

Quality Assurance Framework for New South Wales

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

Questions for Carers

Chapter 3

QAF User Guide

Version 2.0, November 2020 Edition

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire – Carers

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is for carers to complete in relation to the behaviour of a child or young person in their care. The use of this valid and reliable questionnaire provides a robust way of capturing a child or young person strengths and difficulties over time.

The SDQ is a key component of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) which collects key information on how a child is going in OOHC, to ensure we give every child in care the best possible experience. Regular information comes from children, carers, Department of Communities & Justice (DCJ), Department of Education and Health in order to support this.

Carers have first-hand experience of what a child or young person is experiencing and can provide valuable insight into their emotional and psychological wellbeing and social functioning.

It is essential that standardised and tested questionnaires are used to measure wellbeing. Questionnaires measuring wellbeing should be applied consistently, in order to minimise the risk of bias and ensures reliable outcomes.

What is the purpose of the SDQ?

The intention of the SDQ for carers is to reliably flag a concern that may require further attention through casework and is not a diagnosis of a child or young person's mental health.

This questionnaire gives an opportunity to promote a solution focused approach and build on identified strengths as well as:

- A way to focus on where an intervention might help a child or young person
- Inform Behavioural Support Planning and outcomes
- Provide evidence to support accessing other resources/services e.g. Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Over time results provide valid and reliable evidence of changes in the child's strengths and difficulties rather than relying on anecdotal evidence

What are the benefits for the carer and Child and Young person?

Completing the SDQ early in a child or young person care history, will highlight the likelihood that a child or young person either has or could develop mental health issues. This should then assist in accessing appropriate interventions to support a child or young person.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Key Points

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Key points	
Who completes this?	The carer/person with significant relationship to a child or young person in their care
Age range	For a child or young person aged 2-17yrs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDQ for children 2-4 years (non-school attendees) • SDQ for children aged 4-10 years • SDQ for children and young people aged 11-17 years
Cohort	Children or young people who have Final Orders with Parental Responsibility to the Minister
Delivery method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 questions presented in Viewpoint (see Appendix 1) • Receive an individual child ID to access Viewpoint from your QAF Coordinator
First assessment	When a child turns 2 years of age, or 4 to 6 weeks after a placement change then every 6 months after that
Frequency	Once every 6 months
Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioural/ Emotional/ Hyperactivity Problems • Social (Peer Relationships, Prosocial Behaviour)
Results	<p>Results are automatically generated in Viewpoint on completion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0 - 13 Close to average • 14 - 16 Slightly raised • 17 - 19 High • 20 - 40 Very High <p>Each question is rated on a 3-point scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0 = not true • 1 = somewhat true • 2 = certainly true <p>A Decision-Making Pyramid (Appendix 4) is included in the results to identify what needs to be addressed and what activities need to be undertaken.</p>
Analysis	Review results in case review
Consent	Participation is voluntary and agreement to participate is included in the questions in Viewpoint. For non-participation – select the reason from the drop-down box
Sharing results	Can be discussed where appropriate with the carer, manager, during case planning meetings, with professionals and the child or young person
Results storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results will be stored in your agencies casework system. • Results will be summarised in the next Child Overview

