

Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire: A guide for foster carers

What is the strength and difficulties questionnaire?

- The Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire is usually called the SDQ for ease.
- It is a short behavioural screening questionnaire which has sections covering the child/young person's behaviour, concentration, emotions and relationships with other people.
- It is a clinically and internationally validated tool that is used across the World; it is available in many languages.
- It is used as part of a holistic (looking at the whole person not just part of them) assessment of a child or young person and can help to identify if they may need further assessment or if they would benefit from support/extra help.
- It is frequently used by many health professionals working children and young people to help assess their needs.
- The SDQ may not be suitable for use with children/young people with moderate to severe learning disability, in which case a detailed discussion about the child/young person's emotional wellbeing, behaviours and challenges will take place between professionals and the carer/family.
- There are three versions of the SDQ:

Parent/carer – completed for those aged 4–16 years (inclusive)

Teacher – completed for those aged 4–16 years where the parent/carer questionnaire scores 17 or over. Sometimes education colleagues may complete the SDQ at other times if it supports their overall assessment.

Self – completed by the young person themselves when they are aged 11-16 years (inclusive).

Using the Teacher and Self questionnaires helps give a broader understanding of the child/young person including how they feel they are doing and what life is like for them, and all three scores can be reviewed together (triangulated) to give a clearer picture.

Why are we asking you to complete it?

It is important to routinely assess the emotional wellbeing of Children in Care because they often experience worries, fears, sadness, behaviour and/or concentration issues. These emotions and challenges can be very upsetting and can make life difficult for them and for those that care for them.

The information provided by the SDQ can help:

- Identify areas where a child or young person may need further assessment.
- Help identify where a child/young person would benefit from support or extra help; it can also identify where the carers may need extra help and support.
- Identify where a child or young person is doing well and can provide a focus for further work on improving these areas. This information also helps carers and social workers to understand how they can positively support children and young people to achieve goals and outcomes.
- Professionals to evaluate the child/young person's progress against emotional wellbeing outcomes.

The Government requires Local Authorities to use the Parent/carer SDQ to assess the emotional well-being of individual children in care and should be completed by the main carer for each child or young person that is in care aged 4-16 years. Anonymous information is returned to the Department of Children, Schools, and Families.

When is the SDQ completed?

Young people aged 4-16 years of age are required to have the parent/carer version of the SDQ completed annually.

It should be completed 4-6 weeks prior to the child's Review Health Assessment date, thus ensuring that the scores are relevant and up to date, meaning any emotional/behavioural needs can be fully considered by the Looked After Children Specialist Nurse. These elements of the assessment will be included in the child/young person's health care plan.

Completing the SDQ

The SDQ should be completed by the carer who knows the child/young person best.

- The child's social worker or your adoption/fostering social worker will be able to answer your questions about the form and support you with completing this.
- Completion should be straightforward and take around 10 -15 minutes.
- SDQ completion does not need input from the child/young person, but it is expected that they will know about the questionnaire being completed if they are old enough and able to understand.
- Please write clearly on the form who you are and how long you have known the child/young person.
- Ensure that you include the date of completion.
- Read the statement and judge how well it describes the child/young person then tick the appropriate response for each question.
- Please answer every question as incomplete questionnaires cannot be scored.
- Please return the completed SDQ to the Children in Care Health Team as soon as possible so that it is available to help inform the assessment of the child or young person at their Review Health Assessment.

If you have any queries, please feel free to contact the Children in Care Health Team or the child/young person's social worker as we are always happy to help you.

What happens with the completed SDQ?

Once the carer has returned the completed SDQ the Children in Care Health Team scores the questionnaire and shares the questionnaire and score with the Social Worker.

The Social Worker will review the questionnaire and score, and will have a conversation with the foster carer and young person about the results.

If there are significant difficulties, the Children in Care Health Team will discuss this with the social worker who may arrange a further assessment in order to get the help the child or young person may need.

The results will be discussed at:

- The Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting.
- The Looked After Child review meeting and will be recorded in the child's Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) Chair's report.