Scoring the Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire for 2-4 year olds

In most respects, the SDQ for 2-4 year olds is scored in an identical way to the SDQ for 4-17 year olds, and we therefore suggest that you start by reading those instructions. The only differences are:

- The wording of two items on the 'conduct' scales is markedly different in the questionnaire for 2-4 year olds compared to the questionnaire for 4-17 (but the scoring stays the same). One further hyperactivity item is softened slightly in the 2-4 year old questionnaire. These three items are highlighted in Table 1.
- Large population-based surveys in the UK suggest slightly different population norms for 2-4 year olds compared to older children. The provisional proposed banding of SDQ scores for 2-4 year olds is shown in Table 3.

Table 1: Scoring the SDQ for 2-4 year olds

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Emotional problems scale			
ITEM 3: Often complains of headaches…	0	1	**2**
ITEM 8: Many worries…	0	1	**2**
ITEM 13: Often unhappy, downhearted…	0	1	**2**
ITEM 16: Nervous or clingy in new situations…	0	1	**2**
ITEM 24: Many fears, easily scared	0	1	**2**
Conduct problems Scale			
ITEM 5: Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	0	1	**2**
ITEM 7: Generally obedient…	**2**	1	0
ITEM 12: Often fights with other children…	0	1	**2**
ITEM 18: Often argumentative with adults *[REPLACES: Often lies or cheats]*	0	1	**2**
ITEM 22: Can be spiteful to others *[REPLACES: Steals from home, school or elsewhere]*	0	1	**2**
Hyperactivity scale			
ITEM 2: Restless, overactive…	0	1	**2**
ITEM 10: Constantly fidgeting or squirming	0	1	**2**
ITEM 15: Easily distracted, concentration wanders	0	1	**2**
ITEM 21: Can stop and think things out before acting *[SOFTENED VERSION OF: Thinks things out before acting]*	**2**	1	0
ITEM 25: Sees tasks through to the end…	**2**	1	0
Peer problems scale			
ITEM 6: Rather solitary, tends to play alone	0	1	**2**
ITEM 11: Has at least one good friend	**2**	1	0
ITEM 14: Generally liked by other children	**2**	1	0
ITEM 19: Picked on or bullied…	0	1	**2**
ITEM 23: Gets on better with adults than with other children	0	1	**2**
Prosocial scale			
ITEM 1: Considerate of other people's feelings	0	1	**2**
ITEM 4: Shares readily with other children…	0	1	**2**
ITEM 9: Helpful if someone is hurt…	0	1	**2**
ITEM 17: Kind to younger children	0	1	**2**
ITEM 20: Often volunteers to help others…	0	1	**2**

Total difficulties score: This is generated by summing scores from all the scales except the prosocial scale. The resultant score ranges from 0 to 40, and is counted as missing of one of the 4 component scores is missing.

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--report, and from 0 to 6 for teacher-report.

The impact score for 2-4 year olds is calculated in an identical way to the SDQ score for 4-17 year olds. The only change is that, as highlighted below, the item on 'Classroom learning' for 4-17 year olds becomes 'Learning' for 2-4 year olds.

Table 2: Scoring the SDQ impact supplement

	Not at all	Only a little	A medium amount	A great deal
Parent report:				
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
Teacher report:				
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

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.

Cut-points for SDQ scores for 2-4 year olds: provisional banding

The bands for the SDQ for 4-17 year olds are defined such that around 10% of children are 'high' or 'very high' in a general population UK sample, with this figure of 10% chosen to reflect the prevalence of psychiatric disorder in that population. For 2-4 year olds, we unfortunately lack the kind of large, nationally-representative sample that informed the SDQ banding for 4-17 year olds. Pending the collection of such data, we have therefore created a **provisional** banding of SDQ scores for 2-4 year olds drawing on two sources of information:

1. **Estimate of the prevalence of disorder in 2-4 year olds in the UK general population**: The 'Preschool to School Study' in outer London in 1973 found 7% with a moderate to severe disorder and a further 15% with a mild disorder.

2. **Data on the distribution of SDQ scores in 2-4 year olds**: we used data from 11,592 children aged 2-3 whose parents had completed the SDQ for 2-4 year olds. This total sample was made up of 1353 children 3 in Dumfries, Scotland, and 10,239 aged 30 months in Glasgow Scotland. We also used data from 10,004 children aged 4 whose teachers had completed the SDQ for 2-4 year olds. See http://sdqinfo.org/UK3yearNorm.html for further details of these samples and for an acknowledgement of the individuals and organisations involved.

We have used the SDQ distribution data to propose a **provisional** banding of SDQ scores for 2-4 year olds. In doing so, we have sought cut-points such that around 80% of children are 'close to average', 12% 'slightly raised', 4% 'high' and 4% 'very high' (or, for the prosocial scale, 80% are close to average, 12% 'slightly lowered', 4% 'low' and 4% 'very low'). Similar cut-points were observed for parent SDQs collected in a smaller American sample (N=307) of 2-4 year olds.

Table 3: Provisional banding of SDQ scores for 2-4 year olds

	Provisional four-band categorisation			
	Close to average	Slightly raised (/slightly lowered)	High (/Low)	Very high (very low)
Parent completed SDQ				
Total difficulties score	0-12	13-15	16-18	19-40
Emotional problems score	0-2	3	4	5-10
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
Teacher completed SDQ				
Total difficulties score	0-10	11-14	15-17	18-40
Emotional problems score	0-2	3	4	5-10
Conduct problems score	0-2	3	4	5-10
Hyperactivity score	0-4	5-6	7	8-10
Peer problems score	0-2	3-4	5	6-10
Prosocial score	5-10	4	3	0-2
Impact score	0	1	2	3-10

Note that to turn this into a 3-band solution, simply combine the highest two categories.