

**Red Chocolate Elephants: For Children Bereaved by Suicide**


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Diana Sands provides an interactive and unique resource for adults to use with children bereaved by suicide. *Red Chocolate Elephants* is a compilation of writings, personal narratives, and illustrations by eight children, age 5 to 11, who have lost a father to suicide. The text is a developmentally appropriate resource for helping children in their journey toward understanding and expressing the feelings associated with losing a loved one to suicide. Readers should be cautioned, however, that explanation of and further reference to the meaning behind the book’s unique title is not provided until the end of the book. The group name was selected by the children participating in the bereavement group by putting a slip of paper for each of their favorite colors, foods and animals into a hat and then drawing out three choices. All three selections, “Red,” “Chocolate,” and “Elephants” were submitted by the same boy.

*Red Chocolate Elephants* is divided into three major sections: 1) a focus on the child’s understanding of his or her loss 2) feelings the child is experiencing and 3) ways in which the deceased loved one can be remembered and shared. The subsections are highly personal and provide numerous anecdotal narratives and drawings by the children participating in the bereavement group. Each section provides direct quotes from the children as well as information from the author herself describing the aforementioned grief constructs in easy-to-understand language. Perhaps most beneficial are the questions posed to children at the end of each section as well as the subsequent suggested activities. Both encourage an open dialogue about the child’s feelings and experiences following the loss of a loved one to suicide. Sands uses age appropriate language, phrases, and activities throughout the text to appeal to elementary aged youth.

A DVD version of the first two sections of the book, understanding and expressing feelings associated with loss due to suicide, is provided with the text. The DVD features the actual voices of the eight children presented in the book, bringing their narratives to life. The DVD is presented in a child-friendly manner, intertwining the children’s narratives with brightly colored illustrations. The DVD does not, however, include further information or activities than those found in the book. Rather, it serves as an alternative version suited to younger children who may not yet have developed the reading skills necessary for the book.

*Red Chocolate Elephants* offers a child-friendly approach to discussing the effects of suicide as well as numerous suggestions for remembrance activities for children age 5 to 11. While these activities seem to have been well received by the original target group, there is no mention of an empirical basis for the interventions provided, which is clearly the next step to learning how to best help suicide-bereaved children. Sands does, however, provide a list of general suicidology resources for Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States at the end of the text. *Red Chocolate Elephants* is a helpful and important addition to the available literature base for children affected by suicide. Likewise, the resources provided at the end of the book cater to the needs of children during the difficult time following the loss of a loved one to suicide and lead readers to further sources of support.