What is ELSA?

ELSAs are Emotional Literacy Support Assistants. They are Teaching Assistants who have received specific, additional training from Educational Psychologists from whom they receive ongoing supervision. The training develops understanding of children and young people’s emotional development as well as strategies to support particular issues.

What is the value of ELSA?

ELSA was designed to build the capacity of schools to support the emotional needs of their pupils from within their own resources. It recognises that children learn better and are happier in school if their emotional needs are also addressed.

ELSA is highly valuable in supporting social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) challenges within school. ELSA training and supervision supports the development of a skilled member of staff who can approach children and young people’s emotional needs appropriately.

ELSA time can be used in a number of ways to meet the needs of individuals in the school. ELSAs run either small groups or work individually with a child or young person around particular issues and developing specific skills.

ELSA support is especially relevant in light of mental health being made a priority by the government.

What are people saying about ELSA?

This training has made the quality of my sessions better.

ELSA 2016 Cohort

I particularly enjoyed working with new people and sharing ideas.

ELSA 2016 Cohort

This has been an invaluable support.

ELSA 2016 Cohort

Independent evaluation reports show that head teachers, trained ELSAs and Educational Psychologists note a positive impact upon the emotional and mental health of pupils in their schools as a result of ELSA interventions.
Frequently asked questions

What issues are covered in the training?

Multiple aspects of emotional literacy are discussed including: emotional awareness, self-esteem, resilience, anger management, social and friendship skills, social communication difficulties, loss, bereavement and family break-up.

Are ELSAs useful in primary and secondary schools?

Yes! ELSAs are used effectively in a variety of settings.

Should we have more than one ELSA?

It depends on your school size and structure, but it can be highly useful to have more than one ELSA (although it is not necessary).

Who do we choose to attend the ELSA training?

The ELSA contract gives a person specification and job description which will help you make this decision.

What commitments are we making as a school?

ELSA training involves 6 full-day sessions and small group supervisions on a half-termly basis. Your ELSA contract outlines the full considerations you will need to make and the commitments that you are agreeing to.

Do you have an example of an ELSA piece of work?

A secondary ELSA worked for over a year with an upper school pupil who was having difficulty with attendance. The ELSA met with the pupil regularly in order to discuss the emotional barriers to attending and self-esteem. When in school, the pupil could also seek out the ELSA at times when they were not coping well. Over a period of time the pupil’s attendance increased dramatically and they went on to achieve excellent GCSE results.

Do ELSA’s manage behaviour?

ELSA support is not behaviour management. It’s about increasing pupils' self-awareness and helping them develop more successful coping strategies, which is proactive rather than reactive work. Day to day behaviour management should be kept outside of ELSA sessions. Most ELSAs also work as classroom assistants— in this role they may well need to deal with behaviours. However when they are delivering ELSA support it needs to be clear to the children that they are ‘wearing a different hat’, otherwise it may impact upon their relationship with the child or young person.

All children should be nurtured in accordance with their individual needs. There will always be children and young people in schools facing life challenges that detract from their ability to engage with learning, and some will require greater support to increase their emotional literacy than others. In these situations ELSAs are well placed to support these needs.

Where can I find out more?

The ELSA network website: www.elsanetwork.org

The ELSA support website: www.elsa-support.co.uk/

An example of ELSA work in High-town school on Teachers TV: http://bit.do/ELSAs

Example of ELSA on a school website: www.swanageprimary.dorset.sch.uk/elsa-emotional-literacy-support/

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