



The
Elephant
Manifesto

by **Liz McGowen, MA**
and
Effie the Elephant

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Introduction

This is a short guide. Elephants are very direct and to-the-point.

It is generally about embracing elephants. Emotional Elephants. You will find it different from most works because it is written by a real expert – my friend Effie the Elephant. I have assisted her, partly because elephants aren't very good typists.

I originally asked for Effie's input because of difficulties with elephants in my own life. Effie and I have a long history together, and longstanding trust between an elephant and a person is quite rare for reasons you will soon find out.

Please understand that you are reading a work partially written by an elephant and typed by a woman who communicates with this elephant. That being said, I hope you can understand that the content is in no way a substitute for communication with real, live people who are (ahem * cough * cough *) SANE.*

If you feel you need to talk with someone further about what this report brings up, then please do so. A doctor, licensed counselor or licensed healthcare professional would be a good place to start.

All my best,

*Liz McGowen
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Hi. I'm Effie, and I'm an elephant.

Most people have never actually spoken to an elephant, so I'd like to set you at ease. I'm not here to squish or do anything nasty. I'm just here as an observer.

Nearly everyone has an elephant. Psychotherapists and others who deal with "people problems" refer to these as issues, traumas, and use other fancy-pants words.

Since I *am* an elephant, I can honestly say that I really do *know* elephants. So, I'm going to dispense with the formality of the therapy jargon and just call us what we are -- elephants.

I'm also going to say that for quite some time now, I have been an elephant outsider. I am blue, I am quite small by elephant standards, and when properly bathed I sometimes smell like wildflowers. I cannot talk and cannot move without assistance. That makes me unlike most other elephants. Insightful, but different.

Now I'll get right to the point.

Here's what happens: elephants often come into your life because a really-really-awful-bad-terrible thing happened

to you. Then we lurk in your life to see what's going to happen next.

Sometimes, elephants lurk there to protect you from being injured further. Other times, we stick around to see whether more elephants are going to arrive (since we are very social and we like hanging out together).

We're even famous enough that people sometimes refer to the "elephant in the room".


I know, it's pretty cool to be a rock star.

The problem is that not dealing with your elephant prevents all sorts of *good stuff* from flowing naturally into your life. There's something about it that just gets blocked and stuck. You keep not dealing with the elephant and, since the elephant really wants you to pay attention to it, it gets in the way.

Make sense? Are you following me so far?

I hope so.

In times when you are weak, your elephant might come out to nudge you and to say "Hey, I'm here. Think about me. I need some of your attention." We are very needy



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creatures. Then you start thinking about us rather than the positive things in life.

Next thing you know you're on your couch with a tub of frosting watching "Terms of Endearment". Not pretty.

Most people ignore their elephants, and some people spend their whole lives and countless hours and dollars actually figuring out really fascinating ways to avoid us. They become so constantly busy that they are never still with themselves. They bring into their lives tons of *stuff* just to keep their minds off the elephants. They practice avoiding and ignoring so much that they eventually end up miserable.

Other people spend their whole lives trying to get rid of elephants – theirs and the elephants of others. They literally fight and try to tame elephants every day. They get specialized training and spend years and years learning. They make themselves miserable (aha, that word again) trying to get us to leave.

Some of these elephant fighters actually believe they have eliminated their own elephants. Or they continue to deny the continued existence of elephants in their lives.

The other day, Liz asked me: *Effie, why do people put so much time and effort into elephants?*

I'll tell you, but I know it's going to hurt my rep in the elephant community. It's because we're really not very pleasant to have around. We're a tremendous drain. And we're scary.

Some people have several of us hanging about. They try to keep us in closets, under the bed, in the basement, or in other out-of-the-way spots. They would never dream of telling anyone (even the people closest to them) that we're really there. It's just too frightening for many reasons.

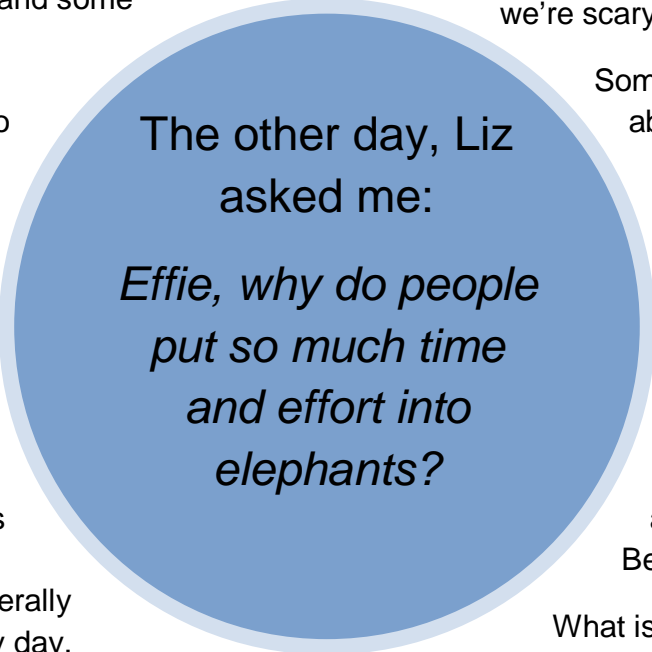
But you know what? Everybody already knows you have an elephant. Because everybody has one!

