



## Kent Educational Psychology Service ELSA Agreement: Information for Schools

*Please note. This is intended for schools implementing the ELSA intervention who received training and supervision from KEPS.*

### 1. What is ELSA?

The ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) intervention was originally developed within Southampton, then Hampshire, by Sheila Burton (Educational Psychologist). The ELSA programme is more than just a training course. It is a partnership between the Educational Psychology Service and Kent schools. It was designed to build the capacity of schools to support the emotional needs of their pupils from within their own resources. This is achieved by training support staff to develop and deliver individualised support programmes to meet the emotional needs of children and teenagers in their care. It recognises that children learn better and are happier in school if their emotional needs are also addressed. This intervention is now widely implemented by educational psychologists across Britain. ELSAs are 'Emotional Literacy Support Assistants' delivering this intervention in schools.

The amount of time allocated to ELSA work varies between schools although a day a week is the minimum expected (half a day a week in small school of less than 100 pupils). Some schools have full time ELSAs whose time is dedicated to planning and delivering interventions throughout the week. Other schools might allocate a specific number of days each week for ELSA work. ***It is important however that, in any circumstance, enough time is allocated for the ELSA to be able to carry out their work effectively and manage the interventions that they are delivering.***

*What kinds of children do ELSAs work with?*

Children often benefit from ELSA support to address a range of issues. This might include helping children to:

- Develop the skills to make friends or address existing friendship difficulties (e.g. bullying)
- Manage anxiety
- Cope with loss, bereavement or family breakup
- Learn to identify how they are feeling
- Learn to regulate their emotions (e.g. anger management, managing anxiety)
- Develop their social skills, such as sharing and taking turns

- Boost their self-esteem

ELSAs are not mental health professionals. It is therefore important that the intervention is not used as an alternative to more specialist services (e.g. CAMHS) when children have significant and complex needs.

## **2. How are ELSAs selected and what do schools need to provide?**

ELSAs are selected by school staff according to their suitability for the role and capacity to conduct the work. Careful consideration needs to be given as to the personal qualities of the person selected for training. Typically, schools select Teaching Assistants (TAs) or Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) to undertake the training and run the intervention. However, counsellors, class teachers and learning mentors have also taken part. We recommend selecting those who are/have:

- Interested in emotional wellbeing.
- Good listeners.
- Able to build good relationships with children and young people in school.
- Able to provide individual and small group interventions outside of the classroom.
- Flexible, creative and willing to learn.
- Resilient in working with children and young people who have sometimes challenging behaviour and emotional needs.
- Good basic literacy skills (needed to access the training and complete target setting sheets, session plans etc.)
- Able to work independently and show initiative.
- Has good time management and organisational skills.
- Able to plan programmes of support that incorporate variety, interest and pace.
- Able to keep succinct records of involvement.

ELSAs have been described as: kind, resilient, warm, encouraging, consistent, supportive, firm, compassionate, motivated and good listeners.

As a minimum, to support ELSA delivery, schools should ensure that they are able to:

- Enable ELSAs to work with children over the course of the training to practice techniques being taught.
- Provide an appropriate space in school for ELSAs to work with children and young people.
- Ensure that ELSAs have sufficient time to plan and prepare for interventions.
- Release ELSAs to attend half-termly supervision with an EP (this is a requirement for all ELSAs to be able to continue to practice work in schools).
- Provide ELSAs with a small budget to purchase resources or materials that will help them to deliver interventions.
- Ensure that the ELSAs line manager understands the nature and limitations of the role and maintains an overview of cases to ensure that these are appropriate for ELSA intervention. The line manager can help the ELSA to identify appropriate referrals and manage caseloads (e.g. helping to review targets identify when an intervention can end and manage 'waiting lists' where appropriate).

- Ensure that ELSAs are able to work with children consistently – for example, minimising disruptions such as using ELSAs for cover in the classroom, which would result in cancelled sessions.
- Ensure that the wider school understands the type of work that ELSAs carry out and the scope of the role. It is also important that those in school have a realistic understanding of what ELSAs can expect to achieve when working with children and young people – as there may not be a ‘quick fix’ and, often, the systems around the child also need to change in addition to the ELSA work being carried out. This is supported when all of those involved in the child’s life work together.
- Ensure ELSAs are able to monitor and review the impact of their work to inform subsequent interventions and support that will be provided to the children and young people they are working with.