Caseworker Check List – for completing Questionnaire

Administering Activities

		Notes
Before <u>home visit</u>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ascertain the age of the child and Questionnaires to be completed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child and Young Person Questionnaires- aged between 7 and 17 years old • Carer Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire - 2-4 years non-school participation, 4-10 primary school attendees or 11-17 high school and/or alternate education 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Prepare your device laptop, tablet to take with you. Review fact sheets. Ensure your device, has internet access, is charged and you have login details. 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Test web access www.vptol.com.au and ID's (Organisation: NSWQAF, Login ID and Password) before the visit and take with you on the home visit. Review the Viewpoint Trouble Shooting Guide. 	
During <u>home visit</u>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Explain key elements of the Questionnaire and its purpose to carers and children and young people. Provide them with the fact sheets or further information as required. 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Explain the use of the questionnaire and how the results will be used to inform case planning. 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Establish whether the child or young person or carer requires support and if they would like you in the room. Some children may need you to define words in the questionnaire. Do not advise on possible answers. 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Child or young person/carer completes the questions on the device. 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Review the results, check for safety , self-harm/suicide for immediate action 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Store the Report according to agency protocol. 	
After <u>home visit</u>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Review results from the Questionnaires, refer to the relevant User Guide for more information. 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Review with your Manager, psychologist or QAF Coordinator where needed 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Use all of this information to inform case plan and actions needed. 	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Discuss information with the carer, child or young person and other relevant agencies. 	

No internet connectivity at carer residence – paper-based versions

The paper-based version is only to be used when experiencing connectivity issues. If you are unable to access the internet while visiting the carer, paper-based versions are available on the internet go to:

www.facs.nsw.gov.au/about/reforms/children-families/QAF/chapters/qaf-user-guides-for-caseworkers

You will find:

- SDQ Questionnaire – 2 to 4 years – non-school attendee
- SDQ Questionnaire – 4 to 10 years – school attendee
- SDQ Questionnaire – 11 to 17 years old

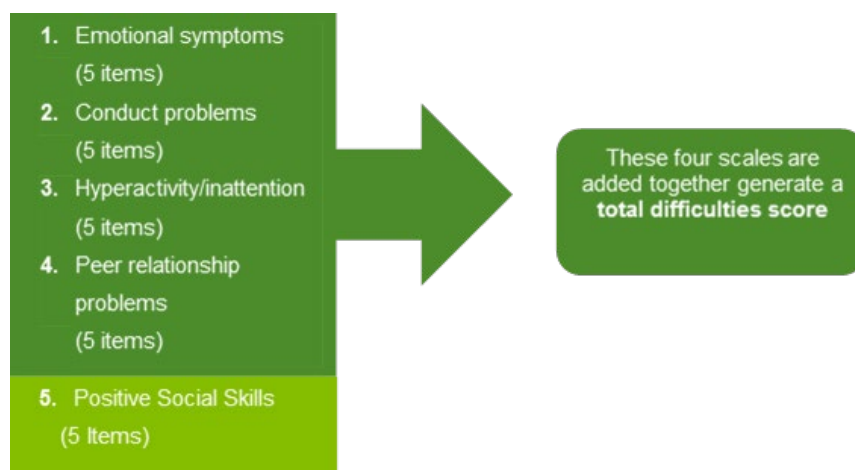
Responses from the paper-based version **will need to be entered into Viewpoint** on your return to the office using the child's Login ID. This will allow the report to be generated and the questionnaire results to be included in the next release of the Child Overview.

Understanding SDQ scoring

At the completion of the SDQ, Viewpoint will automatically generate:

- A total difficulties score
- A score for each of the subscales including prosocial behaviour (positive social behaviour)
- A score for the impact on the child or young person life

There are 5 sections the questions are scored around:



The total difficulties score will read between 0 - 40. On an individual basis:

- A score of 13 or below is within what is deemed to be a normal range
- A score ranging from 14 -16 is considered to be border line
- 17 or above is indicative of a cause for concern.

Each question in the SDQ is rated on a 3-point scale:

- 0 = not true
- 1 = somewhat true
- 2 = certainly true

The total difficulty score is the overall measure of how a child or young person has been going over the six months previous to completion. Each one-point increase in the score corresponds to an increase in the risk of a mental health issue.

The SDQ automatically calculates a score based on a broad population sample. The classifications are:

1. Close to average 0 - 13
2. Slightly raised 14 - 16
3. High 17 - 19
4. Very High 20 - 40

This table demonstrates what each score means compared to the **average for all the same age group**.

