

Reading Guide

to the Guidebook for Little Stars — Volume I

For the adults who accompany a Little Star — and who once were one themselves

October 2026 edition





1. Why this guide

This guide is not meant to be read to the child. It is meant for you: parents, grandparents, teachers, anyone who accompanies a Little Star in reading this book.

The *Guidebook* is written to speak to a child with simple words, concrete images and an always welcoming tone. But behind every page there are carefully considered choices — about what to say, what to leave unsaid, how to build a progression that truly supports the child without rushing them. This guide takes you behind the scenes of those choices, so that you can read it with the child knowing why it is written this way, and not otherwise.

There is a second reason, perhaps more important than the first. The book itself says so from the Preface: this journey is dedicated not only to the little ones, but also to the grown-ups who sometimes forget the child who still lives in their heart, while longing to find them again. It is not a polite turn of phrase. As you read these pages to a child, or read them on your own to understand how to talk about them, try to let them touch you too. Your Heart still has colours. Your Little Cloud still thinks — sometimes in circles. And sometimes you need a Magic Blanket, a Photo of Love, a Secret Diary to remind you of your worth. This guide speaks to you who accompany them, but also to the Little Star you once were, and deep down still are.

There is something worth keeping in mind throughout: the words an adult uses with a child leave a mark, not only on how they feel in that moment, but on how they learn to see themselves. Words do not only describe a behaviour; a child can perceive them as a judgement about who they are: saying “you pushed your classmate and hurt him” is different from saying “you are bad”. In the first case we name a behaviour that can be addressed; in the second we define the person, and that definition risks staying inside them. Expressions repeated in this second form — labels, generalisations, judgements spoken in a moment of tiredness or frustration — can, over time, help shape a more fragile sense of self, even when the adult has long forgotten them. This is not about eliminating every correction or reprimand, which remain a necessary part of raising children, but about distinguishing, when we speak, between correcting a behaviour and defining a person.

The heart of the Guidebook

The *Guidebook* helps the child rediscover what they already have and offers them words and tools to recognise it in everyday life, precisely in the moments when they risk forgetting it. The Tools of the Heart — the Magic Blanket, the Photo of Love, the Secret Diary, the Box of Infinite Love — are how this message takes shape, page after page.



2. The characters of the Little Stars

Every character in the world of the Little Stars comes from a precise choice, not from an aesthetic requirement. Knowing the reason behind each one helps in reading the book.

The Child

The Child represents every Little Star: it is the reader, always addressed in the plural (“Dear Little Stars”). Rather than representing childhood in terms of age, the Child represents the part of the human being that lives an experience before interpreting it — a dimension that continues to exist in adults too. This is why the *Guidebook* can also be read by people who are much older.

The Child is not an exemplary protagonist: they can be afraid, get angry, make mistakes, not understand straight away. This is not a narrative limitation but an educational necessity — a protagonist who is always brave could feel impossible to live up to. The project does not aim to offer a perfect model to imitate, but a travelling companion whom readers feel to be like themselves, because the Child faces the same difficulties they do.

Why the Child has two faces. In the illustrations the Child has two faces: a boy and a girl. Their presence can help whoever reads or listens to identify with the character. They are not necessarily brother and sister, nor two figures with different functions: both represent the Little Star and go through the experiences of the book with equal importance. Both have a Heart and a Little Cloud, feel emotions and form thoughts.

Polly Pitty

She is the author’s playful alter ego. She accompanies the reader without ever passing judgement on their behaviour or their emotions: she leaves them room for discovery and stays by their side even when they make mistakes.

The Heart

The Heart represents feeling: it experiences emotions and makes them visible through its colours. Listening to them can help us recognise what we need. Fear can point to the need for safety, sadness to the need for closeness; anger can signal an obstacle, a hurt or something experienced as unfair, while shame can make us long to rediscover our worth. These links guide the reading, but they are not a rigid correspondence: the same emotion can tell of different needs, and several emotions can take turns around the same experience.

