

Programme and session planning – guidance for ELSAs

Proactive support

ELSAs have been established to deliver planned programmes of support designed to increase the emotional literacy skills of the children and young people with whom they work. This is proactive not reactive work. While ELSAs may often be called upon to deal with the fallout from incidents in school, this should be recognised as additional to their role and not their principal function.

Programme aims

When agreeing to work with a pupil, it is important to set clear programme aims. A referral form has been provided that allows the ELSA to gather brief background information on the pupil's skill level and then, in conjunction with the referrer or the ELSA's line manager, to identify some programme aims. These may be identified by asking the question 'By the end of my involvement, what is it that you hope this pupil will be able to do that they are not able to do at present?'. You may identify up to three aims in this way, but more than that is likely to be unrealistic. Many pupils receiving ELSA support may have quite complex needs and it would be unreasonable to expect all issues to be resolved.

The programme aims should be like SMART targets on individual education plans – **S**mall, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-limited. Without such targets, it will be difficult to define the direction of the programme and be clear about when it is complete. The time frame within which you expect them to be achieved would generally be between half a term and a term. If a programme lasts a lot longer than this it probably indicates an absence of clear and realistic targets. Once the programme aims have been completed it may be appropriate to provide some ongoing review arrangements so that the pupil has some continued but reduced support while generalising new skills, e.g. a brief weekly review or a longer session once every few weeks. Some pupils may need a further programme of support at a later date, with new aims.

Below are examples of some aims, from different programmes, that might be achievable within a term:

- to recognise and be able to talk about the emotions happy, sad, angry and frightened
- to identify and use a selection of calming strategies appropriate to different contexts
- to be willing to attempt tasks that contain a challenge
- to understand the difference between assertive and aggressive behaviour
- to be able to list six personal qualities or strengths on request
- to be confident to contribute to class discussions.

Session plans

Good sessions require adequate thought and planning in advance. A planning form has been provided and should be completed for each session. The first thing to identify is the objective for the session – the desired outcome. This would normally be quite small but needs to be made specific so that the ELSA knows whether or not it has been achieved. Some examples are provided below:

- for ELSA and pupil to find out three new things about each other
- to practise turn-taking
- pupil to identify the main things that trigger her angry feelings
- pupil to develop and practise scripts for asking to join in activities with peers
- to choose a self-calming strategy pupil will try when finding writing difficult
- to explore the importance of eye-contact.

Like a good lesson, the best ELSA sessions contain a variety of activities carried out with pace so that pupil interest is maintained. Following a brief written plan helps the ELSA ensure purpose and pace within sessions. A good session is likely to include an initial warm-up (e.g. review how the pupil is that day or how their week has gone), a brief recap of the previous session to check that the pupil can remember what they learned, a simple explanation of the objective for the current session, an engaging learning activity, a summary of the main points and a take-away activity. This last part may simply be a request to notice something specific in the week ahead or to try out a strategy that has been discussed.

It is helpful at the end of the session to add a few brief evaluative comments to the planning form, noting what went well or anything the ELSA wants to remember to inform future session plans. On occasion the ELSA will need to deviate from the plan because of something raised by the pupil, in which case this would be indicated in the evaluative comments and the omitted learning activities returned to at a later date.

Record-keeping

The completed session plans form a record of involvement that provides accountability for the time spent in support of a youngster. They are also a useful aide memoire when liaising with other staff or with parents. These should be retained and passed on with other pupil records if or when the pupil moves school. ELSAs should therefore be careful to ensure that they only contain factual information that would not breach confidentiality guidelines.