	Close to average	Slightly raised	High	Very High
Score for Total Difficulties	0-13	14-16	17-19	20-40
Score for Conduct Problems Scale	0-2	3	4-5	6-10
Score for Emotional Problems Scale	0-3	4	5-6	7-10
Score for Hyperactivity Scale	0-5	6-7	8	9-10
Score for Peer Problems Scale	0-2	3	4	5-10
Score for Impact on Young Person's life	0	1	2	3-10

Please note: the "Impact on Young Person's life" score is not included in the "Total Difficulties" score

The Prosocial score is 'Kind and Helpful Behaviour' and this table shows what each score means to **the average of the same age group**

	Close to average	Slightly lowered	Low	Very Low
Score for Prosocial Scale	8-10	7	6	0-5

Please note: the "Prosocial Scale Score is not included in the Score for Difficulties

The impact supplement explores whether the perceived difficulties affect the child or young person's functioning and impact on the carer and family. The items on overall distress and interference with everyday life are summed to generate a score ranging from 0 to 10

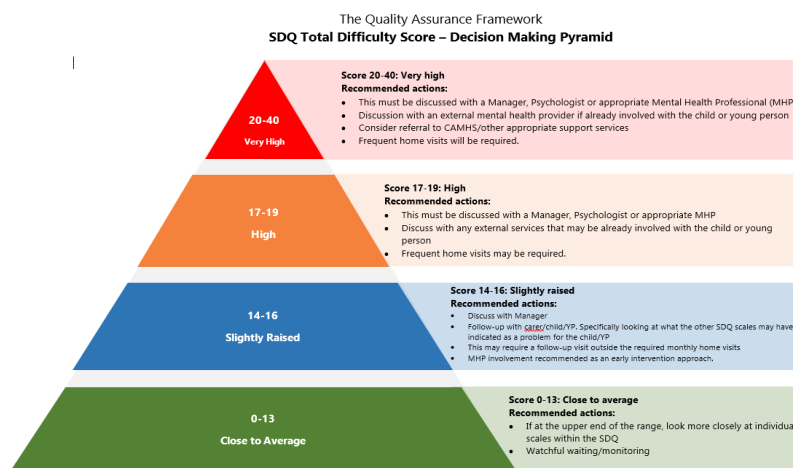
- Not at all or only a little = 0
- Quite a lot = 1
- A great deal = 2

A high impact score should be discussed with your supervisor and may indicate that the carer needs some additional assistance.

Please note in the supplementary questions section, if the carer answers 'not at all or only a little' to all questions the Score for Impact will not appear on Table 2 in the SDQ report.

Below is the decision-making pyramid to identify actions in relation to each score classification.

SDQ Decision Making Pyramid (full version Appendix 4 page x



Disclaimer: The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is to be used as a screener for mental health difficulties in children or young people. It is always important to consider the context of the scores in this report and seek further advice from managers, psychologists and/or mental health professionals if there are concerns that are not reflected in these scores.

Note: This pyramid is intended only as a guide

Information for Carers

A *SDQ Fact Sheet for Carers* can be found at page 15 of this Guide.

Carer participation in the SDQ is voluntary. Viewpoint has a participation page, after you log in, that explains to a carer the reason questions are asked and what happens to the information. If a carer **does not agree** to participate a list of options will appear in a drop-down box to explain their reason/s for not wanting to complete the questionnaire. Ensure they have selected an answer as this will be recorded in the Child Overview instead of the SDQ scoring.

Possible concerns that a carer may have

Carers may be cautious about sharing information that may impact decisions about the placement or levels of support provided. They may not fully know the child or young person's history or under report behaviours based on their experiences caring for other children and young people. Whilst this risk exists research shows that the possibility of under-reporting is outweighed by the benefits that the SDQ identifies. This is particularly true in relation to detecting emotional problems with a child or young person and track changes over time.



