

# The Structured Decision Making® (SDM) System FAQ

| Question   | Answer   |
|--|--|
| Why do professional workers need decision-support tools? | Research demonstrates that decision tools combined with professional judgment result in more reliable and equitable decisions than professional judgment alone.  |
| Does SDM make decisions for workers?                     | SDM helps social workers understand what information is important to pay attention to. It does not make decisions for them.  |
| Is SDM a computer or software?                           | While SDM is not a software program or computer system, it can be adapted for use on a computer. Just as apps make it easy for us to access information on our phones, accessing SDM information via computer makes it convenient for workers.   |
| Is SDM paperwork to be filled out after the fact?        | The SDM model provides a clear way of gathering and organizing complicated information to make an informed decision. The documentation is done as part of the assessment process.  |
| How are safety and risk different?                       | <p>In the SDM system, <i>safety</i> is about the short term. The SDM safety assessment helps the worker identify whether there is a current emergency in the home that threatens a child's safety.</p> <p><i>Risk</i> is about the long-term view. The SDM actuarial risk assessment aids the worker in identifying families who will need more help and services over time to care for their children over the long term.</p> |
| Is SDM biased?   | In California, the SDM actuarial risk assessment has been tested repeatedly and found to be equitable across racial/ethnic groups. Research demonstrates that use of decision-support tools can reduce individual bias and result in more consistent decision making.  |
| Does SDM work "off the shelf"?                           | All good child welfare practice, including use of SDM, requires ongoing coaching, leadership, organizational supports, evaluation, and feedback.   |



*"SDM puts science on our side when making critical calls in the life of a child."*—Frances Allegra, Former CEO of Our Kids of Miami-Dade/Monroe, Inc.

To learn more about how the SDM system can help improve your child welfare outcomes, call (800) 306-6223 or visit [www.nccdglobal.org](http://www.nccdglobal.org). We look forward to talking with you.