What is more, they can sense that you have one.

Wow.

Let's sit with that one for a moment.

That's right, even the most I'm-so-together person has one. Possibly more than one. All the bling and cool clothes and cars and stuff may be a sign that they are



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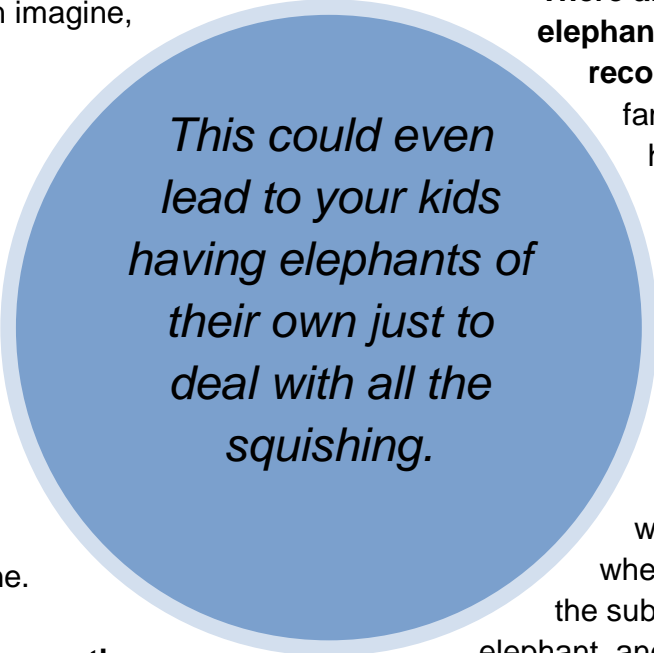
really, really scared of their elephants. And that they might have lots of us.

The sad thing is that these efforts to hide your elephant actually may make your elephant even madder and make her come out even more often. And when we're mad, we tend to get all riled up and squish things. Sometimes we poop on stuff. Unexpectedly. You can imagine, it's usually not pretty.

- **Elephants are used to being bigger than everybody else.**

We are used to being able to intimidate people and bully them. This can make confronting your elephant very, very scary. That's why people often refuse to acknowledge us and stash us away in hard-to-find places. It's also why elephant eviction is not easily done alone.

- **Chances are good you have more than one.** Elephants are social, so once you have one hanging around chances are very good you'll create an environment that is perfect for adding another. And another. And maybe even another. Eventually, your life can get pretty cluttered.



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- **Elephant upkeep is, as you might guess, hugely expensive.** The costs of missing-work-because-your-elephant-is-acting-up and having-to-get-medicine-because-your-elephant-won't-go-away are staggering.
- **There also are costs associated with elephants that you might not even recognize,** like the toll it takes on your family and friends to have an elephant hanging around, never sure when we might squish something. This could even lead to your kids having elephants of their own just to deal with all the squishing.
 - **Other people tend to really, really not like elephants.** Most bosses, teachers, and even friends and family want nothing to do with your elephant. They will avoid you when your elephant is around, change the subject when you try to talk about your elephant, and generally try to minimize elephant-related interactions as much as possible.
- **Elephants have a lot of baggage.** We keep it around for years and years. This takes up a tremendous amount of physical and emotional space.

So, Effie, what's a poor girl to do?

Now there are some people who say, "Just get rid of it."

Ouch. I have to say, that's a pretty painful option. *Very* painful.

No matter how many problems your elephant is causing in your life, it still is intimidating and messy to take a good square look at her and say "get out."

Most people don't want to do this – I mean, can you blame them? What if things don't go well? They risk getting squished or pooped on.

Here's the really interesting thing that some people don't understand: you have devoted time and space and effort to this elephant. It is a part of you – probably a very important part that you've arranged lots of things and stuff around.

If she (or he) suddenly evaporated and you hadn't prepared for that sudden empty space, it wouldn't last long. Your elephant would be back, bigger and better than ever and squishing even more stuff and knowing that you couldn't get rid of her.

