

Using the Preparation Star™

The Preparation Star is a visual tool to support conversations about what is important to people when they consider their final years or months. It may be most relevant for people following a diagnosis, or for those who are elderly or have a health condition, but is also relevant to all of us at any point in our lives. It can be used to start and guide a conversation with professionals, support workers, family, friends or others – or for internal reflection.

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

- The Star Chart, Notes and Action Plan
- A User Guide with short visual scales and detailed scales for each of the nine outcome areas and a detailed description of the Journey of Change
- Short illustrated Scales and Flashcards to support the conversation
- This Guidance for support workers, social workers, medical professionals and others completing the Star collaboratively with patients, residents or others they support
- Separate guidance on self-completion for people choosing to complete it alone or with family or friends
- The Development Report, explaining the development history of the Preparation Star
- A web application for online completion at www.staronline.org.uk.

The Preparation Star was developed by Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise in collaboration with North London Hospice, Jewish Care, St Joseph's Hospice, London ADASS End of Life Network (represented by Fernways Supported Living) and with a grant from Macmillan Cancer Support.

Before you use the Preparation Star™

Make sure that you have received training in using the Preparation Star, are familiar with the materials and know when and how the Star is used in your service. It's vital that you understand and use the Journey of Change underlying the scales – **not yet dealing with this, finding out, trying things out, finding what works, as good as it can be**. This will ensure consistent and reliable information as a basis for support planning and for use by your service. You also need to be familiar with all the scale descriptions, so you can unpack and rephrase them as needed for the people you are working with.

Want to use this Star?

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Contact info@triangleconsulting.co.uk
or 020 7272 8765

How to introduce the Preparation Star™

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

- Devise a short script to introduce the Star in a way that feels natural to you and clear for those you are supporting
- If you meet with the people you support in groups, it can be useful to explain and perhaps discuss the Star with the group before going through it in one-to-one work with individuals
- Consider giving people who are interested a copy of the short illustrated Scales or the User Guide to read before the session.

It helped me to categorise the difficulties I am presently encountering, thus prioritising what is affecting me the most.

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When introducing the Star:

- Explain that people may start anywhere on the Journey of Change and can move both up and down on the scales
- Explain that 5 is the top of the Star scales but does not necessarily mean that things are as people would like them to be – at that point things are as good as they can be under the circumstances. Placing someone at 5 signals that they, you and others are doing all you can already and that this needs to continue rather than considering changes. For example, someone at 5 may still be experiencing pain even though the medical team has done everything possible to minimise this
- Be clear that it is not about numbers or scores, but about building up a picture of how things are for people, their situation and experience. Avoid using the term “score” at all. Refer instead to where someone is on the scale or Journey of Change using the stage names, colours and/or numbers, depending on what works best for each individual
- Encourage people to ask questions so they feel as comfortable as possible about the Preparation Star and reassure them that they will have choices about the pace and process of completing it and that it can be done in the course of more than one conversation
- Let the person decide which scale to start with or choose one that is more concrete and may be easier to discuss, such as “Pain management”.

Overall, the skills and approach needed to introduce and use the Preparation Star well are likely to be the same as those needed for a compassionate, helpful conversation about end of life, including being person-centred, trauma-informed and other good practice in your service. Some suggested phrases for introducing the Star include:

“The Star tells us what support you need in key areas in order to improve how things are for you now, and it helps you and those supporting you to make that improvement.”

“This is about hearing your voice and how things are for you now so that together we can work out what is needed to make things as good as they can be.”

How to complete the Preparation Star™

Completing the Star is meant to be a helpful process that facilitates and focuses a meaningful conversation and provides a useful basis for identifying any further support or changes.

The Star is a flexible tool that can be used in a way that is responsive to each person's interest and ability to engage with it. It allows for the involvement of family or others, if that seems helpful.

The Preparation Star is a great tool. It helped me talk about important and very difficult things.

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Use the scale descriptors as a basis for discussion about the chosen area, or have an open discussion about the area and then use the scale to place the person on the Journey of Change. Although the detailed scales are intended primarily as a resource for workers, they are written to be accessible, so feel free to refer to specific points for clarification with the person. Avoid reading them out in their entirety because of their length, but some people may want to read through them at their leisure.

Always be aware of the Journey of Change and refer to the detailed scales when deciding where someone is on the scales. These are designed to reduce subjectivity – otherwise one person's 2 could be another person's 4, and although the process may still support a helpful conversation, the completed Star won't be a useful basis for learning how best to support someone and your service won't be able to treat collated Star data as reliable for reporting purposes. If someone appears to fall between two scale points, choose the point where they are for most of the time, or opt for the lower of the two points. Don't place people between the scale points.

The process of discussing and filling out the Star may have quite an impact on the person, so ensure the conversation finishes positively, and that the next steps are clear.

Listen and present alternative views but agree to differ if necessary. If you and the person you are supporting have a different view on where they are on a scale, the extent to which you engage in discussion about this is a matter for your judgement of what is helpful and compassionate. If you know there are difficulties in a certain area, and have done all you can to encourage someone to communicate them, but they continue to say there is no problem, you can choose to record both their view and your own on the Star, either at the time or afterwards. Do the same if someone wants to place themselves low on the scale, for example because they are in pain or unable to do what they want, but you are aware that every possibility has been explored and that things are as good as they can be for them. Use the Star Notes to record points from your discussion so that areas of difficulty are not lost or ignored.

Use the Preparation Star to encourage reflection. A worker's role includes helping people understand their situation and also the potential for things to improve, where this is the case. Some people may accept how things are without exploring all the options. Encouraging people to really look at how things are needs to be done skilfully, maybe giving information, using open questions, listening and reflecting back to check understanding.

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Be positive and emphasise that change is not just down to the individual. Used well, the Star can support a conversation is often one of the most difficult and sensitive conversations anyone can have. Ensure that people do not feel they are being judged and clarify that the aim is to understand how things are for them at this moment and where it could be better, perhaps reducing anxiety or enabling them to do more of what is important to them. Stress that change is not just down to them but about everyone involved doing what they can to make things as good as they can be.

It assisted my thinking in what I need to do next and to seek help in doing so. I can't do it alone.

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well-being centre**

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

Once you have completed the Star, encourage the person to join the points, then look at it together and reflect on it together as a basis for what to do next. The visual of the completed Star provides an excellent basis for seeing the priorities and discussing and agreeing changes and actions. These actions can be noted on the Star Action Plan or other suitable document. If it helps, you can try asking 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 OK?
- What is most important for you to explore and try to change first?

Once the areas are agreed, further questions might include:

- What do you want to improve?
- What can you or others do to help bring about this change?
- Shall we agree who will do those things and when?

The step someone is at can provide valuable pointers about how to help them. Some key pointers are summarised in the table overleaf:

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