The Heart never judges what it feels: it does not decide to be happy or sad, it simply feels, and what it feels is not presented as right or wrong. This is why the *Guidebook* avoids phrases like “you shouldn’t feel that way”: the Heart does not have correct emotions, it has authentic ones. A pale blue, red or



grey Heart is not a Heart that is malfunctioning: it is a Heart making visible something that deserves to be heard.

The Little Cloud

The Little Cloud represents the thoughts and interpretations through which we try to understand what is happening and, often, to protect ourselves. It observes, compares, imagines, predicts and builds hypotheses. It can find a useful possibility, but it can also fill a still uncertain space with conclusions that do not match the whole of reality.

This is why the Little Cloud is not presented as an enemy to be silenced, blocked or corrected. It is trying to help, even when its thoughts become insistent or overly cautious. The Heart and the Little Cloud are not opponents: the Heart feels, the Little Cloud thinks and interprets, while the person can listen to both, tell what they feel apart from what they imagine, and choose how to act.

A detail that applies to both: neither the Heart nor the Little Cloud has a proper name. They are not called “Heartie” or “Cloudy” — they are simply the Heart and the Little Cloud. A proper name would have turned them into fantasy characters, external to the story. Instead they remain inner images in which every child can recognise themselves: they are not just characters in the book, they are the Heart and the Little Cloud of every Little Star.

The Star

It is the most essential character in the world of the Little Stars and, not by chance, the one that appears least in this first book. It represents the deep core of every person, the part that remains whole even when everything else changes.

The choice of symbol is not aesthetic. A light, a spark, a sun or a flame could have worked just as well visually, but they do not have the same quality: a star shines without intruding, remains present even when no one is looking at it, and keeps shining even when the sky is overcast. This is exactly what the project wants to represent: a person’s worth does not depend on what they feel, on what they think, or on the results they achieve. It simply exists.

In the *Guidebook* the Star is present but silent: it appears rarely, does not speak, and gives neither answers nor advice. It is not a spiritual guide, and it does not necessarily represent a religious affiliation, an angel or a divinity: its meaning is deliberately left open, so that every child can welcome it regardless of culture or family background.

This same silent presence is also found graphically: a small Star appears in the header of every page of the *Guidebook*, from the beginning to the end of the book. It is not a second symbol, nor a cross-reference: it is the same Star that, in the story, walks beside the Child without ever imposing itself. Here it does so in the most literal way possible — it follows every page, just as it accompanies the Little Star in the adventure of life.



3. Why needs come before values

We chose to start from needs, in order to accompany the child towards the discovery of values.

Many behaviours that adults interpret simply as bad manners may also contain the child's attempt to respond to a need that has not yet been recognised. Feeling safe can reduce the need to control what happens; feeling loved can make some separations easier to bear; recognising one's own worth can lessen the need to keep proving it. This does not make kindness, sharing or courage automatic: values are also shown, explained and learned within relationships, but they can find more fertile ground when needs are listened to.

A behaviour, then, should not be reduced to a positive or negative label. It helps to recognise the need, the emotion or the difficulty that may have accompanied it, without thereby justifying a gesture that hurts. The path is: observe what happened, listen to what the person feels and needs, take responsibility for the behaviour, and look for a possible response or a way to make amends.

4. The common thread: looking at the heart before the behaviour

There is a way to sum up the whole *Guidebook* in a single sentence: it teaches children and adults to look at the heart before judging the behaviour. It is not a book about emotions, nor about needs, nor about communication — or rather, it is all of these things together, because they all rest on this one principle.

Applied to everyday life, this principle makes our language more attentive. When a child shouts, as well as setting the necessary limit, we can ask ourselves what they are trying to communicate. When a parent struggles to say “I love you”, perhaps they never learned to express it; that does not mean the child needs to hear it any less. When a friend teases, the first thing is to say clearly that this behaviour can hurt and must be stopped; only afterwards, without inventing motives, can we try to understand what led them to act that way.

Distinguishing the person from their behaviour does not mean considering every gesture acceptable. Understanding that emotions, needs or difficulties may lie behind a behaviour does not mean claiming to know its cause, nor asking whoever has been hurt to put up with it: looking at the Heart goes hand in hand with discernment, responsibility and protection.



