

## Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA)

<b>For what age?</b>	<b>At what level?</b>
<b>The ELSA project is relevant for staff working with pupils from Reception to Year 13, within both mainstream and specialist provisions</b>	Targeted support for small groups of children experiencing social and emotional difficulties.

### What is ELSA?

The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) project is a preventative capacity-building development programme for Teaching Assistants working in primary and secondary schools. The ELSA project was originally developed in 2004 as a pilot project by Sheila Burton, an Area Principal Educational Psychologist for Hampshire County Council, in response to the increased awareness of the impact of children's emotional well-being on their educational outcomes and the need to increase the skills and confidence of Teaching Assistants working directly with children in schools.

Through the training sessions Teaching Assistants are supported to develop a greater psychological and theoretical understanding of children and young people with social, emotional, behavioural and mental health needs. Practical strategies and a range of evidence-based programmes for supporting vulnerable learners are shared. Following the training days, ELSAs are expected to meet together once every academic term (six times a year) in small supervision groups. The group sessions are led by an Educational Psychologist who provides clinical supervision, shares local good practice and models problem-solving approaches.

### How does it help children?

The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2014) reported that the emotional well-being of children in the UK scored the lowest on a range of measures in comparison to children from 20 other industrialised countries. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2013) also identified that children's social and emotional development was a high priority especially amongst those pupils identified as having additional needs. Research suggests that low levels of emotional literacy can lead to high levels of internalising (e.g. stress, depression) and externalising behaviours (e.g. aggression, delinquency) which reinforces the importance of taking a holistic, as opposed to purely academic, approach to children's education.

The ELSA project has been designed to support school staff to develop their confidence and competence in delivering focused interventions for pupils to enhance their emotional literacy skills and build their levels of resilience. With increased levels of emotional well-being children and young people are able to:

- access learning more readily.
- face new challenges more effectively.
- develop better coping strategies.
- interact more successfully with others.
- enjoy school and home life more and.

- go on to lead richer and more fulfilling lives.

### How do we know it works?

Since 2004 the ELSA project has run successfully in 45 local authorities across the UK. Evaluations of the ELSA programme in other local authorities has indicated that the intervention has a positive impact and children and young people have shown improvements in learning. Staff have felt more confident to manage 'problems' and have particularly valued ongoing ELSA supervision (Burton, 2008). In addition, there is an emerging field of research which confirms the positive impact of the ELSA project (Burton, 2004; Coppock, 2007; Bravery & Harris, 2009; Grahamslaw, 2010; Murray, 2010; Hill, O'Hare and Weidberg; 2013, and Dodds & Blake, 2015). Some of the reported benefits include: increased feelings of self-efficacy and confidence in Teaching Assistants undertaking the ELSA role; improvements in self-esteem and self-awareness for pupils; a perception amongst school staff of an improvement in the overall behaviour and emotional well-being of children specifically supported by ELSAs, which in some cases has been generalised across the whole school.

### What do children and adults say about ELSA?

Feedback from ELSAs in response to the following questions:

What have you learned from taking part in the training?

- That the role of an ELSA is a huge part of the school community.
- Your time is the biggest gift you can give a child.
- I learnt how to help and facilitate healing amongst the children I work with.

### How will it help you?

- I will become more confident in my ability to provide support to children who may be experiencing a range of emotions.
- That children should be listened to and have a voice that needs to be heard.
- I have much more knowledge about how to deal with bereavement, self-esteem, wellbeing and how to word things in the language that children understand.
- All in all, the training has been beneficial. I have made some good friends and feel reassured knowing I will be supported through supervision.
- I will be able to plan programmes that will help me to help children who are struggling to access the curriculum due to emotional barriers.
- I have a greater understanding of the assault cycle and children's motivation and this makes it easier for me to be calm and know how, when, with, what to intervene.

### How can I access training?

To find out more about the ELSA Programme within Northamptonshire please email:

[vldadmin@childrenfirstnorthamptonshire.co.uk](mailto:vldadmin@childrenfirstnorthamptonshire.co.uk) with the subject heading - ELSA

More information about the ELSA Programme can be found at:

- [ELSA Network website](#)