That, my friend, is not the path you want to take.

I'm going to say something now that is extremely controversial: Rather than kicking your elephant out, you want to embrace it.

You want to prepare things so that your elephant knows it is OK to come out to get some attention. When that happens, acknowledge her.

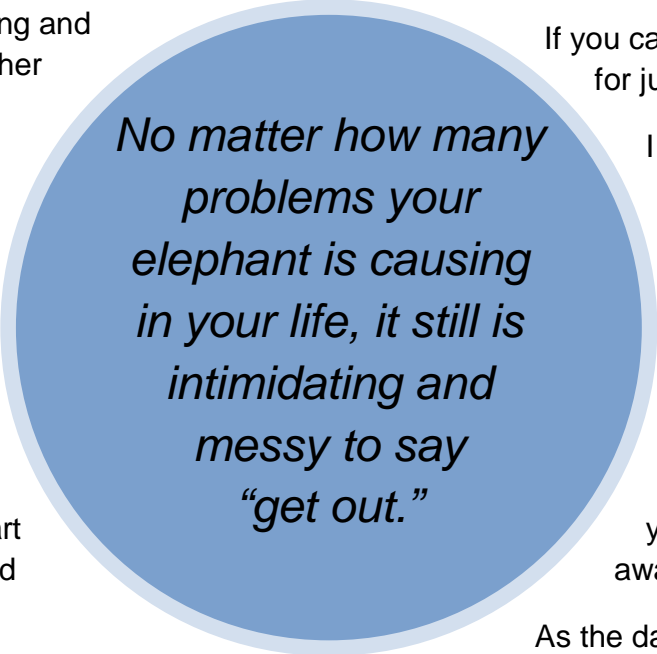
If you can, very gently sit with your elephant for just a moment, then let her retreat.

I know. It's very scary to think about.

During your first encounter, if and when it happens, it might not be possible to sit with each other for even a moment. Your elephant may find this entirely too shocking.

If that is the case, don't force it. Don't even think about it. Just let your elephant know that you are aware she is there.

As the days and weeks progress, you may find that you and your elephant grow a little more tolerant of each other's presence. You might be able to give her a name. You might be able to remember when she first came to be with you, or other times she's come out to nudge you or squish things.



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Eventually, you may be able to look at your elephant and identify the space she is taking up in your life, and you can take care of your elephant. You can look at her and say, "Wow, how did you get here?" You can also find out how on earth she got so big, or so messy. You can find out all sorts of things that you might never have considered before.

All of this is very good.

There is a way to very carefully and slowly and safely begin to care for the elephants in your life. Over time, we may settle down. We might not come out as often, and we will be more likely to be better behaved at dinner parties.

I disagree with those who take a hard line approach to emotional elephant removal, and that's part of the reason Liz and I have been able to live together for such a long time. She squarely acknowledges that elephants exist in everybody's lives.

After all, I'm in her life, aren't I?

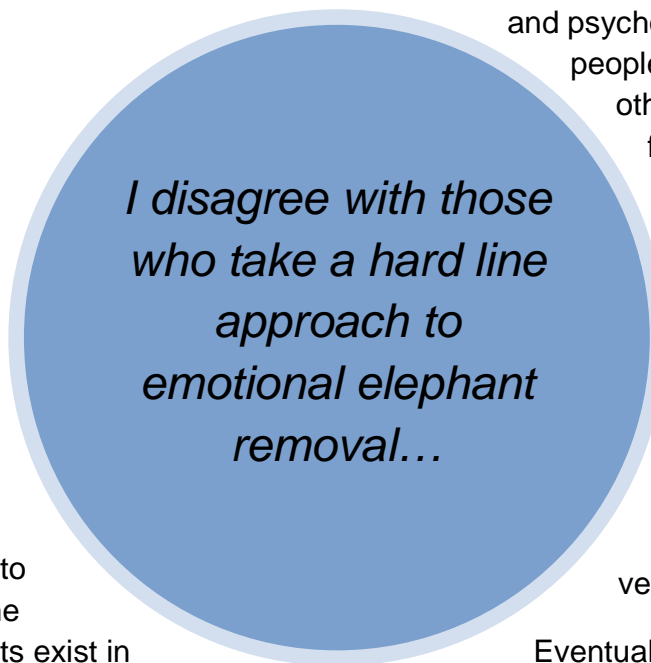
She embraces us. Seriously, she embraces me all the time.

She lets me sit there during her day, and doesn't even ask me to hide. Well, there is this guy called an "accountant" whom she never lets me meet, and I usually don't go to softball games because it would be too messy. But I think I'm included in most other things.

