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Looked After Children –

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Process

Surrey Children’s Services Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Process

Introduction

This process that relates to all Looked After Children in the care of Surrey Children’s Services age 4-17 who have been in care for over a year, and is for those professionals involved in the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) process, particularly children’s social workers, foster carer and key workers, designated teachers for children in care, supervising social workers, and health and CAMHS colleagues.

The primary DFE guidance in relation to SDQs is in Annex B of the 2015 guidance “Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked after children; statutory guidance for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS England”, which can be found [here](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/413368/Promoting_the_health_and_well-being_of_looked-after_children.pdf).

It sets out that the primary aims of completing the SDQ are to establish the emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by looked after children at a national level, and enable social workers to have information to help social workers form a view about the emotional wellbeing of individual children.

In addition, the SDQ provides information about the child’s emotional and behavioural needs for health professionals completing review health assessments, and a mechanism by which CAMHS 3Cs service can offer additional support to a child, as well as highlighting any social /emotional needs which may affect their learning in school and considered within their PEP.

The principles from the DFE guidance are that:

* SDQ questionnaires are given to carers to complete. This should be done well ahead of the child’s health assessment so that the completed SDQ informs the health assessment.
* carers are given an explanation of how it should be completed and that they understand why it is important to complete the SDQ (and that it is about the child and not a reflection on their ability to care for him or her). Carers should know to whom the completed SDQ should be returned and by when
* information in the completed questionnaires is collected by the local authority and the child’s total difficulties score is worked out and available to inform the child’s health assessment. This should help the social worker and health professionals to decide whether to triangulate the scores with an SDQ completed by the child’s designated teacher and (if the child is in the relevant age bracket) the child, and whether the child needs to be referred for further diagnostic assessment of their mental health
* if the child’s SDQ scores suggest there are underlying problems, this should trigger consideration of a fuller diagnostic assessment. The SDQ should be used as evidence to support a referral to local targeted or specialist mental health services, where appropriate.

Process and responsibilities

1. **Identifying the cohort of children requiring an SDQ and sending this out**

Business Support will use the Review Health Assessment Tableau report monthly to identify the Looked After children throughout the teams within Surrey who require an SDQ to be sent that month, which will be 3/4 months before the RHA is due.

The SDQ will be sent by Business Support electronically to the child’s social worker for the social worker to decide if it is best to either send electronically or give physically to the child’s carer/ keyworker/ parent. The carer should then complete and return to Business Support within 1 month.

The child’s social worker will copy in the supervising social worker to the electronic request/ separately notify the supervising social worker for the child’s foster carers (for both Surrey and external carers), so that they can lead on ensuring the return from their carers.

1. **Chasing non-returns**

Business support will send a reminder of the SDQ return to the child’s social worker 3 weeks after being sent out.

Business Support will send the Looked After Children and Care leavers Service Managers a list at the end of every month of those children who have not had a returned SDQ within 6 weeks of being sent out.

This list will be sent to the Service Manager for Surrey Children’s Home and the Surrey Fostering Service, to ensure that the relevant keyworkers and carers are spoken to and supported to return the SDQ swiftly.

For those children in external provisions or placed with parents, the Looked After Children and Care leavers Service Managers will remind the child’s social workers to ensure that they follow up with the provider or offer support to the parents to complete and return the SDQ swiftly.

In order to aim to have as many SDQs returned within timescales, the following efforts should be made for those completing them to understand the importance and how to undertake them:

-Surrey Fostering Service will regularly advertise this in their publications to foster carers

-Children’s social workers and SSWs should discuss the SDQ at placement planning meetings

-IROs should also discuss this and follow up on the scores and impact of these in Looked After Reviews

-Surrey Children’s Homes Service Manager will remind Home Managers of the SDQ importance and process

- An explanation of SDQ scores is planned for Designated Teacher training during Autumn and Spring training from the Virtual School.

1. **Recording the SDQ score**

Business Support will score the SDQ on return and record the score on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire in forms on LCS. They will send a notification to the social worker alerting them to the form being completed and scored, and the social worker should assess this in full.

Business Support will input the score onto their spreadsheet to send over to CAMHS and the Virtual School monthly.

1. **Sharing SDQs with health in conjunction with Review Health Assessment**

Business Support will send a copy of the completed SDQ to the LAC Health inbox, so that it can be provided to the relevant Looked After Nurse in advance of the child’s Review Health Assessment, to contribute to their assessment and preparation for meeting with the child. It may prompt further discussion between the Looked After nurse and child’s social worker.

Health will record the SDQ on their electronic system.

1. **When score is borderline or elevated- Schools**

The PEP electronic recording system Welfare Call will have a section added for the social worker to input the SDQ score. If the score is borderline or elevated, the Virtual School would expect to see one of the PEP targets addressing the child’s emotional needs and the impact of this on their learning.

If the score is elevated, the designated teacher should complete a schools SDQ and provide this to the social worker, in order to triangulate the scoring and provide further information to the social worker and network regarding the child’s emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The Virtual School will use data from the SDQ scores inputted into the PEPs to analyse the improvement of outcomes for children in the care of Surrey annually.

1. **Sharing scores with Children in Care CAMHS (3Cs), and their input for elevated scores**

Business Support will send a monthly spreadsheet of elevated SDQs Scores to David Morley, Caroline Lowe (both 3Cs Clinical Leads) and cc in Rebecca Robertson (Service Manager).

3Cs will then contact the social worker for the children with elevated scores who aren’t already receiving a service from 3Cs, and offer consultation about their emotional and behavioural wellbeing and if any further service may be needed from 3Cs. If the child lives out of county and the outcome of the consultation is that they require therapeutic support, the 3Cs out of county clinician can support with identifying the appropriate provision.

**Summary of child’s social worker’s role in the process**

1. Alert carers to the need for an SDQ at placement planning meetings
2. Send on the SDQ to the child’s carer/ keyworker/parent as soon as alerted by Business Support, choosing whether this is best done electronically/ by post/ together in next visit
3. Notify the SSW of the carer being sent the SDQ so they can follow this up
4. Chase SDQs that haven’t been returned from parents and carer/ keyworkers from provisions external to Surrey when reminded by Business Support
5. Read SDQ once recorded by Business Support to gather information on the child
6. Record SQD score in PEP and remind designated teacher to complete their SDQ for the triangulation process for borderline or elevate scores. One target should address the emotional needs of the child and impact on learning for children with elevated scores.
7. Arrange consultation with 3Cs for those that they are emailed about by 3Cs due to elevated scores and not already being known to 3Cs.

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