Best Practice Guidance for completing, scoring and responding to the data from Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires

RESIDENTIAL WORKER GUIDE

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Why we are introducing this Best Practice Guidance

Care Matters: Time for Change (2007) highlighted the need to improve the mental health of young people in care.

‘Looked after’ children are 4-5 times more likely to have a mental health disorder than those living at home.

Recommended a new local government indicator (NI58) be used to show emotional well-being of children in care.

This indicator was withdrawn in 2010 but data is still formally collected by the Department for Education (SSDA903).

We want to make the best use of the information we are collecting about the young people in our care, which means collecting the information sensitively and accurately. It also means understanding what the information is really telling us about that child in their current situation. Finally it means using the data to make the best decisions we can about how we respond to each child’s needs, both in terms of the supports they need themselves and the systemic response to the changing needs of our Looked After Children population.

This development requires an organised approach, commitment and good will, particularly from those social workers to whom Looked After Children are allocated.

The child should be at the centre of everything we do, their mental health is paramount to us, and getting it right could reduce stress, promote stability and save money, in the long-term, by reduced placement breakdowns etc.

The new processes are clearly mapped and can be largely completed within the existing pattern of contact a social worker will have with carer and child.

To help you keep on the right track, the following pages explain the Best Practice in terms of collecting the data, scoring the data and responding to what the data means.

COMPLETING the SDQ

It is very important that the SDQ is completed properly by a carer who knows the child well. This should be the main carer (foster carer or residential care worker), **following a conversation with the child’s social worker** at, or near the time of completion.

It is possible that the parent, or a previous foster carer, is the best person to complete the form (if the child has just gone into care, or changed care placement).

Accuracy in recording is the most important issue.

Forms should not be ‘sent out’ to carers as the social worker needs to know the information given was considered fully.

**The best practice scenario is that the social worker and carer complete the SDQ *from the carer’s point of view*, while they discuss the issues raised by items in the questionnaire. The SDQ can be a useful tool for discussion about the child and the way they present to the world.**

It is also important for the carer completing the SDQ to keep in mind they are describing the child’s behaviour **over the past six months.** This can be tricky if they have been through a very challenging time in the last few days, which can tend to skew the answers on the basis of just one or two incidents.

SDQs should be fully completed, both front and back. The ‘impact’ score is highly important because it indicates how much effect the difficulties have on the child and carers.

Even while having a conversation around the SDQ, completion should only take about 15 to 20 minutes.

**WHAT TO DO NEXT:**

**Return your completed SDQ form to the child’s allocated case worker (social worker) as soon as it is complete.**

**They will discuss with their manager and arrive at the most appropriate**

**SDQ OUTCOME STATEMENT**

**WITH YOUR MANAGER, ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION BASED ON THE SDQ REPORT:**

**If the scores raise concern, are unexpected or the supports are insufficient, then the SDQ OUTCOME STATEMENT (C) will be the likely outcome.**

**(A) “No concerns from the SDQ scorecard / report – therefore repeat SDQ next year”;**

**(B) “Some concerning scores but, on balance, the child is thought to be sufficiently supported within their placement – therefore repeat SDQ next year”;**

**(C) “Some concerning scores and, on balance, the child is not thought to be sufficiently supported at present – therefore further SDQ data should be gathered / multi-agency meeting to be held to discuss the most appropriate ways to support this child”**

If SDQ Outcome Statement (C) is agreed then you should:

- liaise with the allocated case worker to support the young person to complete a Self-rated SDQ [S11-17] (see guidance on completing an SDQ) within 10 working days and then return the form to the allocated case worker.

- in the week before the next LAC Review, you will ensure that the Parent (carer)-rated **follow-up** SDQ, and the Self-rated **follow-up** SDQ are completed **so that they can be discussed in the next LAC review meeting**.

From this point, SDQ completion will revert back to annual data collection of the Parent-rated SDQ only, unless scoring reports indicate SDQ Outcome Statement (C).

The SDQ Outcome Statement will normally be agreed annually within subsequent LAC Review meetings.