Practice Tips and Considerations

Questions caseworkers may face when completing the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

As with any casework activity there will be questions or issues. Below is a list of issues that may be encountered when completing the SDQ. Work through responses with teams using policies, procedures, practice guidelines and professional judgement.

Some general questions that you may encounter:

Questions	Considerations
When is the SDQ completed?	<p>The SDQ is completed after a child or young person with final orders in OOHC has been placed with the carer for 4 - 6 weeks or following a placement change.</p> <p>In the event of placement changes have a conversation with the new carer about the QAF and provide the carer with information about the QAF and the SDQ process.</p> <p>The SDQ focuses on how the child or young person has been over the past 6 months. Please reinforce this message to the carer and ask that they reflect on the caring experience over the past 6 months.</p>
Which questionnaire do I select for a 4 year old?	<p>Some 4 year old children are school age and some are not, ensure the carer selects the correct SDQ age group (<i>4-10 years for school aged children</i>) as the questions for the two age groups are different.</p>
What if the child or young person has a disability?	<p>If the child or young person has been diagnosed with a disability ensure the carer is informed of the child/young person's diagnosis/conditions, treatment plans and any prescribed medications. This is to ensure the carer's answers to the questions are an accurate reflection of the child or young person developmental capacity/needs.</p>
What if the carer is reluctant to complete the SDQ?	<p>A carer may be cautious about sharing information that may impact on the level of support provided or placement. They may not fully know the child or young person's history or under report behaviours based on their experiences caring for other children or young persons. Discuss the concerns with the carer.</p>



Questions	Considerations
Is consent needed to complete the SDQ?	Yes, for the QAF consent from the carers is required and this is built into the Viewpoint online system.
What happens if the results differ significantly to what I expected?	<p>There may be occasions where the SDQ score does not match your expectations, based on your knowledge of the child or young person. The presence of differing opinions highlights the importance of discussing the SDQ with carers to understand their views and explore the reason behind the differing views. It is recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the Pyramid for required actions. • Discuss the SDQ results during supervision. Your supervisor will help explore all aspects of the child or young person’s life and care history to understand why they may have poor emotional and mental health. • Ensure the SDQ is discussed regularly or as early as possible if risks or concerns are identified in the SDQ outcomes. This will provide analysis and informed discussion to ensure clear actions are identified and completed. • Consider whether to contact specialist health services for advice.
What do I do if a problem area shows up with the results?	The SDQ is a screening tool and not a diagnostic tool. It is important to discuss problem areas highlighted by the SDQ with the carer or child or young person and your supervisor to identify an appropriate intervention such as a referral to a specialist service.
Who do I contact if I have technical issues?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact your local Viewpoint Administrator or QAF Coordinator • email helpdesk@vptorg.com • Review the QAF User Guide – Chapter 2– Viewpoint for Caseworkers



Appendix 1

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ): 2-4 years

Example of questions only you can find a paper based Questionnaire on line at:

<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/about/reforms/children-families/QAF/chapters/gaf-user-guides-for-caseworkers>

Multiple choice answers - Not True / Somewhat True / Certainly True

How well does each statement describe how this child has been over the last 6 months?

1. Considerate of other people's feelings
2. Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long
3. Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness
4. Shares readily with other children, for example toys, treats, pencils
5. Often loses her or his temper
6. Rather solitary, prefers to play alone
7. Generally, well behaved, usually does what adults request
8. Many worries or often seems worried

How well does each statement describe how this child has been over the last 6 months?

9. Helpful if someone is hurt, upset, or feeling ill
10. Constantly fidgeting or squirming
11. Has at least one good friend
12. Often fights with other children or bullies them
13. Often unhappy, depressed or tearful
14. Generally liked by other children
15. Easily distracted, his or her concentration wanders
16. Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence

How well does each statement describe how this child has been over the last 6 months?

