

# A Short Guide to the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

## Background

- The SDQ is a short behavioural screening questionnaire, and is the tool used by Hampshire Children's Services to measure the emotional and behavioural health of Looked After Children aged 4 – 16. It can also be used as a tool to inform the care planning and PEP for the child, and to support access of additional services such as CAMHS or behavioural support.
- Social Workers (SWs) and their PA's are responsible for the distribution and collection of SDQs and for ensuring that scores are recorded by the team admin. This must be completed at least once per year for the duration of the child's time in care.
- Team Admin Assistants have been trained to input SDQ data onto ICS and the scores for each completed SDQ are entered. However, this is being completed by Shirlene and Jemma in this area.
- If the child or carer refuses to complete the SDQ, a 'non-return' must be entered onto the system.
- If SWs decide that additional intervention is required, this must be detailed in the child's care plan.

## The process

- The trigger for the child's **first ever SDQ** is the **4-month CLA review**. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) instigates the SDQ process if it is possible that the child will stay in care for at least 2 more months.
- The Social Worker ensures the carer has the SDQ form and stamped addressed envelope (addressed to the SW's team admin).
- Team Admin creates a new SDQ on ICS with **target start** date = issue date. If HCC carer, contacts the Family Placement Social Worker (FPSW) admin to inform of process beginning.
- Carer completes SDQ and returns it to the SW's Team Admin within 4 weeks.
- Team Admin enters the **actual date** and **score** in ICS, with SW named as person responsible (this automatically sends workflow to SW).

**If the young person is already known to CAMHS or another support service (eg behavioural support):**

- Regardless of the SDQ score, the SW sends a copy of the completed SDQ to the support service for information.

**Non-returns:**

- If the carer does not return the form within 4 weeks, the SW makes contact directly to find out why. For HCC carers, social worker liaises with FPSW to offer help to carer in completing SDQ. If a non-return is confirmed, the Team Admin adds the date, status and a non-return reason to ICS.

## **Triangulation**

**If the carer SDQ Score is 13 or less:**

- No further action is required by the Key Worker unless they feel the SDQ is not representative, in which case they are free to instigate the triangulation process. **Subsequent SDQs** should be sent out with the annual **Review Health Assessment (RHA)** paperwork and the same process followed as for the first one.

**If the carer SDQ Score is 14 – 16:**

- The social worker should consider intervention to maintain or improve the score. **Subsequent SDQs** should be sent out with the annual **Review Health Assessment (RHA)** paperwork and the same process followed as for the first one.

**If the carer SDQ Score is 17 or more:**

- SW will ask the Team Admin to send an SDQ form & stamped addressed envelope to the Designated Teacher (DT) in the child's school.
- Team Admin enters **two new SDQs** and **target start** dates in ICS.
- The DT ensures the SDQ is completed by the most appropriate non-health professional in school and returned within 4 weeks.
- At the same time, SW completes an SDQ, either for or with the child/yp and gives it to Team Admin within 4 weeks.
- Once returned, Team Admin enters the two new **SDQ actual dates** and **scores** in ICS, with SW named as responsible (this automatically sends workflow to SW).

- **Subsequent SDQs** should be sent out with the annual **Review Health Assessment (RHA)** paperwork and the same process followed as for the first one.

**If either DT or SW score is 14 or more:**

- While 14-16 is borderline, any second score of 14+ (alongside the high score from the first SDQ in the series) indicates need for discussion between SW, carer and school to decide what action is appropriate to address the identified needs. This may include contacting the CAMHS helpline or other support services for alternative intervention.

## **Annual Review**

### **Review Health Assessment (RHA):**

- Admin sends out another SDQ to the carer, together with the RHA paperwork.
- At RHA the CiC Nurse will ask the carer if they have completed and returned the SDQ, establish what the previous score was, discuss any interventions re 14+ scores and make appropriate referrals as actions from the assessment if necessary. This process will be repeated at each RHA.

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## **Frequently Asked Questions: Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)**

### **What is the SDQ?**

A questionnaire that measures the emotional & behavioural health of children & young people aged 4-17. It measures five areas: emotional, conduct, hyperactivity/inattentiveness, peer relationships and pro-social behaviour. The SDQ is a screening tool and not intended for diagnostic purposes.

### **Where does the SDQ come from?**

Professor Robert Goodman devised the measuring tool and it was first published in 1997.

### **Why are carers completing the SDQ about Looked After Children (LAC)?**

A new legal requirement was introduced from April 2008, so that all local authorities have to report annually on the emotional & behavioural health of LAC aged 4-16. The tool chosen by the Department of Education is the SDQ and carers must return a questionnaire about the children they care for who fall within the cohort.

### **Is it mandatory to complete the SDQ?**

There are 'exception categories' – if the child has a severe disability, or if the child is Fraser competent and refuses to comply. In the case of exceptions, the questionnaire still needs to be returned with the reason for not completing written clearly on it so that this can be recorded on the child's file.

### **What if a child has recently been placed?**

Where a carer feels they do not know the child well enough, they should contact the social worker for the child to discuss who is best placed to complete the SDQ.

### **What if a child is in a residential placement?**

There should be someone in the residential unit – eg. a 'house parent' or residential worker – who knows the child in their accommodation setting and this is the person who should complete the carer SDQ.

### **Does the SDQ have to be completed for children placed out of county?**

Yes. Every LAC child's emotional and behavioural health should be supported, regardless of where they have been placed.

### **What information does the SDQ give?**

It allows a comparison of areas in which the child is displaying positive behaviour or experiencing difficulty. Page 1 allows a Total Difficulties Score to be derived. Page 2 has Impact Supplement questions that can also be scored; these measure the persistence of behaviours, and any resulting distress, burden to others or social impairment.

### **What do the scores mean?**

A higher score indicates that the child is having a greater difficulty in that area. Social workers may use this to focus help in certain areas, while a total score above a given range supports a referral to CAMHS.

### **What will happen following the SDQ being returned?**

The social worker for the child will examine the data and in discussion with others (including the child and their carer) make a decision about what, if anything, to do next. A procedure (attached flowchart) has been prepared for social workers to follow.

**Does anyone else have to complete the SDQ?**

Not as a legal requirement. However, the SDQ may be completed by three groups of people: (1) parent/carer, (2) teacher and (3) social worker or child (for young people who are Fraser competent. Where the first (parent/carer) SDQ gives a borderline or high score, the social worker will instigate the second and third SDQ and use the results of these to determine further action (in accordance with the agreed procedure).

**How will the data be stored?**

The completed SDQ is scanned onto the child's electronic file and the total score recorded. This score is also reported to the DfE annually.

**Should carers keep a copy of the questionnaire once it is completed?**

No. The SDQ forms part of the child's HCC record.

**Should the child be informed about the SDQ?**

Yes. The social worker for the child should discuss the SDQ process with them so they are aware of it and involved as appropriate.

**Should the child be involved in the process?**

Yes, wherever possible. Carers will need to use their discretion and knowledge of the child about whether or how best to do this. If any carer is uncertain about whether or how to involve the child they care for, they should contact the social worker for the child and/or the carer supervisor in order to discuss the best way forward.

**Will the child ever see what has been completed about them?**

Yes. This will happen automatically where carers use the questionnaire as an opportunity to discuss with the child how things are going for them. As the final SDQ is placed on the child's HCC record they will of course have access to this at some point in the future.

**Can the SDQ be completed electronically?**

No, not yet. For the time being all questionnaires have to be printed off in paper form although it is anticipated that electronic completion will be available in the future.

*Author / owner / questions to:*

*Dated:*