

What is an ELSA?

ELSAs are emotional literacy support assistants. They are teaching assistants who have had special training from educational psychologists to support the emotional development of children and young people in school.

ELSAs help children and young people learn to understand their emotions and respect the feelings of those around them. They provide the time and space for pupils to think about their personal circumstances and how they manage them.

Areas covered on the 6 days of training include:

- identifying, understanding and managing feelings
- self esteem (security, self-awareness, belonging and motivation)
- social & friendship skills
- loss arising from bereavement or family breakup
- creating therapeutic & social stories

How does ELSA work?

Most ELSA programmes will last for up to 12 weeks, helping the pupil to learn some specific new skills or coping strategies. Clear programme aims (SMART targets) need to be set early on and each session has an objective - something the ELSA wants to help the pupil understand or achieve.

The ELSA isn't there to 'fix' the child. For pupils with complex or long-term needs, it's unrealistic to expect ELSA support to resolve all their difficulties. Change is a long-term process that needs everyone's help.



How can we help?

- When you think ELSA might help, be specific about the area of focus. Could you help staff develop SMART targets for intervention?
- Avoid treating ELSA as an alternative or pre-requirement to specialised external agency input. Be mindful of ELSAs' training and remit. They can only support areas in which they have received training. Remember, 6 days of input is limited in scope and does not create specialists.
- It is important to consider school referral systems. The headteacher is responsible for allocating resources. Sometimes the needs of other children may be a higher priority at the time. On occasion, another member of school staff may be a more better choice to support a child due to factors related to school organisation or personal circumstances. So if you think ELSA might be a helpful intervention for a child, please discuss the possibility of this provision with the school, rather than assuming it ought to be provided. Schools will value genuine partnership in supporting pupils.



- Most ELSAs only have very limited time in the role, so can not be effective if given too many children to work with at one time
- ELSAs have clear referral systems that take account of the range of needs within a school
- The school is responsible for managing and prioritising ELSA referrals
- ELSAs generate SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time related) targets for interventions
- ELSAs only work on areas covered in initial training
- ELSAs help pupils to find their own solutions, rather than telling them what to do
- ELSAs are supervised in small groups each half term by EPs, who help them to develop their skills and work within safe professional boundaries



ELSA is an individually tailored intervention intended to help children and young people better access the educational opportunities available to them. If difficulties are primarily home-based, a family-based intervention may be more appropriate than ELSA involvement (e.g. parenting support or family therapy).

You can find out more about the work of ELSAs at www.elsanetwork.org



Info for external agencies

