



Structured Decision Making Frequently Asked Question's (FAQ's)

The Saskatchewan First Nations Family and Community Institute Inc. (SFNFCI) has put together these commonly asked questions and answers to assist Saskatchewan First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) Agencies with making decisions about implementing SDM at their agencies. This FAQ sheet also provides up-to-date clear and consistent information about SDM tools and its potential impact and implementation on FNCFS Agencies and FNCFS Agency staff.

If your question has not been answered here please contact the SFNFCI SDM Consultant Laura Hicks directly at 306-373-2874 ext.224 or laura@sfnfci.ca

1. Can our agency CUSTOMIZE the tools for our First Nation communities?

The SDM system is owned by the Children's Research Center (CRC), and any changes to the tools need to be made by the CRC. The CRC is willing to make changes to the tools that would increase the validity, reliability, and cultural relevance of the tools. This is currently being done, and will continue to be done given the following process:

- FNCFS agencies communicating their concerns to the SFNFCI SDM consultant, who will then forward this information to the CRC.
- Any change that are made to the SDM tools will be done so through conversations with MSS and the FN CFS agencies.
- Allowing the FNCFS agencies or Ministry offices to make changes on their own would risk the validity and reliability of the SDM system.

An agency is **not able** to make any changes to the SDM assessment tools on their own.

2. What is meant by ADAPTING the tools to fit the infrastructure of the agency?

Adapting the tool to fit the needs of your agency is a process, and can be done with the assistance of the SFNFCI SDM consultant. Adaptation means helping staff understand how the SDM tools will fit within their agencies current infrastructure. This involves looking at various levels of the organization for example: ensuring the correct assessments are uploaded to the computer system, ensuring the SDM tools are incorporated into the agencies current case management system, understanding who completes which tools and where it goes from there, looking at who needs to be trained on what tools, and how the agency might use the tools in their prevention programs. These are just examples of some items involved in adapting the tools to the agencies infrastructure.

3. Do we need to have a computer case management system/BI system to use SDM?

To answer simply, no, your agency does not need a computer system to implement and use the SDM tools. The tools all exist as word templates and can be printed off and filled in by hand. They can also be uploaded to the agencies server and exist as a template or form for the staff to work from. The assessments are all fillable on the computer.

****Please Note:** Completing the tools on paper is not ideal, as it creates a lot of extra paper and ensuring the staff are using the right version of the tools & manual can be difficult.

4. Does our agency need to use Linkin?

No. Linkin is a case management system used by the Ministry of Social Services. The Ministry has incorporated SDM into the Linkin system; however, an agency can use SDM independent of Linkin.

5. Will SDM be ‘more work’ for our staff?

There is no simple answer to this question. At first completing the assessments will probably feel like more work, because the staff will be in the process of learning the tool and getting used to the definitions. However, SDM doesn't



change the work your agency does with families. It just changes how the information is captured/documentated. It also helps staff focus in on specific information that needs to be collected, and helps staff be more thorough with their families, helping them explore areas they may have had a difficult time talking about.

6. Will SDM mean more kids come into care?

SDM has us look at the element of 'safety' to assess whether there are conditions that place a child in danger of immediate harm. In the short term, this may mean that more children are brought into care because there is a safety threat that can't be mitigated immediately; however, in the near future a plan may be developed to address the safety threat and that child can be returned home. The tool is also designed to expediate permanency for children, meaning that the parents' progress with the case plan is reevaluated every four months, and if the risk has been reduced the child can return home and the agency can step away.

7. Do we need to share statistical information we collect with the CRC?

No. Using the SDM system at your agency does not involve sharing any data with the CRC. Depending on how the SDM assessment tools are incorporated into your agency (are they uploaded to the server, are they incorporated into the BI system, or are they completed on paper) will determine how much information the **agency** can collect from the assessments; however, at no point will that information be shared with the CRC, unless the agency contacts the CRC and makes this type of arrangement.

8. What type of support does the Saskatchewan First Nations Family and Community Institute SDM Consultant provide the agencies?

The Institute has broken down support in four (4) categories. Pre-implementation, training, post-training support, and the supervisors working group.

Pre-implementation support involves the Institute consultant meeting with the agency prior to the onsite training, to begin the process of adapting SDM to the agency. This involves completing a needs assessment to help the agency look at what areas they may need to focus on prior to the training.



The training support is the actual onsite training, where the consultant will train the staff on all six SDM assessments. During the training, live case examples will be used and a portion of the training will be spent on application.

The post-training support is the most important piece to SDM implementation at the agency, as this is where the consultant will be onsite to help the staff apply the tool. The training is a small piece of the implementation process, and it's not until the staff start using the tools will they really learn them and get comfortable using them.

Supervisors SDM working group is a place for the supervisors to come together to receive an enhanced level of support with SDM. The supervisor is really the key to implementing SDM at the agency, and they need to be well versed in how to apply the tool and how to supervise staff using the tools. This will also be a place for agencies to come together and share experiences, and lessons learned with SDM.

9. What other SDM support is available from the Ministry of Social Services?

The Ministry of Social Services will continue to offer SDM training in Regina and Saskatoon twice a month (once at each location). The training can be offered in Prince Albert if requested by an agency, or Ministry office. The Ministry also has the First Nation and Metis Services Unit that can support an agency with SDM implementation. The unit has hired two new consultants, both with SDM experience. To learn more about the role of the FNMS unit consultant contact Kim Taylor at 306-787-3949.

10. How long will it take our agency to implement the SDM system?

Technically, your agency can implement SDM as soon as your staff have taken the SDM training. Once the staff have taken the training, they would begin using the intake, safety, and risk assessment tools on any new referrals the agency receives. The staff would complete the Family Strength and Needs (FSNA), Risk-Reassessment, and Reunification assessment tools at the next 120 day assessment point since the last assessment date. For example, for an ongoing file where the agency has been offering child protection services, the Assessment Case Plan (ACP) is required after 120 days, this is also when you would complete



the FSNA. If the worker had completed the ACP one day before they received the training, they wouldn't need to go back and complete the FNSA, they would complete it at the next assessment date, in 119 days. SDM does take time for workers to get used to, it doesn't change the work done by your agency, but it does change how it is documented/captured. With time and support SDM will be second nature.

11. What are the benefits of our agency using the SDM tools?

These are the benefits as experienced by those FNCFS agencies that have already implemented, or are in the process of implementing SDM. A perfect quote from one of our agency directors is that 'SDM makes my staff better social workers'. The tools help staff engage with families and have more meaningful conversations, conversations where the family is leading the discussion and any plan that is made is the families plan. Feedback received from several agencies is that SDM helps their staff remove bias' in case decisions and be non-judgmental in working with families. Child protection is filled with difficult decisions, and there is a lot of information coming in for the staff to process, the SDM assessment tools help the workers sift through the information, focus on what's important, and helps them make difficult decisions about cases.

Several agencies have also used the SDM tools to help them determine which cases should go to prevention and which need to be serviced by protection.