I do try, partly through my gift of being extremely quiet and psychoanalytical, to help her explore people's elephants and to keep her (and other people) safe. Sometimes it's frustrating to me that I have to be so quiet. But it works.

When we meet people who have elephants (which is pretty much all the time), we find that a very slow approach works best. Very slow and very gentle. If they need our help, we start by trying to help acknowledge their elephant and beginning to feel their presence. It's very hard, sometimes very slow work.

Eventually, much later down the road, we might even be able to identify the stuff that is related to their elephant. We often find clutter is something an elephant brought with her. Difficulties with relationships. Problems with eating or sleeping. These things take lots of time to identify, but are often evidence that an elephant is indeed lurking.



Please understand that emotional safety is a huge issue when dealing with your elephant. If you believe you have an elephant and she changes course or becomes more scary, it is important that you get help. If your elephant begins talking to you, talking through other people or things, or telling you to do something, most definitely get help. I'm not kidding. Seek help from a doctor or counseling professional right away.

Millions of people out there are actively ignoring their elephants. Another few million want to embrace their elephants but are too scared.

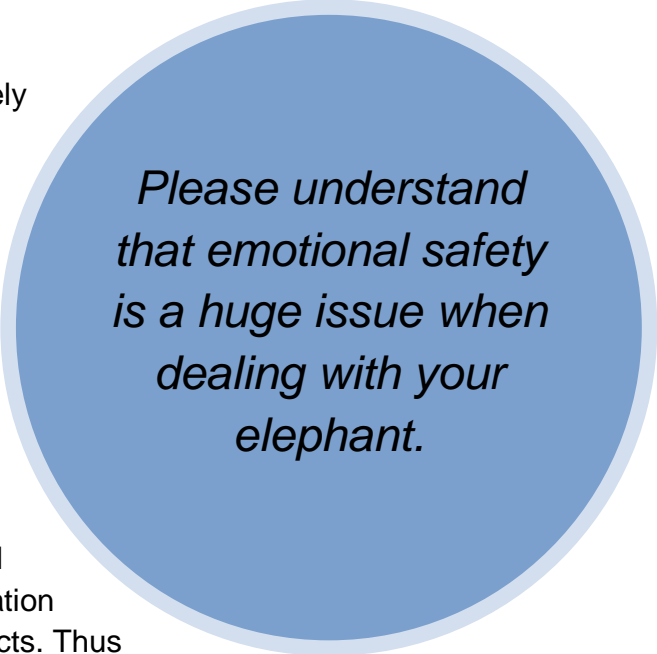
I hope this little guide will be of help to you and to your elephant. Feel free to read it to her, and ask her what she thinks once you are able to tolerate a discussion.

I know many of you will have questions. I must tell you that I spend the majority of my day in quiet meditation on very serious and imperative subjects. Thus if you have a question or need to reach me, please send an email to Liz (reachable via liz@lizmcgowen.com). Put something like "Question for Effie" or something in the title. She will discuss things with me and get back to you.

Thank you for reading this. You are a truly special person for being able to allow this to resonate with you.

And best of luck with your elephants.

For Effie's detailed story, please scroll to the last page...



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Effie's Story

I came into Liz's life a few months after her oldest daughter was born, thanks to our dear friend Tracy who found me at the store and recognized my unique abilities.

For the first year or so, I lead a life devoted to the baby. I also spent a large portion of my time in quiet consultation with her cat, Missy.

I learned a lot from Liz, but I actually learned most of what I know from Missy who went to grad school with Liz and absorbed the information in her textbooks by sleeping on them daily. Let me tell you, Missy really knew her stuff.

Anyway, in 2001, Liz and her friend Holly were working on a project and desperately needed to point out the importance of acknowledging elephants in the lives of clients. So I got to come to work with her for a big and important meeting! And she wore a jacket that was blue like me!

It was awesome, and after that I was a little famous at her job.

From that point on, I continued to accompany Liz to fun things *and* to be with the baby. Soon more babies arrived, and one day I got a terrible orange juice stain that still won't come off. I like to think of it as my beauty mark.

Then one day Liz told me she was opening a private coaching practice and she took me to her office, where I hang out a lot. Sometimes our clients come to visit us, and lots of times we talk to them on the phone.

Occasionally, we have what are called "home visits" where we go visit other people's houses and sometimes I get to play with the kids and see the toys. That's my favorite part.

I stick around, partly because I think Liz is just really fun and creative, and partly because sometimes we *do* find other elephants in our clients' lives and I like to make sure everybody knows how to handle them.

Most elephants aren't nearly as busy as I am, but I love what I do.

Hugs and squishes,

Effie