5. The four symbols and their functions

From the second chapter, the book introduces an imaginary suitcase that every child carries: it holds dreams, talents, wishes and possibilities, and contains three precious objects — the Magic Blanket, the Photo of Love and the Secret Diary. Later on, the Box of Infinite Love is added. The symbols are not the needs and do not coincide with them: they represent resources and possible ways of recognising those needs and taking care of them.

- **The Magic Blanket** → evokes protection and safety: shelter, warmth and the possibility of asking for help when something frightens us or leaves us exposed.
- **The Photo of Love** → evokes belonging and closeness: the bond with those who love us, even when they are far away or cannot be there at that moment.
- **The Secret Diary** → holds recognition and the memory of what is beautiful: our abilities, our pride, gestures of love, kind words we have received and the moments when we felt seen and appreciated.
- **The Box of Infinite Love** → in our Heart there is a Box for every person we love, and that person also keeps one for us. Every Box is unique and, when it seems full, it grows larger: love does not divide, it expands.

These symbols are encountered following a narrative progression: the Little Star recognises what they carry with them, meets different ways of seeking safety, closeness and recognition, and finally discovers that every bond can have a place of its own. The progression guides the story, but it does not turn the symbols into rigid or interchangeable categories.

Keeping them in mind as you read helps you understand what is happening when a chapter comes back to them. It can be useful for adults too: at the end of a heavy day, we can ask ourselves what we are feeling, what we might need and what concrete resource could support us in that moment.

In this first book the symbols are not presented through a definition (“the Magic Blanket represents safety”), because their meaning has to emerge gradually through the story: first the emotional bond, then awareness.

6. The relationship between the Heart and the Little Cloud

It is easy to read the Heart and the Little Cloud as two opposing forces — authentic emotions against thoughts that complicate everything. This reading does not belong to the philosophy of this project.

The Heart and the Little Cloud can influence each other: an insistent thought can unsettle the Heart, and an intense emotion can lead the Little Cloud to produce new interpretations. This movement



does not make them opponents. The Heart keeps on feeling; the Little Cloud keeps on looking for meanings and possibilities. Neither of the two holds the whole story on its own.

Balance is not reached when the Heart feels only pleasant emotions or when the Little Cloud stops thinking. It comes from being able to listen to what we feel, observe what we are thinking, and recognise that a thought does not automatically become true just because it is insistent.

Why two separate characters

Every experience can produce two closely linked movements: living it and trying to understand it. When the Child falls and gets hurt, the Heart feels the pain and the Little Cloud may start wondering what happened, whether it could happen again and how to avoid it. These movements can appear almost together and influence each other without merging.

The Heart feels; the Little Cloud observes and interprets. The Heart makes the emotion visible; the Little Cloud looks for a meaning or a solution. Keeping them distinct avoids portraying a conflict between reason and emotions: no part of the person is declared wrong, even when a thought or a reaction does not produce the desired result.

One point must be held firm: it is not the Heart and the Little Cloud that decide. At the centre there is each one of us, who listens to both and, little by little, learns to choose how to act, with the tools suited to their age.

7. The structure of the book and why it follows this order

As we have seen, the book builds a progression that goes from listening to oneself to meeting others, in five main stages:

- **I get to know myself** — the three precious objects in the suitcase.
- **I discover what happens inside me** — first difficulties, emotions, thoughts (the Little Cloud), masks.
- **I choose how to grow** — the courage to choose, the importance of expressing ourselves well.
- **I meet others** — looking at others with love, the Boxes of Infinite Love, intuitions.
- **I carry all this into the world** — the words that make love blossom.

The fifth stage is not a chapter like the others: the child does not take away a theory, but seven concrete phrases — to use at home, at school, with friends, and one day as an adult. Right after it, the chapter “What do we take with us?” gathers up the whole journey before the Conclusion: it is the door through which the child leaves the book.



On a first reading, following the order of the book can help you grasp the thread of the journey. It is still possible to pause, go back or choose a chapter close to what the child is experiencing at the moment.

