

Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA)

This summary is part of a series produced to support the implementation of the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being. They are intended to help schools make informed decisions when choosing interventions and approaches to improve and promote mental well-being. The interventions and approaches reviewed are not endorsed by Welsh Government or Public Health Wales.

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg / This document is available in Welsh

Key messages:

- We are unable to make firm conclusions on the effectiveness of ELSA at improving emotional and mental well-being due to a lack of experimental evidence. Promising findings from qualitative studies warrants further research.
- Qualitative evidence suggests ELSA could be considered in schools where they have identified learners with additional emotional needs such as relationships, anxiety, bullying and managing emotions.
- ELSAs are trained teaching assistants who provide one to one or group sessions for a short time frame (approximately half a term).
- Schools will need to release ELSAs for training. To run the programme ELSAs will need approximately one day per week to complete the role. Supervision will be required from an Educational Psychologist for 2 hours every half term.

What is ELSA?

ELSA is a school-based intervention designed to support learners who have additional emotional needs. Teaching assistants within the school are trained to become ELSAs and have dedicated time every week to support learners. Learners who may benefit from ELSA support experience problems such as developing relationships, bullying, understanding and managing emotions (emotional literacy and emotional regulation), anxiety or other concerns which may affect their ability to learn. The aim is to support learners to develop new skills and coping

strategies to effectively manage social and emotional demands.

ELSA's deliver individualised programmes to encourage learners to find their own solutions to problems. Clear aims of working together are set at the beginning and the support is short term (approximately half a term). ELSAs require supervision from an Educational Psychologist. It is essential ELSAs work within their scope of practice and discuss any concerns with their supervisor to ensure appropriate onward referral for a learner if they have greater needs.

ELSA was developed in England and was founded by Educational Psychologist Shelia Burton (CPsychol, AFBPsS). Further information about the programme is available from the [ELSA Network website](#).

What aspect(s) of well-being does ELSA intend to support?

ELSA supports different aspects of well-being including how individuals think, understand their feelings and those of others (emotional intelligence), and manage relationships. More information about mental well-being and the things that influence mental well-being can be found on the [Public Health Wales webpage](#).

How does ELSA influence a change in well-being?

ELSA aims to support learners to understand and regulate their own emotions. It also supports learners to develop self and social awareness through respecting the feelings of those around them. These skills are important to protect and promote individual emotional and mental well-being.

Theoretical models describe how a change in outcome might take place. ELSA is underpinned by various theoretical models including Social Learning Theory. This key theoretical model emphasises the impact of social relationships on emotional development. It recognises that children learn socially as well as intellectually. ELSAs use social and emotional learning to help learners develop emotional regulation and manage challenging situations.

What are the implications for schools?

Schools should consider what needs they have in their school community for example improving emotional awareness. These may be identified within existing processes such as reviewing Schools Health Research Network (SHRN) data, whole school approach to emotional and mental well-being self-

evaluation, knowledge of learner needs, or school development plans. When considering what intervention or approaches may help, it is important to recognise that any one stand-alone programme may not fully meet the school's identified needs. ELSA could be considered by schools with learners who have additional emotional needs.

In practice a process to determine which learners would benefit from ELSA support is required. A suitable space will be needed to encourage a reflective conversation. Schools must be able to release ELSAs for the equivalent of one day a week to fulfil the role. The number of ELSAs required within a school depends on the total number of learners within the setting. Releasing an ELSA one day per week is appropriate for a school of 100 learners or less.

It is important ELSAs are professionally supported and work within their scope of practice. To achieve this supervision from an Educational Psychologist is required. Appropriate plans need to be in place should a child's needs change and become greater than what the ELSA can provide.

If already using ELSA, or planning to, schools should think about how they can monitor and evaluate the impact of ELSA against identified emotional and mental well-being priorities of the school community.

What do I need to know if I'm thinking of using ELSA?