17. Kind to younger children
18. Often argumentative with adults
19. Picked on or bullied by other children
20. Often offers to help others (parents, preschool staff, children)
21. Can stop and think things out before acting
22. Can be spiteful to others
23. Gets along better with adults than with other children
24. Many fears, easily scared
25. Good attention span, sees play activities through to the end

Have the staff at playgroups, day care or preschool commented over the last 6 months about ...

Multiple choice answers - No, or doesn't apply/ A little / A lot

26. Fidgetiness, restlessness or over activity?
27. Poor concentration or being easily distracted?
28. Acting without thinking about what she or he is doing, frequently butting in, or not waiting her or his turn?

Overall, do you think that this child has difficulties in any of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get along with other people? Multiple choice answers

How long have these difficulties been present? Multiple choice answers

Do the difficulties upset or distress her or him? Multiple choice answers

Do the difficulties interfere with her or his everyday life in the following areas? Home Life, Friendships, Learning, Leisure activities - Multiple choice answers for each

Do the difficulties put a burden on you or the family as a whole? Multiple choice answers



Appendix 2

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ): 4-10 years

Example of questions only you can find a paper based Questionnaire on line at:

<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/about/reforms/children-families/QAF/chapters/gaf-user-guides-for-caseworkers>

Multiple choice answers - Not True / Somewhat True / Certainly True

How well does each statement describe how this child has been over the last 6 months?

1. Considerate of other people's feelings
2. Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long
3. Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness
4. Shares readily with other children, for example toys, treats, pencils
5. Often loses her temper
6. Rather solitary, prefers to play alone
7. Generally, well behaved, usually does what adults request
8. Many worries or often seems worried

How well does each statement describe how this child has been over the last 6 months?

9. Helpful if someone is hurt, upset, or feeling ill
10. Constantly fidgeting or squirming
11. Has at least one good friend
12. Often fights with other children or bullies them
13. Often unhappy, depressed or tearful
14. Generally liked by other children
15. Easily distracted, her or his concentration wanders
16. Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence

How well does each statement describe how this child has been over the last 6 months?

17. Kind to younger children
18. Often lies or cheats
19. Picked on or bullied by other children
20. Often offers to help others (parents, teachers, children)
21. Thinks things out before acting
22. Steals from home, school or elsewhere
23. Gets along better with adults than with other children
24. Many fears, easily scared
25. Good attention span, sees play activities/chores/homework through to the end

Have her or his teachers complained over the last 6 months of problems with. Multiple choice answers for each

- Fidgetiness, restlessness or overactivity?
- Poor concentration or being easily distracted?
- Acting without thinking about what she or he is doing, frequently butting in, or not waiting her or his turn?

Overall, do you think that this child has difficulties in any of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get along with other people? Multiple choice answers

How long have these difficulties been present? Multiple choice answers

Do the difficulties upset or distress her or him? Multiple choice answers

Do the difficulties interfere with her or his everyday life in the following areas? Home life, Friendships, Classroom learning, Leisure activities - Multiple choice answers

Do the difficulties put a burden on you or the family as a whole? Multiple choice answers



Appendix 3

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ): 11-17 years

Example of questions only you can find a paper based Questionnaire on line at:

<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/about/reforms/children-families/QAF/chapters/qaf-user-guides-for-caseworkers>

Multiple choice answers - Not True / Somewhat True / Certainly True

How well does each statement describe how this young person has been over the last 6 months

1. Considerate of other people's feelings
2. Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long
3. Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness
4. Shares readily with other young people, for example games and food
5. Often loses her or his temper
6. Would rather be alone than with other young people
7. Generally, well behaved, usually does what adults request
8. Many worries or often seems worried

How well does each statement describe how this young person has been over the last 6 months?

9. Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill
10. Constantly fidgeting or squirming
11. Has at least one good friend
12. Often fights with other young people or bullies them
13. Often unhappy, depressed or tearful
14. Generally liked by other young people
15. Easily distracted, her or his concentration wanders
16. Nervous in new situations, easily loses confidence

How well does each statement describe how this young person has been over the last 6 months?

