# Scoring the Self-Report Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

The 25 items in the SDQ comprise 5 scales of 5 items each. It is usually easiest to score all 5 scales first before working out the total difficulties score. Somewhat True is always scored as 1, but the scoring of Not True and Certainly True varies with the item, as shown below scale by scale. For each of the 5 scales the score can range from 0 to 10 if all 5 items were completed. Scale score can be prorated if at least 3 items were completed.

| **Emotional Symptoms Scale** | Not True | Somewhat True | Certainly True |
|---|---|---|---|
| I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I worry a lot | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I am often unhappy, downhearted or tearful | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I am nervous in new situations | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I have many fears, I am easily scared | 0 | 1 | 2 |

| **Conduct Problems Scale** | Not True | Somewhat True | Certainly True |
|---|---|---|---|
| I get very angry and often lose my temper | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I usually do as I am told | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| I fight a lot | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I am often accused of lying or cheating | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I take things that are not mine | 0 | 1 | 2 |

| **Hyperactivity Scale** | Not True | Somewhat True | Certainly True |
|---|---|---|---|
| I am restless. I cannot stay still for long | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I am constantly fidgeting or squirming | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I am easily distracted | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I think before I do things | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| I finish the work I am doing | 2 | 1 | 0 |

| **Peer Problems Scale** | Not True | Somewhat True | Certainly True |
|---|---|---|---|
| I am usually on my own | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I have one good friend or more | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Other people my age generally like me | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Other children or young people pick on me | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I get on better with adults than with people my age | 0 | 1 | 2 |

| **Prosocial Scale** | Not True | Somewhat True | Certainly True |
|---|---|---|---|
| I try to be nice to other people | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I usually share with others | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset of feeling ill | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I am kind to younger children | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| I often volunteer to help others | 0 | 1 | 2 |

**The Total Difficulties Score:**
is generated by summing the scores from all the scales except the prosocial scale. The resultant score can range from 0 to 40 (and is counted as missing if one of the component scores is missing).

# Interpreting Symptom Scores and Defining "Caseness" from Symptom Scores

Although SDQ scores can often be used as continuous variables, it is sometimes convenient to classify scores as normal, borderline and abnormal. Using the bandings shown below, an abnormal score on the total difficulties score can be used to identify likely "cases" with mental health disorders. This is clearly only a rough-and ready method for detecting disorders – combining information from SDQ symptom and impact scores from multiple informants is better, but still far from perfect. Approximately 10% of a community sample scores in the abnormal band on any given score, with a further 10% scoring in the borderline band. The exact proportions vary according to country, age and gender – normative SDQ data are available from the web site. You may want to adjust banding and caseness criteria for these characteristics, setting the threshold higher when avoiding false positives is of paramount importance, and setting the threshold lower when avoiding false negatives is more important.

## Self Completed

|  | Normal | Borderline | Abnormal |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Difficulties Score | 0 - 15 | 16 - 19 | 20 - 40 |
| Emotional Symptoms Score | 0 - 5 | 6 | 7 - 10 |
| Conduct Problems Score | 0 - 3 | 4 | 5 - 10 |
| Hyperactivity Score | 0 - 5 | 6 | 7 - 10 |
| Peer Problems Score | 0 - 3 | 4 - 5 | 6 - 10 |
| Prosocial Behaviour Score | 6 - 10 | 5 | 0 - 4 |

## Generating and Interpreting Impact Scores

When using a version of the SDQ that includes an "Impact Supplement", the items on overall distress and social impairment can be summed to generate an impact score that ranges from 0 to 10.

|  | Not at all | Only a little | Quite a lot | A great deal |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Difficulties upset or distress me | 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.

Although the impact scores can be used as continuous variables, it is sometimes convenient to classify them as normal, borderline or abnormal: a total impact score of 2 or more is abnormal; a score of 1 is borderline; and a score of 0 is normal.