
Strength & Difficulties Questionnaire

Guidance note for Social Workers & District Teams

Introduction

From April 2008 all local authorities in England have been required to provide information on the emotional and behavioural health of children and young people in their care. This data is collected through Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ). Across Lancashire, social workers and health professionals should consider SDQ scores as a basis to identify where positive action could be taken to promote emotional health and wellbeing in each case. The following briefing note provides advice and guidance.

What is the strength and difficulties questionnaire?

The strength and difficulties questionnaire is a measure of adjustment and behavioural, social and emotional difficulties in 3 – 16 year olds. It has five sections containing a series of items/questions relating to; emotional difficulties; conduct problems; hyperactivity or inattention; friendships and peer groups; and also positive behaviours. Individuals completing the questionnaire are asked to rate the applicability of those items/questions over the last 6 months to the child in question using a three point rating scale.

What do the SDQ results mean?

The SDQ results provide a total difficulty score (between 0-40), and a further breakdown of these results into four areas (emotional distress, behavioural difficulties, hyperactivity and attention difficulties and difficulties getting along with other children).

These results are not a judgement of a young person's mental health but they can provide predictions of the likelihood that a young person's emotional health and wellbeing is under strain.

Professionals are asked to pay particular attention to the total difficulties score (which can range from between 0-40)

- A score of 0-13 is considered to be within the 'normal' band.

This is not a judgement of the young person's mental health; rather this refers to the 'norm' of the population of young people in general. Young people falling into this band have a range of responses which would be expected of their peers.

- A score of 14-16 is considered to be within the 'borderline' band

Young people with a borderline score fall slightly outside the expected range of responses. It is likely that their mental health and wellbeing is under strain.

- A score of 17 and above is considered to within the 'abnormal' band'.

This is not a judgement of the young person's mental health, rather it refers to the fact that the SDQ score falls considerably outside the range of expected responses. It is very likely that the emotional health and wellbeing of young people falling into this band will be under considerable strain.

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The role of the local Children Looked After Team

The SDQ procedure *is attached to this document*.

Within each district, there should be an SDQ lead. This person is responsible for coordinating the SDQ procedure and should be contacted in the first instance with queries relating to the process in your area. In your area this person is.....

It is the responsibility of local Children Looked After Teams to arrange for a score to be obtained from the main carers of all looked after children between 3 and 16 (inclusive) Good practice also suggests that young people over the age of 11 should be supported by their social worker to complete a questionnaire as well. Advanced notification letters will be sent to foster carers, residential homes, parents of young people on home placements, and young people over the age of 11. SDQ questionnaires and guidance letters should be issued by district teams. The responsible childcare social workers should also make contact with carers, and assist where appropriate. Supervising social workers should be available to support and advise carers with how to complete their SDQ.

Once completed SDQ's have been returned, they should be scored by local district teams who should then pass on a breakdown of the scores and the hardcopy questionnaire to the responsible childcare social worker. It is the responsibility of the responsible social worker to record and determine any follow-up actions that need to take place (flow charts to assist with this are attached/available from your SDQ lead). Scores should be considered in the context of existing information relating to the emotional wellbeing of the child in question. Social workers can be signposted to CLASS/SCAYT for further help and advice (see below for contact details). All scores and follow up actions should be recorded on ISSIS as a Health Event.

In cases where a child has received a score which doesn't meet with the expectations of the social worker, it is good practice for the responsible social worker to arrange for a significant adult or teacher to complete an SDQ relating to the young person. This information should be considered alongside the original SDQ score, when considering what further action to take. Specific versions of the questionnaires for teachers and young people can be found at www.sdqinfo.com). Social workers can contact CLASS or SCAYT for advice and support.

Linking with the Health Assessment

Where possible, the most recent SDQ score should be made available to the health professional conducting the child/young person's annual health assessment. This is in line with Government guidance, and allows for recommendations to be incorporated from the child/young person's health professional.

Ongoing responsibility for overseeing any necessary action relating to the young person's SDQ score should remain with the childcare social worker.

