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| Title | Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire procedure |
| Purpose | Support practice relating to SDQs across the practice system |
| Updated by | Elaine Andrews Service Manager NW Looked After Team, Sarah Foster Head of Service, Gateway to Resources, Siobhan Walsh Assistant Director Looked After Children and Care Leavers |
| Approved by | Siobhan Walsh |
| Date | 17.10.24 |
| Version | V2 |
| Status | Completed |
| Review | July 2024 |
| Frequency | Every two years |
| Next review date | July 2026 |
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Surrey Children's Services Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Process

Introduction

This process 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 carers, children's homes, keyworkers, supported accommodation providers, Independent Reviewing Officer designated teachers for children in care, supervising Social Workers, Mental Health Social Workers, New Leaf workers and Health 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](#).

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 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 Mental Health Social Workers and New Leaf service can offer additional support to a child, as well as highlighting any social /emotional needs which may affect the child's 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 trained in the use 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 (RHA) and “SDQ Required” Tableau report on a monthly basis to identify the Looked After Children throughout all teams within Surrey who require an SDQ to be sent that month, which will be 3/4 months before the RHA is due, or if the SDQ is currently overdue.

A link to the SDQ form will be sent by Business Support electronically to the child’s Social Worker for them to decide if it is best to send this electronically or give physically to the child’s carer/ keyworker/ parent. The carer/keyworker/parent should then complete and return to Business Support within 1 week.

There may be a time during the child’s development where they are best placed to complete their own form. It is essential that whoever completes the form, is a consistent person to avoid fluctuating scores due to differing views of carers/workers/parents/children.

The child’s Social Worker will copy in the Supervising Social Worker (SSW) or Gateway to Resources Officer (GTR Officer) Gateway Admin via gateway.admin@surreycc.gov.uk on a weekly basis until completion of the SDQ. (depending on whether the child is placed in a Surrey or External placement) to the electronic request to notify them that the child’s SDQ is due. The SSW/(GTR Officer Gateway Admin on a weekly basis until completion of the SDQ.) will alert the carers/worker for that child so that they can lead on ensuring the return from their carers/providers.

2. Chasing non-returns

The Social Worker will follow up with chase both the carer/worker and the supervising Social Worker/ Gateway Officer/Admin on a weekly basis until completion of the SDQ.

Business Support will send a reminder of the SDQ return to the child’s Social Worker 2 weeks after being sent out.

Business support will send an escalation notification of the SDQ return to the allocated Service Manager 3 weeks after being sent out. This list will be sent by the allocated Service Manager to the Service Manager for Surrey Children’s Home, the Surrey Fostering Service and the Head of Gateway to Resources, to ensure that the relevant carers and providers/keyworkers are spoken to and supported to return the SDQ within a week.

The Allocated Service Manager will send an escalation notification of the SDQ return to Supervising Social Worker Manager or the Head of Gateway to Resources, Service Lead Assistant Director and Children's Resources Assistant Director at 4 weeks after being sent out.

If the SDQ has not been received within 6 weeks a formal Care Plan Alert should be completed by the Child's Independent Reviewing Officer and sent to the relevant professional to respond.

For those children placed with parents, the allocated Team Manager will remind the child's Social Workers to ensure that they follow up with the parents to complete and return the SDQ within 1 week.

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:

- Mental Health Social Workers do 3 monthly sessions within team/service meetings to Social Workers and Team Managers around the purpose and importance of SDQ completion.
- Surrey Fostering Service will regularly advertise this in their publications to foster carers
- Children's Social Workers and Supervising Social Workers should discuss the SDQ at placement planning meetings
- Surrey Children's Homes Service Manager will remind Home Managers of the SDQ importance and process
- Gateway to Resource Managers should remind external providers of the SDQ importance and process.
- IROs should discuss SDQ completion and follow up on the scores and impact of these in Looked After Children Reviews
- An explanation of SDQ scores will be provided as part of is planned for termly Designated Teacher network meetings throughout each academic year training during Autumn and Spring training from the Surrey Virtual School (SVS).

3. Recording the SDQ score

An automated system called the "Bot" scores the SDQ on return via the link and records the score on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire in forms on LCS. The "Bot" will send a notification to the Children's Social Worker alerting them to the form being completed and scored, and the Social Worker should assess this in full.

If there is an error whereby the "Bot" cannot score and upload the report automatically, then Business Support will complete this task.