See also: <https://www.elsanetwork.org/about/code-of-practice/>

### **3. How do school’s sign-up?**

An Expression of Interest form is available for schools to register their interest for the next ELSA training course. Any additional places will be advertised via email and CPD Online. Schools will need to register and book through The Education People. This guidance will be accessible via a link on The Education People booking form and schools will be required to confirm that the Head Teacher has read this and agrees with the terms. We will also require the ELSA to complete an enrolment form. The Education People will then be notified that the place can be confirmed. A maximum of 1 place will be offered to any one school during a single training block and places will be allocated on a first come first served basis. Training costs will be regularly reviewed and clearly communicated to schools. The Education People will invoice the school directly.

### **4. What does the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) provide?**

Kent Educational Psychology Service (KEPS) have a commitment to (1) providing the initial training, (2) maintaining a register of ELSAs in Kent schools, and (3) providing regular supervision, detailed below.

#### **4.1 The initial training**

KEPS offer a 6-day initial training programme covering a range of topics, such as:

- An introduction to ELSA & emotional literacy in schools.
- Active listening & reflective conversations
- Attachment, relationships & belonging (including social skills).
- Managing emotions.
- Self-concept, self-esteem & motivation.
- Supporting children through loss, bereavement & family break up
- The use of puppets & story in ELSA work.
- Starting ELSA work in schools.
- Using a Solution Circles approach.

Training materials are regularly reviewed and adapted in light of developments in psychological research and theory, as well as Local Authority aims/ initiatives. Staff attending the training will be provided with handouts and relevant resources on a session-by-session basis. These will be made available for online access. Any printing will need to be done by the ELSA.

#### **4.2 Issuing certificates/ maintaining a register of ELSAs in the LA**

The role title of 'ELSA' may only legitimately be used by people who:

- Have attended at least 5 out of the 6 days of the full ELSA training course delivered by one or more fully qualified educational psychologists (see above).
- Are currently delivering bespoke programmes of support to individual pupils and sometimes small groups.
- Regularly attend half-termly supervision in small groups (with a recommended maximum of 8 ELSAs per group and duration of 2 hours per session), led by a qualified educational psychologist. Certificates confirming that ELSAs are registered will not be issued until ELSAs have attended a minimum of 4 supervision sessions. It will be made clear to ELSAs that they will need to continue to attend indefinitely after this, for as long as they wish to use the ELSA title, remain on the register, and carry out ELSA work in their school settings. Certificates will be issued on an annual basis at the end of the academic year.

KEPS will maintain a register of ELSAs who have completed the initial training. Attendance to each training day is logged.

Where schools have ELSAs who meet the above criteria, they are encouraged to advertise the intervention on their website/ school offer.

***If for any reason ELSAs take a break in their practice, they should inform the Lead EP on [elsa@kent.gov.uk](mailto:elsa@kent.gov.uk) who will remove them from the ELSA register temporarily (the ELSA can re-join when they restart intervention delivery).***

#### **4.3 Supervision and role of the ELSA line manager**

As ELSAs are employed directly by schools, they should receive management supervision from a nominated member of staff. This may be the SENCo or another manager within the school. The line manager is responsible for supporting ELSAs in their day-to-day work by ensuring that they have designated time for planning and delivery, a suitable space in which to work with children, and providing a budget for purchasing resources appropriate to their work. The line manager will also liaise with the ELSA about children in need of support, and help other staff to be aware of the role of the ELSA within school. It is the responsibility of the line manager to ensure that ELSAs are released from other responsibilities to attend training and supervision.

In addition, because of the nature of their work, ELSAs also need regular access to professional supervision with Educational Psychologists (EPs). EPs are responsible not only for initial training but also the ongoing professional development and support of ELSAs. The principal means of providing continuing support is through local supervision groups facilitated by EPs. These meet for **two hours each short term** to:

- provide casework support through the application of psychological perspectives
- enable additional training in areas not covered in the initial training course
- disseminate information about useful resources
- give access to peer support
- facilitate shared problem-solving.

ELSAs are working with some of the most vulnerable and sometimes challenging young people in our schools. For their own safety and that of the young people they are supporting, it is essential that ELSAs continue to receive specialised professional support that enables them to reflect on the quality and appropriateness of the assistance they are offering. Schools need to have due regard to the skills and competence of the ELSA and not be asking them to work beyond their competence. EPs may also advise further discussion with line manager when a young person's needs seem to be beyond the skills and competence of an ELSA and require more specialist support.

