

BOOK REVIEW:

How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce? A Create-a-Storybook Guide to Preparing Your Children -- with Love!

Reviewed by Matt Krough

The old saying (or is it my mother?) tells us that life doesn't come with instruction manuals—but most of us sure wish it did. With thousands of mostly useless self-help books littering America these days, it's refreshing to find one that tackles a difficult problem and breaks it down into elements of what you should do, why you should do it, and how everyone involved can benefit from the process.

Available only as an e-book, Rosalind Sedacca provides a thoughtful and clear path for divorcing parents to follow when they have to ask the question, “How Do I Tell the Kids about the Divorce?” And the e-book format, while a new experience for some, is precisely the reason why Sedacca's book is so broadly useful.

The responsibility for any given [divorce rests squarely on the shoulders of the parents](#). But Sedacca, like many others offering advice about divorce, believes that the route to an integrity-based divorce comes from a child-centric approach. This book helps to focus parents' attentions on reassuring children about what will stay the same: the love both parents have for the kids, even without them both living in the same household.

Sedacca's own divorce experience led her to define the six points that she felt were the most important to communicate to her son:

- This is not your fault.
- You are, and always will be, safe.
- Mom and Dad will always be your parents.
- Mom and Dad will always love you.
- This is about change, not about blame.
- Things will work out okay.

From these points, Sedacca developed each chapter of the book to offer an analysis of a particular issue—for example, defining the family history, explaining problems and solutions, or how to finish the conversation—and follow it up with testimony from experts in child psychology or psychiatry on the reasoning behind that particular approach. While experts' testimony about each component of Sedacca's advice is

reassuring, the e-book's real utility comes from its customizable format, a tool which encourages parents to fill in the details of their lives before and with the children.

This key tool in the e-book is what Sedacca calls a "Storybook Template." Construction of the "Story" using Sedacca's suggestions and fill-in-the-blank forms is really a way of creating a joint family history up to the point of divorce, and projecting a reassuring future for all involved—especially the children.

In the throes of a painful divorce, it can be difficult for parents to step outside of themselves to objectively analyze the right course of action. Because of this, Sedacca's process focuses on understanding how things look from the perspective of the child.

Children are rarely surprised by divorce itself, regardless of their reaction to the announcement itself. We all are able to feel the tensions around us at home, children no less than anyone else. But the kids' understanding of their own role in those tensions needs to be clearly defined in such a way that they don't come away from divorce feeling that they themselves are responsible for the break-up of the family.

As an example of her emphasis on the need for understanding children's perspectives, Sedacca and a guest expert, Dr. C. Paul Wanio, explain the proclivity toward "magical" thinking that inclines kids toward feeling responsible for bad things happening around them. Heading that idea off at the pass is a crucial part of one's task as a parent in these conversations.

But doing so doesn't mean that her method will be easy for anyone. Sedacca's account of using her storybook method with her own son is heart-wrenching:

As I started reading about changes in the family, tensions, disagreements, and sad times, I watched as tears pooled up in my son's eyes. By the time I reached the end of the story he was weeping uncontrollably and holding on to both of us as tightly as he could.

But she counterbalances this account with her 28-year-old son's intro to the book, in which he expresses gratitude for the storybook methodology Sedacca and her ex-husband used to discuss the divorce, and the meaning that has stayed with him even as he plans to become a new father himself.

While the book lays no claim to being literature, its simple premise—that we need to be able to see divorce from the perspective of the children, and discuss it with them in terms they will understand—is well worth delving into. With two sample storybooks designed for kids five to ten years old, or from ten to fifteen, this book will certainly help any parent answer the question of how to tell the kids.

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