Young service user

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