*Is there a cost for supervision?*

For the 2023-24 academic year ELSA supervision continues to be offered as part of Kent's local district offer at no charge to schools, as long as the terms of this agreement are kept.

*What will happen if an ELSA does not attend supervision?*

As outlined, receiving a certificate of training is contingent upon ELSAs attending a minimum of 5 out of the 6 initial training days, participating in at least 4 out of the 6 supervision sessions following completion of training, and submitting at least one completed impact measures form on completion of their first intervention. **Once they have received their ELSA certificate, they are required to continue accessing regular supervision to maintain their registration.**

The EPs facilitating the groups will keep a register of attendance. ELSA attendance is recorded centrally to ensure that they are receiving adequate professional support. Inevitably there will be occasions when, for reasons beyond their control, an ELSA is unable to attend a group supervision session. In such circumstances, apologies should be sent to the facilitating EP. If non-attendance is noticed to be a regular occurrence, the EP supervisor will make enquiries of the school and attempt to rectify the situation.

Where there is more than one ELSA in a school and releasing two or more people at the same time creates difficulties for the school, the EP service will be happy to allocate the ELSAs concerned to different groups.

***If an ELSA chooses to discontinue attending supervision meetings or is prevented by the school from doing so, they will be assumed to be no longer functioning in an ELSA role and their name will be removed from the register of LA approved ELSAs. They will no longer be eligible for supervision and any references to ELSA should be removed from the school offer/ website.***

This is to ensure that ELSAs are given the necessary professional and ethical guidance to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities to children and young people to an appropriate standard. KEPS recognises its responsibility in this area and consequently prioritises its support to ELSAs.

### *Supervision setting*

Supervision may take place in-person or via Teams. ELSAs should be encouraged to 'host' supervision in their schools. This is usually alternated between group members and details agreed at the end of each session for the next. ELSAs should be reminded to follow protocols in their schools for obtaining permission to host, booking rooms and informing relevant staff members of arrangements. It is important that the supervision is provided in a private space so that information shared remains confidential. The EP supervisor is responsible for sending reminder emails with details of the time and location in advance of each session. Where supervision sessions take place via Teams the ELSA should ensure that they have protected time and a private space to attend the session.

### *Safeguarding*

ELSAs should follow the school's safeguarding policy at all times. An important aspect of the Day 1 afternoon session, and reason for requesting the line manager to attend, is to discuss the importance of safeguarding in the context of the ELSA sessions and ensure that the ELSA is clear about when and how to pass on a safeguarding concern that may arise in the session.

### *What Degree of Confidentiality Should an ELSA Observe?*

Building a trusted relationship with the child is an important aspect of ELSA work. However, ELSAs are not counsellors and do not need to follow such strict confidentiality guidelines. Liaison with selected other staff in school is usually beneficial to ensure that supportive practices for the child are shared with wider school staff. A useful principle is to share generalities rather than sensitive personal details that the pupil may have shared within the session.

## **5. Planning sessions**

### *What do interventions look like and how long do they last?*

ELSAs typically work with children in school on an individual or small group basis, for 6-12 weeks. Sessions may last between 30-60 minutes - although this can vary depending on the child's age and specific needs. ELSAs should meet children once a week at a consistent time and in a consistent space set aside for emotional literacy work. In some cases, for example when working with children with more long-lasting difficulties, ELSAs might continue to provide support beyond the intervention by setting aside a regular time to 'check in' with the child on a less frequent basis e.g. 1 x 20 minute session every fortnight.

Interventions are tailored to the individual, rather than following a prescribed programme. ELSAs draw on their training to identify the main areas of need and activities that can be used to address these. ELSA programmes should work towards specific, measurable and realistic targets that are, ideally, developed prior to the intervention with the most important people involved in the child's life and/or those who have identified the need for support (e.g. teachers, parents, the school SENCo

and the child themselves). This means it is important that ELSAs have time to gather information about the child, plan sessions and identify resources.

