

**Schechter, I. J. (2019). Do You Ever Cry, Dad?:
A Father's Guide to Surviving Family Breakup. Toronto: Dundurn Press.**

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“Do You Ever Cry, Dad?”, authored by I. J. Schechter, is an important book relating to men’s mental health and family relationships after a divorce which involves children. This recent book is a smooth mix of personal accounts and professional insight which easily engages the reader and provides context to unique and highly complex circumstances.

This book, at its core, is about children, not fathers; the title itself puts the reader in the point of view of a child whose parents have separated. Children are entirely dependant on their parents, so a father can not afford to sink into despair, act out in manic or depressive fits, or neglect his children to build a new life. Fathers need to be a stable pillar in an uncertain situation so that their children can grow and develop in a healthy manner throughout life without parental divorce polluting aspects of their future relationships. The author summarizes this feeling directly and effectively by saying that “no matter how stressed you’re feeling, or how angry, or sad, or desperate you are, you’re a father whose children need you. This means that you need to make sure you don’t do something you might permanently regret, or which might unfairly impact others or, worse, compromise your relationship with your children.” (pp. 105-106). According to Schechter, letting yourself heal with time, making appropriate decisions, and working to make yourself physically and emotionally healthy are the best things you can do to help your children after a divorce.

Another important facet of this book is to inform divorced fathers that they are not alone in going through a divorce, and that things will get better in time. Many men do not feel able to discuss personal shortcomings in their marriage or express deep emotions for fear of appearing weak or vulnerable. Schechter aims to fill a gap in the scholarship around family relationships by specifically giving voice to many fathers after divorce to show that other men have gone through these tough times too and they can turn out okay in the end by getting help and support from others.

Schechter uses several methodological devices to enhance the book. The first is that he continually includes citations from Family Counsellors (p. 30), Therapists (p. 34), Family Psychotherapists (p. 37), and other sociological and psychological professionals who provide a professional backbone to the large number of testimonials of divorced fathers. Another method used is concluding each chapter with a standardized questionnaire filled out by a divorced father, providing context into complicated situations. Personal accounts, whether Schechter's or someone close to him, account for a significant portion of this book.

Schechter, having experienced a divorce himself, deeply understands the pain that a father and his children can experience when a marriage ends. Throughout the book, the author is open with his personal experiences with divorce and describes the intense levels of isolation, vulnerability, and pain he experienced, an admission that many modern men have a challenge making. Schechter wrote this book to provide information to divorced fathers which he gathered from professionals and other dads who have gone through a divorce, so that decisions that dads are forced to make, are as informed as possible.

This book also does an excellent job of putting intense emotions and feelings into words,

a skill lacking in a world of heteronormative masculinity. Learning to identify patterns of unconscious thought that may be highly destructive is a benefit of family support books like this, which help manage negative patterns so that families do not turn into divorce horror stories. Schechter uses language like “gajillion” (p. 86) and “pain in the posterior” (p. 86) to connect with men who may be turned off from an overly academic book which engages openly with vulnerabilities and emotions. While this methodology makes the book more manageable, it has the effect of making the book seem informal to an academic audience.

“Do You Ever Cry, Dad?” has a very focused purpose, making it not suitable for all aspects of studying divorce and family life. Targeting divorced heterosexual men, who are fathers, and also have the impetus to maintain healthy family relationships according to western values, significantly narrows the individuals this book can apply to, though this is not to say that number is insignificant. All of these specifications and constraints make this book an excellent resource for this prevalent circumstance but become idiosyncratic and challenging to apply to other areas of family life.

Schechter is adamant about not discussing the cause of the separation. The author discusses how fathers are routinely “given access” to their children, when they should be entitled to have an equal presence in his child’s life as his partner has (p. 100). This argument is not true, since there are a variety of actions and behaviours that either partner may commit that would cause the other partner or the State to remove their parental rights over their children. Schechter, by ignoring the potential causes of divorces and not acknowledging damaging actions that parents can take, ends

up providing advice that applies only to amicable separations, and not ones that cause intense disputes or physical and emotional harm.

An opportunity was missed to deeply discuss the nature of custody predominantly being granted to mothers in a divorce. Schechter mentions custody briefly in his “Negotiating Your Rights” chapter (p. 100), but the author mostly discusses constructive negotiations with the child’s mother. Schechter emphasises negotiation without lawyer’s present (p. 87) and finding balanced solutions, but this may be challenging in a system that is biased toward granting custody to mothers. Fathers who are actively engaged in their child’s development have been denied full access to their children in the past, so navigating the structural barriers to modern paternal custody is an opportunity missed by the author.

The target audience of this book has two main demographics. The first, somewhat obviously, are newly divorced fathers who need assistance navigating one of the most traumatic events of their lives. The second target audience is more academic in nature and would use this book as a lens to view family relationships and, more broadly, societal frameworks. This group would include Social Workers, Family Therapists and Counselors, Sociologists, and more. Mainly, people who work closely with families, and professionals who study the interaction between family members and stressors to those relationships. Teachers and Early Childhood Educators would also greatly benefit from reading this book due to the unique insight that it provides into what is happening in various families as they are going through tumultuous times. Also, since divorce causes disruptions which potentially take years to resolve, ensuring institutional support for children whose families are experiencing divorce while at school is necessary to give children

the best chance to avoid lasting emotional damage from their parents' divorce.

Although there are certainly areas of Schechter's book that can be improved, there are enough sections that provide substantial support and advice for fathers for this book to merit a recommendation to other fathers as well as an academic audience. Each divorce is unique in its circumstance and the pain it inflicts upon a family. Each father undoubtedly feels, at times, rudderless and isolated, unsure of himself and uncertain as to what to do next. Recently, society has started to embrace men's mental health as a genuine topic of discussion, a much-needed development, and Schechter's work is an excellent beginning to further explore men's perspectives. A challenge to future writers and sociologists will be to consolidate male and female perspectives on contentious issues like heterosexual divorce involving children in an objective academic framework, rather than the tone of this book which is tailored more to the fathers experiencing divorce themselves.