17. Kind to younger children
18. Often lies or cheats
19. Picked on or bullied by other young people
20. Often offers to help others (parents, teachers, children)
21. Thinks things out before acting
22. Steals from home, school or elsewhere
23. Gets along better with adults than with other young people
24. Many fears, easily scared
25. Good attention span, sees chores or homework through to the end

Have her or his teachers complained over the last 6 months of problems with...

- Fidgetiness, restlessness or overactivity?
- Poor concentration or being easily distracted?
- Acting without thinking about what she or he is doing, frequently butting in, or not waiting her or his turn?

Overall, do you think that this young person has difficulties in any of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get along with other people? Multiple choice answers

How long have these difficulties been present? Multiple choice answers

Do the difficulties upset or distress her or him? Multiple choice answers

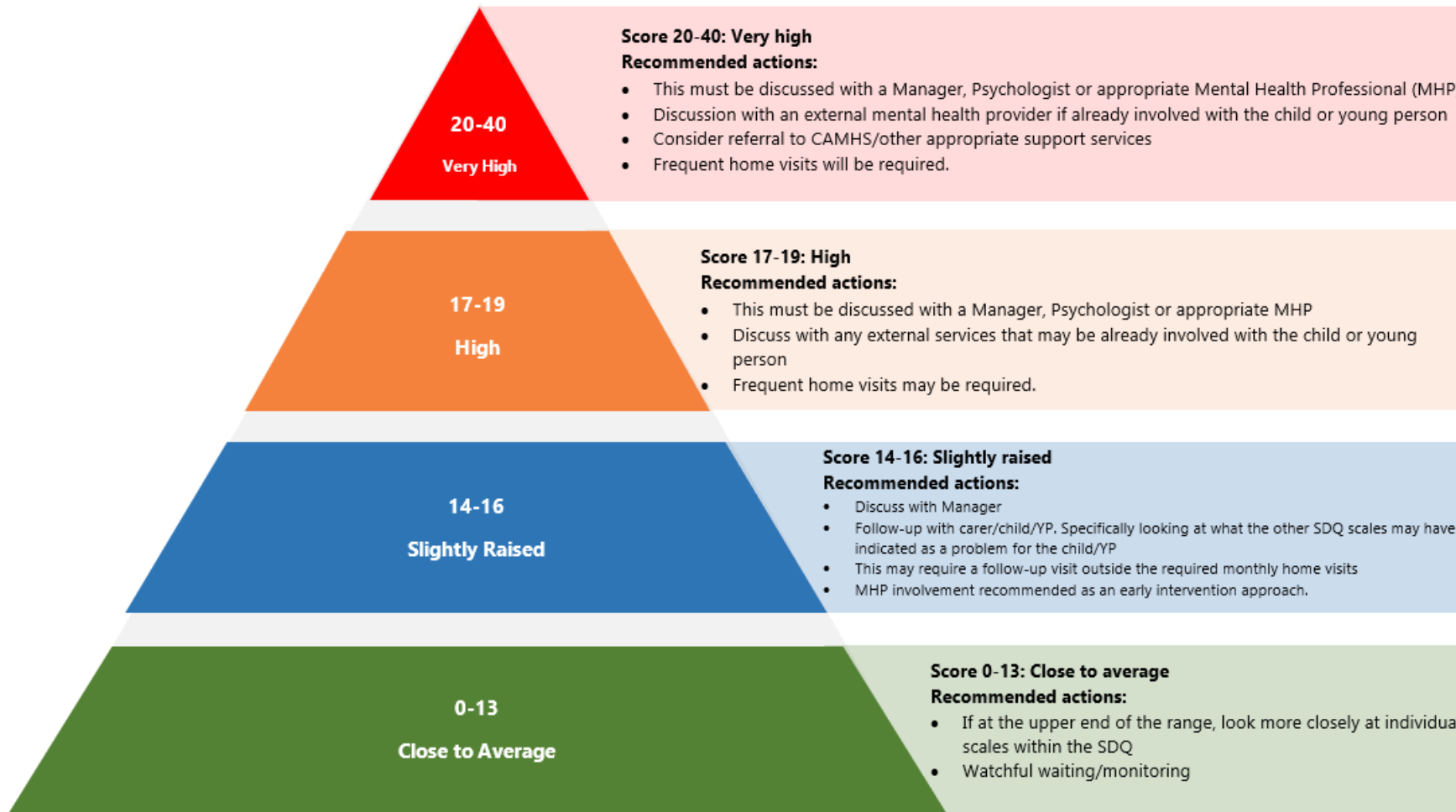
Do the difficulties interfere with her or his everyday life in the following areas? Home life, Friendships, Classroom learning, Leisure activities - Multiple choice answers