“The courage to choose” as a turning point

It is worth knowing, as you read this chapter, that it marks a real change of perspective in the book. Up to this point the child has learned to know themselves: they have discovered their needs, learned to listen to their emotions, observed their thoughts and recognised the masks they wear when they feel vulnerable. With “The courage to choose” all this turns into concrete action: the child discovers that they cannot choose everything that happens to them, but they can choose how to respond, which thought to feed and how to communicate what they feel. It is the passage that naturally prepares the whole second part of the book, devoted to listening to others.

8. Words as action

In the book, saying something is not only describing it: it can become a way of taking care of it. When the child learns to say “Will you hug me too?” or “It hurts when you make fun of me”, they make what they feel communicable and open up the possibility of being heard, asking for help, setting a limit or looking for a solution. Words do not automatically make the emotion disappear and do not guarantee the other person’s response, but they allow the experience to come out of silence and enter the relationship.

This applies to adults too. The phrases the book invites us to give to others (“I believe in you”, “I’m proud of you”, “It’s okay to make mistakes”) are not formulas to recite: they work when they are the true expression of what you feel. Putting what you feel into words — even just by writing it down, even just by saying it to yourself — is already a small act of care, not a mere report.

A progression to notice when reading aloud: I believe in you → You can do it → It’s okay to make mistakes

These three chapters, read in sequence, form a path worth noticing as you read them with a child: first, trust is restored in the good that already exists within them (“I believe in you”), then comes the push for the first step (“You can do it”), and finally the child is helped to face the fear of making mistakes (“It’s okay to make mistakes”). A useful thread to keep in mind: in these chapters, courage is never the absence of fear, but the choice to go forward in spite of fear.



9. How to read it aloud with a child

The refrains are intentional: in its chapter, each emotion opens with the Heart speaking in the first person about what it is going through or the need it might point to (“It may tell us: ‘...’”, with a small variation for shame: “It may tell us that we need to remember: ‘...’”). Fear, sadness and shame also close with a similar formula (“Listening to this need helps us...” or “can help us...”); anger, instead, has an ending of its own, because listening to it does not mean letting it decide our behaviour. Read them with a similar rhythm every time: the child will learn to recognise the structure, even if the words are not identical.

Joy also follows a different movement, without ceasing to be an emotion. Its chapter does not close with the same formula as the others, because it focuses on the possibility of recognising it, living it and sharing it. It can be read in a more relaxed tone, letting the child make room for pleasant sensations without turning them into an obligation to be happy.

The open questions (“How do we feel?”, “Think about it: what have you put in your suitcase to feel good every day?”) have no right answer: they are spaces deliberately left for the child, to pause and look inside. Don’t rush to suggest one.

Some pages are designed to be completed by the illustration, not by the text alone. And there is no hurry to finish the book in one sitting: each chapter also stands on its own — it is fine to read one per evening, or to come back several times to the same one, especially to the chapters on the emotions the child is going through at that moment.

If, reading these pages together with a child, you find you have rediscovered something of your own as well — a forgotten need, a colour of your Heart you had not felt for a long time — then the book will have done exactly what it was written for.

10. Psychological and developmental considerations

The following points gather the main precautions to keep in mind while reading. They do not turn the *Guidebook* into a clinical tool: they help adults respect the complexity of children’s experience and recognise when a situation calls for more expert listening.

- **Emotions and needs.** The associations suggested are only indicative. Fear can point to safety, sadness to closeness, anger to respect or protection, and shame to recognition; however, the same emotion can accompany different needs, and one experience can contain several emotions that alternate or overlap. The child should not feel obliged to fit into a single category.



