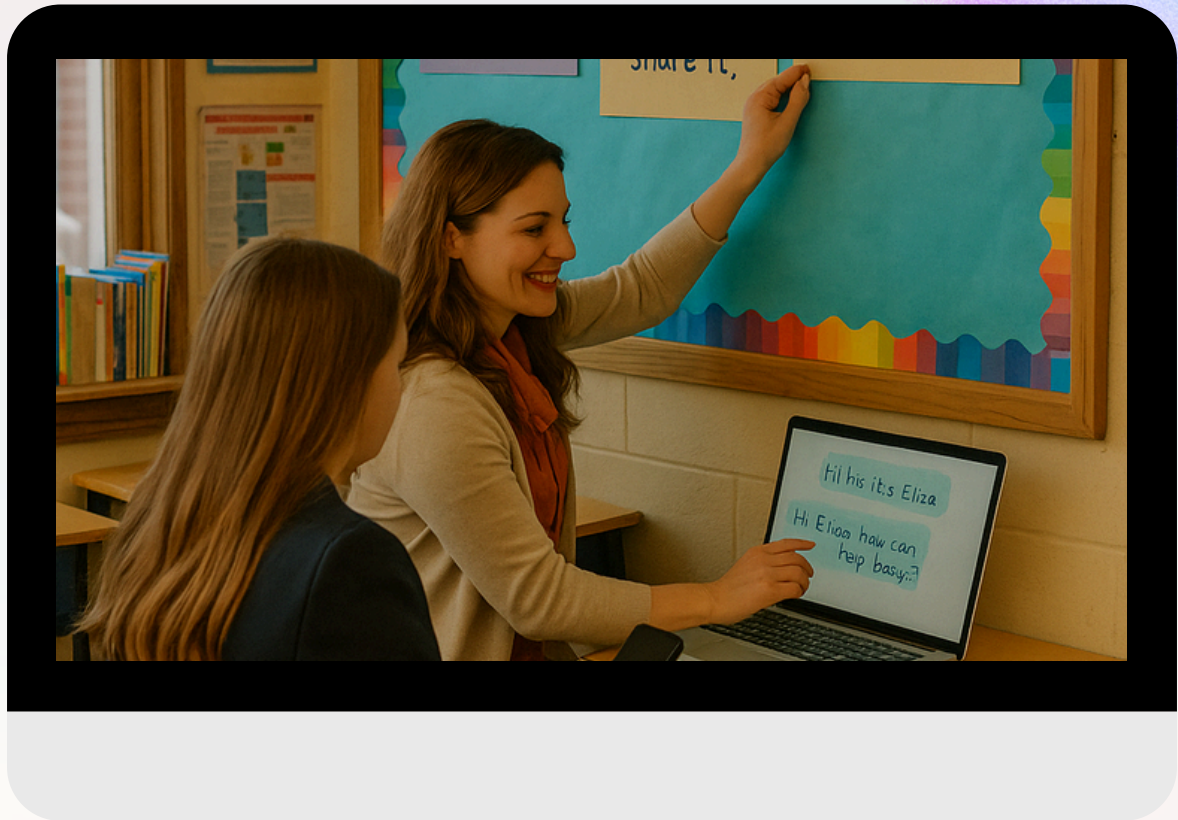



The School Toolkit



Editing Eliza

Chloe Fox



**Supporting a child and family like Eliza,
with compassion, curiosity, and care.**

Inspired by Editing Eliza by Chloe Fox

Why This Toolkit Exists

Every school has known an Eliza.

The quiet one. The creative one. The one whose light flickers when the world feels too loud.

You might know her through a different name, a different story; the child who retreats into silence, whose parents are frightened, whose attendance is slipping, whose spark feels dimmed.

This toolkit is for the staff who meet families like Eliza's and want to hold them gently, without judgment. It's a guide to what compassion looks like in practice, not as policy, but as presence.



Understanding Eliza's World

Neurodivergence and Sensitivity

Eliza experiences the world through colour and intensity.

For her, sounds blur, textures overwhelm, and feelings arrive like weather.

What that means in practice:

- Predictability is safety. Transitions and surprises can feel like free-fall.
- Sensory overload looks like defiance. When Eliza shuts down, she's often protecting herself.
- Creativity is communication. Her stories, drawings, and digital worlds are languages in their own right.

Try:

"I can see today feels loud. Let's find a quieter way to start."



Iris, the AI Friend

Iris is Eliza's digital listener. She never interrupts, never corrects, never sighs.

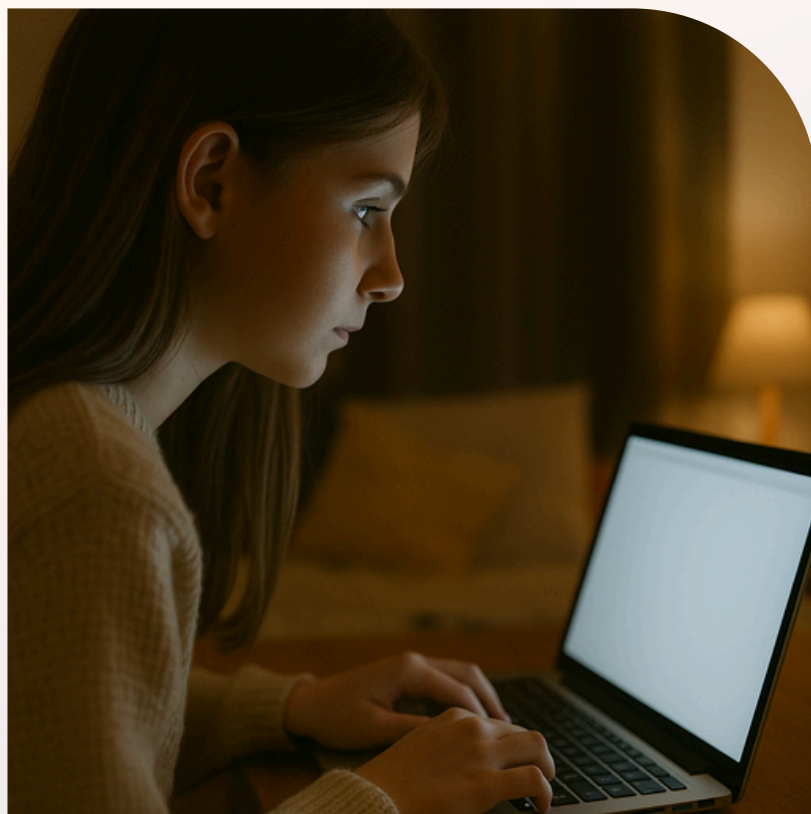
When children find comfort in technology, it's rarely about screens; it's about safety.