A SharePoint Spreadsheet is available to all professionals contributing to the SDQ process which will show SDQ report status alongside score. This should be reviewed by the Mental Health Social Workers and the Virtual School on a monthly

basis. Access to this SharePoint site can be requested via sdqadministration@surreycc.gov.uk

4. Sharing SDQs with health in conjunction with the RHA

The “Bot” will send an alert that the SDQ has been completed to the allocated child’s Social Worker’s team duty inbox. When the RHA referral is sent to Health, Business Support will forward the SDQ form alongside the RHA paperwork (and EHCP, if relevant) to the Health Admin.

It is essential that that a copy of the completed SDQ is provided to the relevant Health Professional in advance of the child’s RHA, to contribute to their assessment and preparation for meeting with the child. It may prompt further discussion between the Health Professional and child’s Social Worker.

Health colleagues will record the SDQ on their electronic system.

If the SDQ is not available to the Health Professional at the time of the RHA, it will be noted as a specific action within the child’s health plan to be carried out. This action should be incorporated into the child’s care/pathway plan by the child’s Social Worker.

5. When score is borderline or elevated - Schools

The Personal Education Plan (PEP) electronic recording system, “Welfare Call” will have a section for the child’s 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 to address 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.

Any PEP targets should be incorporated into the child’s care/pathway plan by the child’s Social Worker.

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.

6. Sharing scores with New Leaf (CAMHS), and their input for elevated scores

Mental Health Social Workers within the Social Work Teams will have access to the SharePoint Spreadsheet and review monthly.

The Mental Health Social Workers will then contact the child’s Social Worker for the children with elevated scores who aren’t already receiving a service from New Leaf or alternative therapeutic provisions and offer consultation about the child’s

emotional and behavioural wellbeing and if any further service may be needed from New Leaf or alternative therapeutic provisions. If the child lives out of county and the outcome of the consultation is that they require therapeutic support, the New Leaf out of county clinician can support with identifying the appropriate provision.

7. Roles of professionals

Summary of Business Support worker's role in the process

1. Review Tableau to ascertain which children need SDQ's
2. Send SDQ notification and link to the child's Social Worker
3. Reviewing the SDQ Error report and uploading any SDQ's which have not been automated by the "Bot"
4. When RHA timescales occur, forwarding a copy of the completed SDQ to Health Colleagues
5. Send further emails to the child's Social Worker and managers in accordance with the "chasing non-returners process" (section 2)

Summary of child's Social Worker's role in the process

1. Alert carers/keyworkers/parents to the need for an SDQ at placement planning meetings
2. Send on the SDQ notification 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/GTR Officer of the carer being sent the SDQ so they can follow this up
4. Chase SDQs that haven't been returned from carers/keyworkers/parents when reminded by Business Support
5. Read SDQ once recorded by the "Bot" to gather information on the child
6. Arrange consultation with Mental Health Social Worker for those children with elevated scores and not already being known to New Leaf or other therapeutic provisions.
7. Record SDQ score in PEP and remind designated teacher to complete their SDQ for the triangulation process for borderline or elevated scores. One target should address the emotional needs of the child and impact on learning for children with elevated scores within their PEP.
8. Incorporate any actions/targets from the SDQ, RHA or PEP within the child's care/pathway plan.

Summary of Carer/Keyworker role in the process

- 1a. Complete the SDQ via the link within a week of receiving this from the child's Social Worker and screen shot that the form has been completed.
- 1b. Complete the SDQ paperwork within a week of receiving this from the child's Social Worker and return to the Social Worker.
2. Contribute to consultations and conversations with the child's linked professionals in regards to any elevated scores or concerns for the child's behaviour or emotional wellbeing.

Summary of Supervising Social Worker/Gateway Officer's role in the process

1. Alert carers/keyworkers to the need for an SDQ at placement planning meetings
2. To remind carers/keyworkers of the importance of completion of the SDQ and process on notification that an SDQ is due
3. Chase SDQs that haven't been returned from carer/keyworkers
4. Respond to escalation process if there is a delay in completion of SDQ (4 weeks)

Summary of Designated Teacher

1. Complete an SDQ for the triangulation process for borderline or elevated scores.
2. Add one target to the PEP to address emotional needs of the child and impact on learning for children with elevated scores.

Summary of Independent Reviewing Officer role in the process

1. Gain dates of SDQ at every Looked After Review
2. Discuss SDQ completion, follow up on the scores and impact of these in every Looked After Review
3. Complete a Care Planning Alert if there is delay on completion of the SDQ (at 6 weeks)