Do the difficulties put a burden on you or the family as a whole? Multiple choice answers



Appendix 4

The Quality Assurance Framework SDQ Total Difficulty Score – Decision Making Pyramid



Disclaimer: The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is to be used as a screener for mental health difficulties in children or young people. It is always important to consider the context of the scores in this report and seek further advice from managers, psychologists and/or mental health professionals if there are concerns that are not reflected in these scores.

Note: This pyramid is intended only as a guide

Quality Assurance Framework for Out-of-Home Care Carers Fact Sheet

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

This fact sheet provides information for carers about the use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) in the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for children and young people in statutory out-of-home care (OOHC).

KEY POINTS

- The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) are implementing a new way of bringing together reliable information to provide a holistic picture of children and young people in OOHC that will help improve case planning and services.
- Carers will be asked to complete the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to inform their caseworker about the emotional and psychological health of the children in their care.
- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a valid and reliable questionnaire about children and young people.
- The information from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) will be used by your caseworker and their supervisor in case planning to identify areas that need to be addressed with the aim of improving outcomes for the child or young person.

What is the QAF?

The QAF is based on what we all know - children need to thrive, to feel safe, and to have stability and permanency in their lives so they can achieve a sense of wellbeing. The QAF will provide important information on how an individual child in OOHC is going and presents that information in a Child Overview to support caseworkers to meet that child's needs.

What is my role in the QAF?

We recognise that looking after children in OOHC is one of the most important jobs we do. Equally, hearing your voice as a carer is essential, as you have first-hand experience of what a child or young person is experiencing. Insights into the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the children in your care can help your caseworker provide appropriate support when needed.

How do I provide information on the child in my care?

You will be asked by your caseworker to complete the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The questionnaire will ask you to respond to a series of statements and decide how well the statements describe the child in your care. Completion usually takes 20 minutes and if you require assistance in completing the questionnaire your caseworker will provide support.

Is this about my role as a carer?

Please be assured that this is not an assessment or reflection on how well you care for the child, it is about how you see the child's emotional and psychological health. As you have day to day knowledge, you are best placed to identify whether the child you care for is experiencing any difficulties. Identifying problems early means that the right support can be put in place at the right time.

What happens to the information I provide?

When collecting any personal information we are obliged to observe strict privacy rules, which are contained in the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* and the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002*. The *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* permits us to share information in specific circumstances relating to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children with other designated agencies who provide services to children.

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is available in an online system known as Viewpoint. To proceed to the questionnaire, you will be asked to press 'yes' to continue. However, if you choose not to participate you will be able to 'decline' and to change your mind and revoke your consent to participate at any time.

The information obtained from you will be used by your caseworker to identify areas of need and build this into case plans and services for the child.

Information collected for the QAF is confidential and will be stored securely and used to provide services to the child in accordance with the law.

For more Information

If you would like more information on the questionnaire or the QAF please contact your caseworker.

Information on the QAF and its development can be found at

<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/about/reforms/children-families/QAF>

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire and supporting the child or young person in your care.