



## Strength Difficulties Questionnaire, SDQ Guidance

### **What is the Strength Difficulties Questionnaire**

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a short behavioural screening questionnaire used for 3-16 year olds. It is used within research, evaluating treatment outcome and as part of clinical assessment in order to examine a child's mental well-being. This standardised questionnaire has good psychometric properties (McPherson et al., 2006) and has been used with Looked After Children (LAC) (Mason, Chmelka & Thompson, 2012).

It helps social and mental health workers/therapists to make decisions quickly and acts as a guide when planning treatment. In a review by the Department of Health, feedback from social workers included that the questionnaire 'gave a more in-depth look at the young person' and that it could be a 'springboard for therapeutic action' (Department of Health, pp. 2b).

### **Where do you get the SDQ?**

All versions of the SDQ are available free of charge on the *Youth in Mind* website (See link below)

<https://sdqscore.org>

As per Best Practice Guidelines, Foster carers/Parents/Caregivers, Teachers and, if possible, the Young Person themselves should be administered the SDQ in order to improve the validity of results.

### **How to use the SDQ**

Use the **Double-Sided Version** of the SDQ and ensure the right version (carer/teacher/child) is administered. The double-sided version includes a Psychological Attributes Component and an Impact Supplement-

Psychological Attributes Component- The SDQ examines 25 attributes, divided between 5 scales:

- Emotional problems
- Conduct problems
- Hyperactivity and inattention
- Peer Relationship problems
- Prosocial behaviours (excluded from total difficulties score)

Impact supplement - The impact supplement examines the nature of a young person's problems, completed by parents and teachers. Information collected includes "burden to others", social impairment, chronicity and distress related to a reported problem.

## **How does Scoring Work?**

Input the results from the questionnaires online:

<https://sdqscore.org>

## **How to Interpret the results**

A **total difficulties score** is calculated using the SDQ, which ranges from 0-40. Each 1-point increase in the total difficulties score corresponds with an *increase in the risk* of developing a mental health disorder.

Scores are also provided for each of the 5 scales. Looking at the profile of scores is particularly useful in terms of making decisions about the appropriate type and level of support, particularly if a child is scoring significantly higher in one area.

The following categories are used in order to assess whether a child's score is close to average, slightly above average, high or very high when compared to children of their age:

	<b>Close to average</b>	<b>Slightly Raised</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Very High</b>
<b>Parent completed SDQ</b>				
<b>Total difficulties score</b>	<b>0-13</b>	<b>14-16</b>	<b>17-19</b>	<b>20-40</b>
Emotional problems score	0-3	4	5-6	7-10
Conduct problems score	0-2	3	4-5	6-10
Hyperactivity score	0-5	6-7	8	9-10
Peer problems score	0-2	3	4	5-10
Prosocial score	8-10	7	6	0-5
Impact score	0	1	2	3-10
<b>Teacher completed SDQ</b>				
<b>Total difficulties score</b>	<b>0-11</b>	<b>12-15</b>	<b>16-18</b>	<b>19-40</b>
Emotional problems score	0-3	4	5	6-10
Conduct problems score	0-2	3	4	5-10
Hyperactivity score	0-5	6-7	8	9-10
Peer problems score	0-2	3-4	5	6-10
Prosocial score	8-10	5	4	0-3
Impact score	0	1	2	3-6
<b>Self- completed SDQ</b>				
<b>Total difficulties score</b>	<b>0-14</b>	<b>15-17</b>	<b>18-19</b>	<b>20-40</b>
Emotional problems score	0-4	5	6	7-10
Conduct problems score	0-3	4	5	6-10
Hyperactivity score	0-5	6	7	8-10
Peer problems score	0-2	3	4	5-10
Prosocial score	7-10	6	5	0-4
Impact score	0	1	2	3-10

Note that these scores only provide a rough and ready way of screening for disorders. Combining information from SDQ symptom and impact scores from multiple informants is better, but still far from perfect.

## **Internalising and Externalising Scores**

‘Externalising’ and ‘internalising’ scores: The externalising score ranges from 0 to 20 and is the sum of the conduct and hyperactivity scales. The internalising score ranges from 0 to 20 and is the sum of the emotional and peer problems scales.

<b><i>Internalising and Externalising scores:</i></b>			
<b>The internalising score</b> (range 0-20) is the sum of the emotional and peer problems scales.			
Emotional Problems Score	+	Peer Problems Score	= <b><i>Internalising Score</i></b>
<b>The externalising score</b> (range 0-20) is the sum of the conduct and hyperactivity scales.			
Conduct Score	+	Hyperactivity Score	= <b><i>Externalising Score</i></b>
N.B. Using these two amalgamated scales may be preferable to using the four separate scales in community samples, whereas using the four separate scales may add more value in high-risk samples.			

## **Generating impact scores**

When using a version of the SDQ that includes an ‘impact supplement’, the items on overall distress and impairment can be summed to generate an impact score that ranges from 0 to 10 for parent- and self-report, and from 0 to 6 for teacher-report.

**Table 2: Scoring the SDQ impact supplement**

	Not at all	Only a little	A medium amount	A great deal
<b><u>Parent report:</u></b>				
Difficulties upset or distress child	0	0	1	2
Interfere with HOME LIFE	0	0	1	2
Interfere with FRIENDSHIPS	0	0	1	2
Interfere with CLASSROOM LEARNING	0	0	1	2
Interfere with LEISURE ACTIVITIES	0	0	1	2
<b><u>Teacher report:</u></b>				
Difficulties upset or distress child	0	0	1	2
Interfere with PEER RELATIONS	0	0	1	2
Interfere with CLASSROOM LEARNING	0	0	1	2
<b><u>Self-report report:</u></b>				
Difficulties upset or distress child	0	0	1	2
Interfere with HOME LIFE	0	0	1	2
Interfere with FRIENDSHIPS	0	0	1	2
Interfere with CLASSROOM LEARNING	0	0	1	2
Interfere with LEISURE ACTIVITIES	0	0	1	2

Responses to the questions on chronicity and burden to others are not included in the impact score. When respondents have answered 'no' to the first question on the impact supplement (i.e. when they do not perceive themselves as having any emotional or behavioural difficulties), they are not asked to complete the questions on resultant distress or impairment; the impact score is automatically scored zero in these circumstances.