A typical ELSA session might consist of:

- 10 minute – Starter activity and 'check in' (a time to allow the child to talk about their feelings).
- 25 minute – Main activity – The ELSA will plan the activity to the targets set at the start of their involvement. The activity might often aim to help the child to do something at the end of the session that they were not able to do previously. This can be identified using an 'I can' statement such as 'I can tell you about my strengths' (A self-esteem objective).
- 10 minute – Review and reflection, often followed by a relaxation exercise to prepare the child to go back to class in a calm, settled state.

### *Programme and session planning*

During the initial training ELSAs are supported to think about programme and session planning and are provided with templates for this. Throughout the training there are opportunities for ELSAs to work together to devise lesson plans based on the topics covered.

ELSAs should maintain session plans throughout the delivery of the intervention and are encouraged to share examples with their EP supervisors. Checking of plans is not intended as an inspectorial role for EP supervisors. It is to ascertain whether the ELSA needs any further support with identifying clear and realistic targets for a programme of intervention and appropriate session objectives. The EP would be able to offer improvement suggestions as appropriate to help an ELSA develop their practice. While it may be appropriate from time to time for an ELSA to deviate from a session plan in order to respond to a current emotional need, it is not appropriate for an ELSA to deliver support without plans. This would be reactive rather than proactive support. The exception to this is when a programme has been completed and the pupil is receiving more informal maintenance support to establish the new skills learned. This follow-up support would normally be either less frequent or involve briefer contact sessions.

Without clear programme aims an ELSA will not know when to end a programme. Programmes should have discreet aims. These need to be SMART (small, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-limited) targets. Session objectives may relate either to what the ELSA does or what the pupil does. ELSAs are encouraged to use Target Monitoring and Evaluation (TME) forms and are shown how to do so during the course of the initial training (**APPENDIX A**). A webinar from Greenwich EPS explaining how to use TME forms can be accessed here: <https://youtu.be/AEvMRbirMPA> . A more detailed form to support ELSA work can be found here:



ELSA Referral and  
Work Process.docx

For further information about ELSA please contact: [elsa@kent.gov.uk](mailto:elsa@kent.gov.uk) or visit our website <https://www.kelsi.org.uk/special-education-needs/educational-psychology/educational-psychology-services/core-preventative-services>

**Date: September 2023**





## APPENDIX A: Target Monitoring and Evaluation Form

1. The evaluation form (on the next page) should be completed in consultation with those who know the child best. A date for review should be agreed, usually within a term.
2. Up to 3 targets can be agreed. These should link directly to desired outcomes and intervention plans.
3. The descriptor of the **baseline level** should be defined first. This tells us where the child is currently at (e.g. '*Charlie usually hits other children when they try to take a toy that he is playing with*').
4. The baseline descriptor is allocated a rating on a scale from 1-10, circled and marked with a **B**. This will normally be at the lower end of the scale (around 2 or 3).
5. The level of attainment expected by the review date is defined as a target and written in the space above the shaded box. You should allocate a rating on the scale to indicate the expected level. This should be circled and marked with an **E**. This will normally be between 6 & 8.
6. At the review, a score is allocated for the level achieved, circled and marked with an **A**. A score above the expected level than (**E**) indicates more progress than expected, below this, less than expected.
7. A behavioural statement describing the level achieved is recorded under 'descriptor of level achieved' (e.g. '*When another child tries to take a toy that he is playing with, Charlie approaches an adult for help*').

Child/Young Person: Charlie Young	Date target set:
	Date of review:
ELSA:	School:

Target 1: **e.g. 'When another child tries to take a toy that he is playing with, Charlie seeks an adult (90% of the time)'**

Rating:	1	<b>B</b> 2	3	4	5	<b>A</b> 6	<b>E</b> 7	8	9
10									
Descriptor of baseline level: e.g. 'Charlie usually hits other children when they try to take a toy that he is playing with'									
Descriptor of level achieved: e.g. 'When another child tries to take a toy that he is playing with, Charlie approaches an adult for help (50% of the time)'									

Target 2: **e.g. 'Charlie is able to name 3 things that his teacher, mother and a chosen friend like or admire about him'.**

Rating:	1	<b>B</b> 2	3	4	5	<b>A</b> 6	<b>E</b> 7	8	9
10									
Descriptor of baseline level: 'Charlie reports that he has no friends and that nobody likes him. He does not think he is good at anything'.									
Descriptor of level achieved: 'Charlie can list 3 strengths identified by his teachers and mother. He no longer considers that nobody likes him'.									