

READ★PRAY★WONDER★PLAY

A GUIDE TO SHARING STORIES WITH CHILDREN

My Elephant Is Blue: A Book about Big, Heavy Feelings

By Melinda Szymanik & Vasanti Unka

My Elephant Is Blue is a book about the big, heavy feelings that children can have and how some people carry these feelings for a lifetime. There is a "[Discussion and Activity Guide about Sadness](#)" that offers support for families. While this story focuses on sadness, the story of learning to live alongside whatever it is that a child feels burdened by—chronic illness, neurodiversity, physical disability, or mental illness—can be applied to many situations and can help children understand how some mental and physical health issues remain and yet change over time.

This story uses metaphor, and younger children may need help connecting an emotion or experience that feels heavy with the idea of an elephant's weight and a color. When reading the story, note that the instincts of the caregivers is to fix the situation. Pay attention to your need to respond and your ability to walk alongside your child's feelings as you consider how you can see your family in this story.



★ ★ WONDER TOGETHER ★ ★

- Before reading the story together, look at the cover and wonder what these big, heavy feelings feel like. How might these feelings compare to having an elephant sitting on each of you?
- What conversation would you have with an elephant like Blue in your life?
- What helped the child in the story feel lighter? What helps you feel lighter from heavy emotions or experiences?
- Why do you think the elephant turned pink and then yellow?
- How does it make you feel that at the end of the story the elephant is still in the child's life? What might that mean for emotions and experiences in your life or the lives of those in your family?
- Do you think we all may have an elephant like Blue in each of our lives? Why or why not?

★ ★ EXPLORE THE STORY ★ ★

- Invite your child to imagine they have an animal that lives with them, like Blue. Have your child draw a picture of that animal and the color it feels like right now. Talk together about this animal and when it may transform into different colors or animals.
- Sadness or depression often get dismissed or others try to fix it. Discuss together why we might be uncomfortable with our own or another person's sad feelings.
- Do an internet image search for "feeling wheel for children" and choose an image to explore the nuanced feelings associated with different emotions. Encourage your children to use these, and other words, to help identify and unpack feelings.
- Watch the movie *Inside Out* (Disney/Pixar, 2015). Talk together about the emotions in the movie and what is learned about sadness.

PRAY

Loving God, you are always with us no matter how we feel. You sit in the darkest valleys with us. You help us carry our heavy burdens. May we rest safe in your gentle presence and be that for others when they need it too. Amen.



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Feelings and emotions are part of being human and something that everyone experiences. As children grow and develop it is important to help them verbalize and accept their varied emotions. Let them know that emotions can feel very big and overwhelming at times, but that they also change even if they continue to be experienced in some form.

- Help your child notice how an emotion feels in their body. In the book, the child identifies sadness like a huge weight upon them, like an elephant sitting on them.
- Share and label your own feelings to give your child permission to share their emotions without judgment.
- Normalize their feelings. Acknowledge that they are OK and that feelings are not good or bad but part of being human.
- Read books or watch YouTube videos or books about feelings. Search “children’s picture books about feelings” for suggestions.
- Do research to familiarize yourself with symptoms of mental health concerns, like depression, and how children experience them.

The psalms are poems, prayers, and songs to God that express a full range of human emotions with the assurance that God hears us and is always with us.

- Read aloud a psalm from *Psalms of Wonder: Poems from the Book of Songs* by Carey Wallace and illustrated by Khoa Le (Flyaway Books, 2023) or from a Bible. Read several lines of the psalm and wonder what feelings the writer is expressing and when you have experienced a similar feeling.
- Invite your child to draw or paint a picture, or just use colors to express their feelings, while you read a psalm or a portion of it.
- Invite your child to write a prayer or write one together.

Remember that sadness is a normal reaction to life experiences that comes and goes for short periods of time. If you feel your child has sadness that lasts a long time and interferes with their life’s daily abilities, talk with your child’s doctor or a mental health professional. It is ok to ask for help.

MORE TO READ & DO

CLICK THE LINKS BELOW TO LEARN MORE

ADDITIONAL DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES FOR *MY ELEPHANT IS BLUE*

- Download the [Discussion and Activity Guide](#)
- Download the [Coloring Page](#)

ADDITIONAL BOOKS THAT ACKNOWLEDGE & EXPLORE EMOTIONS

- [Max and the Purple Worry](#), by Kitty Black and Jess Rose
- [One Thursday Afternoon](#), by Barbara DiLorenzo
- [Simon and the Big, Bad, Angry Beasts: A Book about Anger](#), by Ian De Haes
- [Grandpa’s Window](#), by Laura Gehl and Udayana Lugo
- [Sidney the Lonely Cloud](#), by Tim Hopgood
- [What in the World Is Wrong with Gisbert?](#) by Jochen Weeber and Fariba Gholizadeh

Guide written by Meg Elliot Rift and created in partnership with PC(USA)’s initiative “[Around the Table](#)” (pcusa.org/aroundthetable).



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