



The ELSA Project – A Summary of the Project

The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) project is an initiative 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.

We know that the ability to learn is adversely affected by emotional and psychological difficulties. When emotional and cognitive energy is focused upon these things there is a reduced capacity to concentrate on academic development and learning new skills. There will always be children and young people in our schools facing life challenges that detract from their ability to engage with learning. If we give them a chance to think about these difficulties within the context of a safe and supportive relationship, we can help them increase their resilience. By encouraging better recognition and self-management of emotional states they will become better able to access the educational opportunities presented to them.

All children should be nurtured in accordance with their individual needs. Just as with learning, some will require greater support to increase their emotional literacy than others. The ELSA initiative was developed to provide that additional level of attention and care that will enable children with temporary or long-term emotional needs to feel better about themselves and about their time in school. Its aim is to equip school support staff to identify needs and intervene effectively to help create change for the pupils with whom they work. It is an initiative developed and supported by educational psychologists, who apply psychological knowledge of children's social and emotional development to particular areas of need and to specific casework. Through this project, educational psychologists are able to indirectly support very many more young people than they could ever do through direct involvement.

ELSAs are learning support assistants who have received five days additional training on aspects of emotional literacy including emotional awareness, self-esteem, anger management, social and friendship skills. They receive support from educational psychologists once every half term in a local primary or secondary supervision group. ELSAs are expected to be good listeners, build relationships of trust with young people and help them increase their emotional literacy. They plan and deliver programmes of individual (and sometimes small group) support that would normally last between half to one term, and occasionally a little longer. Children may, for example, receive support to recognise and manage their emotions, raise their self-esteem, improve peer relationships, recover from significant loss or bereavement, and resolve conflict effectively.