- **Shame and guilt.** The chapter on shame keeps a protective distinction between behaviour and identity. Guilt can concern what we have done; shame can make us fear that there is something wrong with who we are. Phrases like “a mistake doesn’t say who we are” allow us to take responsibility without turning it into a condemnation of the person: recognising a mistake, accepting its consequences and trying to put things right does not mean losing one’s worth or the right to be loved.
- **The Heart and the Little Cloud** offer accessible images for telling emotions and thoughts apart. The adult can use them to open a conversation, without asking the child to constantly monitor themselves or to analyse every inner change.
- **Masks.** The examples in “Beyond the masks” help recognise common ways of hiding what we feel. They are not a catalogue of behaviours to look for in every situation: while reading, it is enough to welcome the examples in which the child recognises themselves, without pushing them to identify with all of them.
- **Model phrases** of assertive communication are possibilities, not formulas to recite. They can be adapted to the child’s spontaneous words, as long as what happened, how it made them feel and what they want to ask for remain clear.
- **Calming down alone and together.** In the early years, the ability to regulate one’s emotions on one’s own is still developing: the child also learns by leaning on the calm of the adult beside them. This is co-regulation, from which self-regulation grows over time. That is why, when an emotion explodes, the way we react matters a great deal: it is from there that the child begins to understand what can be done with that emotion, and they will carry that understanding into future situations. Breathing, counting or pausing can help; seeking the closeness and support of an adult remains just as important. Growing up does not mean having to learn to always calm down alone.
- **Spiritual references.** The Beings of pure Love come from the author’s sensibility, but they can also become part of the reader’s: everyone is free to welcome them, adapt them or leave them aside. In any case, they do not replace asking a trusted adult for practical help when the child is frightened, in difficulty or in need of protection.
- **Reading together or alone.** The *Guidebook* can be read together with an adult or, when the child is able to, independently. In shared reading the adult can offer explanations and a listening ear; in independent reading each child picks up the layers closest to their own experience and can come back later to the more complex ones.
- **Growing with others.** As children grow, so do their ability to compare themselves with peers, their social awareness and their capacity to consider points of view other than their own. These abilities support chapters such as the one on shame and “Looking at others with love”, without assuming that all children develop them at the same time or in the same way.



- **A layered reading.** A child does not need to understand every level on a first reading: what matters is that no layer makes them feel guilty, makes them responsible for adults' difficulties or makes them think they must face everything alone.

11. For parents

Fear. When a child is afraid, the Heart turns dark grey and seeks safety. The parent can do the same thing we ask the child to do: welcome it without minimising it. Not “there’s nothing to be afraid of”, but listening to what frightened them, staying close, offering the same protection the Magic Blanket represents. Welcoming fear, not correcting it.

Sadness. When a child is sad, the Heart grows heavy and turns a faded pale blue: it asks for closeness, a hug, to be included. The parent can meet this need with the same simplicity with which the book invites the child to ask for it: a hug, a moment of attention. If that is not possible at that moment, explain why clearly, without making the child feel less loved because of it.

Anger. When a child is angry, the Heart glows an intense red. The book suggests stopping, breathing or counting to ten before responding. The parent can support this space by trying, as far as possible, not to react in turn with anger or impatience, allowing the time needed and then listening to what hurt the child. A calm response can protect both one’s own Heart and the child’s, without expecting the adult to always manage it perfectly.

Shame. When a child makes a mistake and feels ashamed, the Heart grows small and hides: it does not only ask for affection, it needs to remember its own worth. The parent can welcome the mistake without turning it into a judgement on the person — separating “you made a mistake” from “there is something wrong with you”. The *Guidebook* in fact uses both phrasings: the Heart reminds us “Even if I made a mistake, I am worth just as much”, and the child can ask the parent “Even if I made a mistake, do you still love me?”

Joy. When a child is happy, the Heart lights up in a thousand colours. Here the parent’s task is the simplest of all: to be there to share it, without minimising it or hurrying it. Rejoicing with them is already a gift.



References and sources

The *Guidebook for Little Stars* is a narrative and psycho-educational work. Its main psychological foundations are consistent with verified empirical studies and theoretical contributions, selected taking into account the participants' age, the nature of the samples and the limits of applicability of each source. The images of the Heart, the Little Cloud and the precious objects, on the other hand, are the author's original symbolic translation: they are narrative images, not literal descriptions of psychological functioning.

Some sources are accompanied by a brief note on the sample or on the nature of the study, so that readers can judge their scope for themselves.

Main empirical sources

Studies of child development, including longitudinal studies.

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Empirical sources with a note on the sample

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Theoretical and historical foundations

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