

THE CONTINUATION OF ELSA TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

AUTHORS: The National ELSA Steering Group: Sheila Burton, Dr Dawn Bradley, Anna Cox, Dr Laura Grahamslaw, Dr Robert Kempson, Dr Mary Leighton, Dr Fiona Okai, Dr Felicity Record.

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Please note, when we refer to ELSA training and supervision in this document, we refer to the ELSA Network model.

Following ELSA Network steering group meetings in September and October 2020, we would like to offer you updated guidance on training and supervision of ELSAs during the ongoing 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 have been possible for everyone and may have had to be suspended. We believe that online supervision now needs to be provided to all active ELSAs, (i.e. those currently engaged in delivering planned and targeted ELSA programmes.) We would expect that once we are able to safely meet in person that supervision continues in face to face groups as per the well-established ELSA Network model.

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 many ELSAs are unlikely to provide programmes of support in schools due to the constraints of working in 'bubbles'.

ELSA Training

To stay true to the fidelity of the ELSA Network training model, and to get the absolute best tutoring experience, we continue to advocate that training days are best delivered in person. Since Covid-19, we understand that some training providers have sought to problem solve continuation of delivery by offering online/ virtual training. We understand the reasons for this and are pleased to know that trainers have incorporated interactive learning sessions. In view of reported experiences, we recognise that there are benefits in considering a blended training model post-pandemic, comprising online presentations and face to face days that would increase the time available for discussion and activities, including demonstration and practise of basic counselling skills, practise in setting SMART programme aims and in session planning.

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We are seeking to stay true to the fidelity of the ELSA model, yet recognise that in the interests of public health, we cannot expect in person training to continue as it did before March 2020. Perhaps we were overly optimistic in drawing up the guidelines shared in June 2020. Moving forward, we remain hopeful that we can all fully return to the ELSA network model of delivery once it is safe to do so. In the interim, we are offering the following guidance, which is a blended model of ELSA training delivery, combining independent, virtual, and in person learning.

In the guidance of June 2020, we cautioned against moving the ELSA network training in its entirety to an online platform. We advised that in the absence of any direct in-person contact that the ELSA network could not endorse the use of 'Registered ELSA' as title. For reasons explained in the initial guidance, we still believe that ELSAs need and benefit greatly from in-person interactions and support. As part of a learning experience, the opportunity to rehearse skills, practice and to apply in practice theoretical elements of the training is needed. It is understood that logistically, offering a degree of in-person training will likely create some difficulties, but we feel that if we are not able to meet with each other in person at all, we risk losing some of the core values of the ELSA Network training.

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 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 in normal times we would not expect this to replace the minimum 25 hours face to face contact time. Online delivery may however be used to enhance the training experience by freeing up time for increased practical elements within the training days.

During the pandemic, we support use of online delivery that incorporates audio-visual presentation with small group interactive sessions online. We recommend that this should also incorporate assignments to be submitted by the trainee ELSAs that allow the trainers to assess their understanding of the material and ability to apply their learning. This will also allow trainers to revisit and clarify aspects of the training that may need further explanation in

webinars. We recommend that once in-person meetings become possible, trainers provide additional face to face sessions either in small groups or as a cohort. A good balance might be a two-hour session per module (delivered in small groups by a single EP as in supervision or to the whole cohort by a group of EPs). We plan to open this up as a discussion within the ELSA Network closed forum to help clarify the type of content that might usefully be covered in this time.

For clarity, it is for the following reasons that we wish to retain a strong in-person element to the training model:

- 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 diminished. 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 diminished 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 alone. This is specifically true of active listening and reflective conversations. Careful consideration also needs to be given to loss and bereavement, where there may be strong personal resonance for trainee ELSAs that is more easily picked up within in-person training. These include the practice of active listening and reflective conversation skills. 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 steering group, 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. We do not feel 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 all ELSA training were delivered online.

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 cannot be answered via the ELSA Network online trainers' forum.

Kindest regards,

The ELSA Network Steering Group

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

NAME	GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION	EMAIL
SHEILA BURTON	Chair	sheilaburton@elsanetwork.org
DR DAWN BRADLEY	Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, East Cheshire	enquiries@summitpsychologyservices.co.uk
ANNA COX	Hampshire and the Isle of Wight	Anna.Cox@hants.gov.uk
DR LAURA GRAHAMSLAW	Surrey	Laura@psychologyfirst.co.uk
DR ROBERT KEMPSON	Wales	Robert.Kempson@rctcbc.gov.uk
DR MARY LEIGHTON	Doncaster	Mary.Leighton@doncaster.gov.uk
DR FIONA OKAI	Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole	fiona.okai@bcpcouncil.gov.uk
DR FELICITY RECORD	London	record50@gmail.com