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Monitoring (to be updated)

Each locality is required to provide a list of CLA and their respective SDQ scores to their PDRO by May 7th 2011.

The SDQ is a compulsory data item. This information should be provided in a spread sheet format and should include the following information (template spreadsheets will be issued to SDQ leads in each area):

- Name of child
- Social Worker
- Date SDQ request issued to carers
- Date of completion
- Indication/detail of any chase up for non return of SDQ
- Carer Total Difficulties Score
- Reason for non completion (coded in accordance with DCSF categories)
 - SDQ1 - no form returned as child under 4 or over 17 at date of assessment
 - SDQ2 carer refused to complete or return questionnaire
 - SDQ3 not possible to complete due to severity of the child's disabilities
 - SDQ4 other (please specify)
 - SDQ5 Child refuses to allow SDQ to take place
- Indication/detail of any other significant adults requested to complete SDQ
- Additional Total Difficulties Score

The following templates will be issued to SDQ leads in each district:

- **Advanced notification letters to carers**
- **Cover SDQ letters to carers**
- **SDQ Guidance for carers**
- **SDQ's**
- **Notification of SDQ to young people over age 11.**
- **List of children/young people included in the cohort.**
- **Spreadsheet for areas to score and record SDQ's.**
- **Flow charts for social workers to assist with actioning SDQ's (including signposting information).**

Please note, these documents will be issued to SDQ leads on an ongoing basis at each stage of the process.

Additional Support

For additional guidance and information about administration of the SDQ process in your area, please contact your SDQ lead.

For more information and guidance relating to the SDQ questionnaire, including versions of the questionnaire, and scoring questionnaires, please visit www.sdqinfo.com.

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For further information advice and support relating to promoting the emotional health and wellbeing of a looked after child in Lancashire, please see below for support in your area:

SCAYT+ What you need to know

SCAYT+ (Supporting Children and Young people Together) has been up and running for over 12 years- commissioned by Lancashire County Council to promote the emotional needs of children looked after (by LCC) and adopted. This information is a short reminder of what the service is for and how it relates to you. See also:

<https://www.scie.org.uk/children/care/mental-health/report>

1. Only children looked after by LCC are eligible to access SCAYT+. Children need to be placed in Lancashire or close to the Lancashire border.
2. We consider referrals of children adopted from the LCC post adoption social worker.
3. Although SCAYT+ will not routinely screen all cases referred in to other services, we are always happy to discuss them. Please contact us directly yourself to do this, rather than send a family away with the suggestion they see SCAYT+ first.
4. Within the team we have a range of emotional health practitioners (10 staff) with varied backgrounds and skills.
5. Our preferred approaches enhance the therapeutic value of everyday care and include Theraplay® ideas and practices, parenting with PACE, attachment-informed approaches and systemic work.
6. Our service is strongly systemic in that we donot usually see psychological therapy for children as an appropriate first course of action- and never in isolation from other necessary actions in the professional and family networks.
7. We are ready to support all colleagues in developing their understanding of the emotional needs of children- so this can inform care-planning and future decision making.
8. We use an initial consultation as the place to start discussing the issues and how/if SCAYT+ might get involved. We discuss requests every week and book these in within a few weeks of referral.
9. Referrals are best done by LCC staff, either by the social workers, or at least with their knowledge and agreement through the LCS system.
10. We provide training to foster carers, adoptive parents and LCC staff.
11. We are keen to strengthen relationships with professionals working with children across LCC, education, CAMHS teams and child clinical psychology teams.
12. We are operate over the county from two sites, The Fold in Burnley and Riverbank Children's Centre in Preston.
13. We are always keen to improve our multi-agency working and consider joint work.
14. Do talk to us or email us

Contacts:

SCAYT telephone number 01772538880

The SCAYT team mailbox is cypscayt@lancashire.gov.uk

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Advice and guidance for anyone worried about the emotional wellbeing of a child or young person can also be found at <http://www.youngminds.org.uk/> or by calling their helpline on 0808 802 5544.