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| Intended recipients | Support is indicated for those who have experienced problems with loss and bereavement; emotional literacy; self-esteem; social skills; friendship or relationships concerns; managing strong feelings; anxiety and worries; bullying conflict; emotional regulation; growth mindset; or problem solving skills. Suitable for learners in early years, primary, secondary, special education and further education settings. |
| Age range | 4 to 18 years |
| Delivery method | Support is provided on a one to one basis or in small groups. This is offered for approximately 6 sessions (half a term) but can be longer if required. |
| Resource requirement | <p>ELSA Skills requirement: The ELSA support network recommend ELSAs should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a warm personality and be able to stay calm under pressure. • Be able to gain the confidence of children who are behaviourally challenging or socially withdrawn. • Be happy to work independently and show initiative. • Be creative in planning interventions and efficient in recording ELSA work. • Be eager to learn and develop new skills. <p>Training time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training is a minimum of 25 hours (usually 6 days). <p>Ongoing ELSA support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 hour clinical supervision every half term with a qualified Educational Psychologist. <p>Programme delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools need to release ELSAs for an equivalent of one day per week (approx. 5 hours). This expectation is set for schools of approx. 100 learners or less. As such number of ELSAs required within a school and time they will need to complete the role will vary dependent on the size and needs of the school. <p>Costs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training costs between circa £500-800 per delegate for a 6 day course. Schools are advised to review availability of subsidised courses or grant funding. • Ongoing costs include small group supervision sessions with an Educational Psychologist. Schools are advised to check whether this provision is in place locally or whether there would be additional costs. • There are a range of free resources and numerous manuals available to purchase on the ELSA website. Schools are encouraged to make a small budget available to build a resource bank. |
| Language | The ELSA network website provides resources in English only. Local services may want to translate resources into Welsh to meet local needs. |

Note details are correct as of July 2023.

Further information available from the following websites: [ELSA support](#) and [ELSA Network](#).

What did we want to find out?

We wanted to find out whether ELSA improved emotional or mental well-being of learners in the school community. To do this we were looking for published academic research that measured changes to outcome measures related to emotional or mental well-being.

What did we do?

We searched for academic research papers that looked at whether ELSA changed emotional or mental well-being outcomes.

We reviewed papers to identify key information which was summarised and presented to an expert panel. The panel included a range of professionals with experience in Education, Health, Policy and Academia. The panel met and agreed recommendations for this summary based on our evidence identified from the search.

Full details of the evidence review and expert panel decisions are available within the technical report which can be provided upon request. Please email:

hi-programme.support@wales.nhs.uk

What did we find?

We were unable to find any research that measured the effectiveness of ELSA in improving outcomes for pupils. We found five qualitative studies* which looked at school experience of using ELSA, and the findings indicated that schools consistently reported a positive experience of using ELSA.

Rather than measuring outcomes, qualitative research results show common themes. Common themes identified within the five qualitative research papers suggested improvements in positive relationships; confidence; managing conflict; skills development; dealing with feelings; engagement; hopes and aspirations; emotional resilience; support and skills development; ELSA - child relationship;

emotional regulation and uncertainty about programme aims.

We were unable to make a conclusion on effectiveness due to the lack of experimental evidence on ELSA. However, the positive qualitative research suggests that further research should be undertaken that can answer questions about the effectiveness of the programme on learner outcomes.

What are the limitations of the evidence?

There is a small body of evidence available for ELSA. We identified 5 papers to review. A key limitation is that there are only qualitative research papers available. This means we do not have any objective measure of how ELSA affects emotional or mental well-being of learners.

How up to date is this evidence?

Evidence published up to Autumn 2022 was included in this review.

Concluding Statement

We are unable to make firm conclusions on the effectiveness of ELSA at improving emotional and mental well-being due to a lack of experimental evidence. Promising findings from qualitative studies warrants further research.

If already using ELSA, or planning to, schools should think about how they can monitor and evaluate the impact of ELSA against identified emotional and mental well-being priorities of the school community.

*References:

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