

# Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: SDQ

## Guidance for Professionals

### What is an SDQ?

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, or SDQ, is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire. There are 3 questionnaires: one for the teacher, one for the pupil (over the age of 11) and one for the parents/carers. They have the same questions in them, just asked in slightly different ways.

Each questionnaire consists of 25 questions assessing the following areas: emotional symptoms; conduct problems; hyperactivity; peer relationship problems; kind and helpful behaviour. There is also a short impact supplement.

### Why do we use SDQs?

Local authorities are required to use the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) to assess the emotional wellbeing of individual looked after children aged 4-16. Understanding the emotional and behavioural needs of looked after children is important so that the relevant support can be put in place and children are given the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

The number of SDQs completed by the local authority for looked after children is reported to the DfE annually.

The requirements to complete SDQs is set out in the following statutory guidance:

- Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked after children
- Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children
- The Designated Teacher for looked after and previously looked after children

### When is an SDQ completed?

For children aged 4 to 16 an SDQ is completed by the Designated Teacher and parent/carer:

- when a child is **new** to care
- then **annually** as long as the child remains in care
- or children under the age of 5, after they have been in care for **6 months**

Children over the age of 11 can complete their own SDQ annually.

An SDQ can be completed at any time if any professional feels this is needed to access services and support for a child/young person.

The Named Nurse Children in Care (NHCT) sends the SDQ form to the foster carer/residential worker and child. The completed form is returned to the Named Nurse who scores the SDQ.

The Virtual School send the SDQ form to the Designated Teacher. The completed form is sent by the Virtual School to the Named Nurse who scores the SDQ.

The scores are triangulated if necessary and are used at the child's health assessment and for their first PEP meeting.

**SDQ forms are available online from [sdq.org](https://www.sdq.org)**

### How can an SDQ be used?

The SDQ provides a means of regularly measuring the emotional and behavioural experiences of looked-after children and supports the professional network to form a view

about a looked after child or young person's emotional wellbeing. Regular review enables the network around the child and young person to act earlier to put in place appropriate support to minimise these needs.

It is important to routinely assess the emotional wellbeing of looked after children because:

- Looked after children have a higher prevalence of emotional and behavioural issues arising from neglect and abuse
- Looked after children are more likely to develop mental health problems and require provision from CYPS
- Looked after children often experience attachment difficulties and require therapeutic support

The completed SDQ can be used in the following ways:

- To inform statutory health assessments completed by the NHS
- To inform whether the child/young person needs a referral into CYPS
- To evaluate progress against emotional wellbeing outcomes as part of the overall health needs of looked after children
- To give commissioners of services a better understanding of the emotional wellbeing needs of Northumberland looked after children

### What does an SDQ score tell us?

Bandings have been developed which can help predict children and young people who are likely to develop significant mental health problems based on their SDQ score.

The bandings classify scores as:

Total difficulties score	0-13	Normal
Total difficulties score	14-16	Borderline
Total difficulties score	17-40	Cause for concern

If the child's total difficulties score is outside the normal range and considered as giving cause for concern, professionals might then triangulate the scores of the teacher, parent/carer and child SDQ.

Every child's education SDQ score is recorded on their ePEP, and their foster carer and/or child score is recorded on their health assessment. Social workers have access to PEPs and the health assessment stored on ICS.

Who needs to know the SDQ score	Where can the SDQ score be used	Who needs to take action based on the score
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Health professional</li> <li>•Designated Teacher</li> <li>•Virtual School</li> <li>•Carer</li> <li>•Residential worker</li> <li>•Child/young person</li> <li>•IRO</li> <li>•Social worker</li> <li>•Care Team</li> <li>•Family Placement</li> <li>•Data Unit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Care Team meeting</li> <li>•LAC review</li> <li>•EHCP review</li> <li>•Placement review</li> <li>•PEP review</li> <li>•Health assessment</li> <li>•CYPS assessment and review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Health professional</li> <li>•Social worker</li> <li>•Designated Teacher</li> <li>•Virtual School</li> <li>•CYPS</li> </ul>