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Following the ELSA Steering Committee meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2020, we would like to update you and offer some guidance on the national ELSA training programme and ongoing supervision arrangements for trainee and registered ELSAs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Firstly, we would like to say a sincere thank you to the national ELSA network and communities of ELSA practitioners during this time in their endeavours to support families, children, young people, and each other. We recognise and appreciate the enormous efforts of ELSA trainers who have continued to provide support and who are making difficult decisions in uncertain times to continue with and make contingency plans for the delivery of the ELSA training programme. We hope this document will help with future decision-making processes.

## **ELSA Supervision**

Supervision is what sets the ELSA training programme apart from many other similar CPD packages and is integral to the ELSA programme. We are greatly appreciative of authorities and service providers that have found virtual solutions for supervision during this pandemic and who have been able to continue to offer this support. We also understand that this may not be possible for everyone and may have had to be suspended.

During the first phase of lockdown, some ELSAs were still delivering the ELSA programme and as such supervision was maintained. During the second phase and as schools have re-opened, we acknowledge that ELSAs are unlikely to provide programmes of support in schools due to the constraints of working in 'bubbles'.

To keep people connected within ELSA communities the offer of support and reflection through supervision may be incredibly helpful at this time. Although the focus may not be on the ELSA programme per se, staying connected, maintaining relationships, and providing a space to share experiences may be very well received. This is not a mandatory requirement, but training providers could still offer a point of connection via a virtual platform if it is felt helpful to do so. It is advisable that if contact points are scheduled, or are being maintained, that a review point is set, for example, meeting virtually until August, with a review in September. We would expect that once we are able to safely meet in person that supervision continues in face to face groups as per the ELSA model.

For our ELSA trainers, we would encourage you to make contact with each other if you are not already doing so. Perhaps this could be arranged regionally via the regional networks, or via the

online ELSA forum (<https://www.elsanetwork.org/>) It is obviously important that we support each other too and look after our own wellbeing.

The committee has representatives throughout the UK, and they are as follows. Please do contact the person nearest to your geographical location if you have any questions or concerns that you would like to raise directly:

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## ELSA Training

To stay true to the fidelity of the ELSA training model, and to get the absolute best tutoring experience, in person training is the ELSA training model. Since Covid-19, we understand that some training providers have sought to problem solve continuation of delivery by offering online/ virtual training. We genuinely appreciate your efforts but must advise that the ELSA steering committee has not, nor will not endorse the use of moving to, or using virtual training platforms for the delivery of core content of the national ELSA training programme, nor is to be seen as a future platform for delivering ELSA training.

We also must advise that trainees that have begun to, or may be registering to complete future online training will not be able to be able to use the title of 'Registered ELSA' if they have completed, or are expected to complete all core training days online. We must also remind you to be mindful of copyright law in relation to this.

If online training has already been delivered, it is an expectation that sufficient time is allocated to revisiting this material in a normal training context and to bring ELSA training back to the fidelity of the delivery model. It is essential that trainees have the opportunity to apply in practice the theoretical elements for skill development.

ELSA training is expected to include a minimum of 25 hours of delivery in person and spread across a minimum of five days. Most services are providing the equivalent of six days of delivery. Services may choose to enhance and compliment content with access to online/ virtual

training presentations in addition to the core training, but this should not be included within the minimum 25 hours face to face contact time.

If you have begun to deliver virtual training and it includes the core ELSA content, we can assist in supporting your future delivery to integrate what may have already been covered on a virtual platform if you would find that helpful.

For clarity, it is for the following reasons that we are not able to endorse online training leading to ELSA registration, or indeed, to call online teaching ELSA training:

- 1) A fundamental ideal is that ELSAs are supported to build their own ELSA communities within and between each other and which provides a strong sense of group belonging and identity. In the absence of face to face contact and the opportunity to meet and build interpersonal relationships with each other, this value is lost. The greater the number of trainees, the more difficult this becomes. The same is true of us as trainers and in moving to virtual platforms, we also lose the opportunity to really know the professionals that we are working with, to establish rapport, to be empathic towards each person and their personal learning journey, to be authentic, to attune, and to model the attributes that we desire ELSAs to have and to continue to develop in their role as an ELSA. These opportunities are invaluable in the continued support and development of ELSAs and which we feel are lost in the limitations of virtual platforms.
- 2) An integral part of the ELSA training programme is the opportunity and requirement to have time to apply in practice the theoretical elements of being an ELSA. Emotional wellbeing is something that we not only teach, but model through example. This is done through a variety of methods such as modelling, paired thinking, group collaboration, self-reflection of learning activities, time to discuss learning, and the draft planning of sessions of support. When we are together in person, the learning process is dynamic, spontaneous, focussed, creative, and occurs in the moment.
- 3) We often have a wide range of tangible resources that we take to training sessions to use in demonstrations, such as puppets, and we often provide a wide array of other tangible resources for ELSAs to explore. We are not able to do the latter on a virtual platform and point (2) becomes exceedingly difficult, if not impossible due to the constraints of remote learning. We can also miss the richness of experience and diversity of thought that is frequently sought and shared face to face. We should also consider that people may not be so willing to share thoughts and ideas online, and in the absence of interpersonal connections that are formed when we meet in person.
- 4) There are distinct areas within the core training that are seen to be entirely unsuitable for online learning. These include but are not limited to active listening and reflective conversations and bereavement and loss. If you have spent any time working on a virtual platform in recent times, you will likely know from your own experience how difficult it is to read the non-verbal communication of others on a screen, particularly if there are multiple participants. As a committee, we cannot envisage how we can then try and teach these skills which rely so much on being present, active in our listening, and attuned, when we are not with each other and face to face.

5) As HCPC registered psychologists, we have a responsibility to ensure our practice is ethical. As ELSA trainers, we extend that duty of care to hold the emotional space for our trainees, to contain powerful feelings, and to make people feel safe and secure. The bereavement and loss training are particularly susceptible to revealing vulnerabilities through the sharing of personal experiences which may be triggered by the content of this day. When we are face to face and have the support of interpersonal relationships and feel we can trust others with our thoughts and feelings this day can be profoundly moving. We do not feel therefore we are able to fully hold the emotional experience for our trainees on a remote platform, and would not be practising ethically, or in the best interests of others if ELSA training were delivered online.

Moving forward with the provision of ELSA training, the national picture is variable. Some training providers and local authorities have postponed until the autumn term, at which point the logistics of training are to be reviewed against whether training spaces are open, accounting for physical distancing measures, the availability of staff to attend training (notwithstanding teaching bubbles), and whether in the interests of public health it is safe to meet in larger groups. Because of the high levels of uncertainty, other training providers and local authorities have postponed ELSA training until the spring term 2021. We feel that it may be most helpful to decide to postpone the training until at least the autumn term and subject to review. This may alleviate anxiety arising from uncertainty if a definitive decision could be made by each service provider and within services who are part of the local authority. The steering committee is monitoring developments and we will review and contact you again in the Autumn term with further guidance as may be needed.

We would like to conclude by saying thank you again, and to remind you that we are available if you have any questions, or matters to be discussed that can not be answered via the ELSA online forum. We hope that you remain in good spirits and that you and your loved ones are well, in every sense of the word.

Kindest regards,

The National ELSA Steering Committee