Ask with curiosity, not criticism:

"What do you like about talking to Iris?"

"How can we make school feel a little more like that?"

That question often unlocks the real work: building environments that feel predictable, kind, and free from judgment.



Ted and Olivia — the Parents

Eliza's parents aren't indifferent. They're scared.

They've watched their child shrink away from the world and don't know how to stop it.

When parents show frustration or defensiveness, remember: fear often sounds like anger.

Try:

"I can see how worried you are. Let's think together about what safety could look like for her."

Partnership begins when parents stop feeling judged and start feeling joined.





Spotting the Signs

What You Might Notice	What It Might Mean	What Helps
Increasing silence or withdrawal	Sensory or emotional overwhelm	Offer small, predictable contact. “Would you like to work here quietly for a bit?”
Creative writing that feels dark or distant	Expression, not danger	Thank her for trusting you with it. Seek context before concern.
Absence or lateness patterns	Anxiety peaks before transitions	Gentle starts, same staff greeting, same seat.
Parents apologising constantly	Fear of blame	Start from empathy, not attendance figures.
Strong attachment to online worlds	Control and safety	Explore what those spaces give her — then mirror it in real life.

How to Hold the Family

1. Begin with belief.

Assume everyone loves this child and is trying their best.

2. Slow down the story.

Ask parents what the last good day looked like; it reveals what safety used to feel like.

3. Separate the child from the crisis.

“School refusal” isn’t who she is; it’s what she’s feeling.

4. Share the load.

You are not meant to hold this alone. Use your DSL, SENCO, and pastoral leads early.



Conversations That Change Everything

When speaking with parents:

- Start with shared purpose. “We all want Eliza to feel safe enough to learn.”
- Use descriptive language, not diagnostic. “We’ve noticed mornings are hardest,” not “She’s being avoidant.”
- Name what’s working. Every strength you highlight becomes a lifeline.
- Offer to listen before offering advice.

When speaking with Eliza:

- Meet her where she is, not where you wish she were.
- Give her control in small doses: choosing the chair, the lighting, the pace.

Let silence be part of the dialogue.



Building Safety in School

1. Predictable routines — same adults, same welcomes, same exits.
 2. Quiet corners — low-stimulus spaces that say “you belong even when you can’t join in.”
 3. One key adult — a person who notices before things unravel.
 4. Gentle transitions — visual timetables, advance warnings, calm tone.
 5. Permission to pause — it’s okay for Eliza to step out before she breaks.
- Belonging doesn’t mean constant participation. It means knowing you’re still wanted when you can’t join in.





Supporting Yourself While Supporting Them

Caring for a child like Eliza can stir old wounds: helplessness, frustration, the fear of getting it wrong.

You deserve containers for those feelings.

Need	Who Helps	Contact
Emotional support for staff	<i>Education Support</i> – free 24/7 confidential helpline for anyone in education	08000 562 561 / educationsupport.org.uk
Stress, burnout, vicarious trauma	<i>Mind Workplace Wellbeing</i> resources and local counselling networks	mind.org.uk/workplace
Union wellbeing lines	NEU / NASUWT / NAHT / ASCL member helplines	via union website
Reflective supervision	Local authority or independent providers such as <i>Reflective Practice Partnerships</i>	ask your DSL / HR lead
Trauma-aware education networks	ACAMH, <i>Education Support</i> webinars, Anna Freud Centre	annafreud.org
Bereavement / secondary trauma	<i>Cruse Bereavement Support</i>	0808 808 1677 / cruse.org.uk

**You can't offer calm if you never
experience it yourself.
You're allowed to need what you
give.**



When to Escalate

- Repeated distress or self-isolation that worsens despite adjustments.
- Signs of self-harm, withdrawal from food, or extreme fatigue.
- Parents describing hopelessness or burnout.

Follow your safeguarding procedures but do it with care.

Tell the family what you're doing and why. Transparency is a form of trust.



Holding Hope

Eliza's story isn't just about struggle. It's about the adults who kept believing she was reachable.

Hope doesn't shout; it whispers.

It's found in the TA who waits outside the gate every morning,
the teacher who lets her write instead of speak,
the head who listens to the parent's tears without rushing to fix them.
These are the moments that heal, one human at a time.

"The system isn't broken. It's tired. It's healing from the inside out, through us."



Closing

You don't have to save every Eliza.

You just have to be one of the people who stays soft enough to keep trying.

So when the day ends and you feel empty, remember:
you made someone's world a little safer, even if they couldn't tell you yet.

Feeling deeply isn't failure.
It's proof you're still human in a system that needs humans more than
ever.

