



Eckler, Rebecca. (2019). Blissfully Blended Bullshit: The Uncomfortable Truths of Blending Families. Toronto: Dundurn Press.

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In Rebecca Eckler's book, "Blissfully Blended Bullshit: The Uncomfortable Truths of Blending Families," Eckler takes the readers on the journey of her and her daughter, Rowan, blending with her partner and his two children. Eckler navigates the readers through all the blissful moments of blending but does not hold back from the bullshit moments she experiences. This book is a true eye-opener to what it's really like to create and maintain a blended family and how new roles within the family are to be balanced. It's an honest and raw read and opens up conversations on blended families that are often ignored. Eckler highlights many emotions that she struggled to voice to her family or others around her. Eckler delves into family discussions, fights, money, advice given and received, expectations, and family bonding.

The main issue Eckler opens up about was the lack of discussion between her and her partner before choosing to blend. She admits she was crazy in love and, at the moment, did not care about the potential consequences they might face. This, however, changes when she starts to see the effects unravel in her life. Conversations regarding parenting styles, family trips, exes, and, most importantly, money were never discussed beforehand and ultimately had a negative impact on their blissful blending journey. Eckler and her partner welcomed their shared baby shortly after moving in together while still needing more parenting discussions or what this would mean for

their already existing children. Eckler felt it wasn't her place to parent her partner's children, which left her feeling like a stranger in her own home and created a divide between her and her partner. Family arguments are inevitable. However, Eckler did not consider how little problems can cause such big fights. The first notable fight in their blended family was the "Hi/Bye Fight." Eckler was hit with the first family argument over who was supposed to say hello to each other first and who would initiate the goodbyes. The "Hi/Bye Fight" played a role throughout the whole book but was just the starting point for the little annoyances she would face. Eckler stresses the importance of discussions in her family which can translate to any family structure outside the book. Sufficient conversations are often shied away from, which, in turn, creates more significant problems and miscommunications.

Fighting about money was recurring throughout the book as Eckler felt she was fronting the main bills and felt no effort or appreciation from her partner. She initially admitted to giving her partner a pass as he was still going through a divorce and a new business but assumed that over time things would change. When she began to notice her partner had no intentions of chipping in more or paying back the money he had borrowed, she became resentful. Money was the root of their main problems, and they could never make it on the same page to resolve their issues. Eckler often stated she felt underappreciated when her partner wouldn't chip in more or buy nice things for herself or her daughter, but he always seemed to have the money to splurge on his own children. Problems regarding money are one of the most common issues a family can face and cause a great amount of stress in a household.

Throughout the book, Eckler inserts a story that a friend or an acquaintance told her, high-

lighting their experience with their blended family. These stories either conveniently lined up with her issues or issues that were soon to come. We saw the two sides of her giving advice to others and seeking advice. Some stories give the impression that her friends and acquaintances felt she knew best about the situation as she was living a blended life herself. Eckler admits throughout the book that she has no idea about blended situations as a whole and it's all about individual experiences. People often turn to their family and friends in a place of need and try to be there for others as well. Being a good support system for those around you can be extremely difficult in a situation that isn't black and white. Most cases aren't black and white. Advice and needed support are things people in their everyday lives look for and need in challenging situations. Eckler's book gives great insight into how these personal relationships play out in different situations.

Eckler admits to having high expectations in her life and, therefore, with her blended family with her partner. Time and time again, she was disappointed and reminded to lower her expectations. A big expectation Eckler shares at the beginning of the book is that all children would be treated the same, considering they are all family now. Many instances arose where it was very apparent that there was a difference between biological and stepchildren. Eckler hated when she or her daughter were being treated differently or treated less than by her partner and his family. Eckler, however, was unwilling to give up the things she and her daughter had been doing for years and had no problem not consulting with the rest of the family. Eckler still took her daughter on their yearly birthday Miami trip, trips to Mexico, and school plays without bringing her partner or his children. She even admits to loving her biological daughter more. Though she greatly loves her stepchildren, she realizes it is not the same type of love.

Bonding is essential in all family structures. Eckler had high hopes of bonding with her blended family in an attempt to create a strong base but ultimately fell short. A lot of blame was placed on her partner's ex-wife, and she uses her as the reason that all the kids were not closer throughout their time together. Eckler invited her partner's ex-wife to come to visit the house that her kids would be living in half of the time but ultimately shut it down, which offended Eckler. The children's ages were primarily an issue for bonding. Eckler's daughter was younger than her stepchildren and was largely interested in different activities. While Eckler was placing blame on her partner's ex due to her not letting the children do certain activities with the family or having a significant influence on her daughter's opinions, Eckler's intense emotional reactions only put her stepchildren in an awkward situation. Often, it felt as if Eckler wanted her stepchildren to choose her over their biological mother when it came to meaningful decision-making. Blended families are a common family structure to see. Blended families often come with a child having both a birth mother and a stepmother, which can create stressful situations for the children as they are placed in a position where they are expected to make both parties happy. Pleasing all family members is hard to achieve, especially when they are not on the same page and are selfishly trying to get the child to choose sides.

At the beginning of the book, Eckler was very open about the fact that this book was not about how to be a step-parent or having stepchildren but rather how blending affects everyone "like our exes, our ex-in-laws, our new in-laws, and even the dog" (p. 12). Eckler is open and honest about a blended family's hardships and details areas that people find hard to open up about. Eckler does go into challenging topics but in a very negative fashion. The author touches on every

aspect of her life, but it comes across as continuous complaining and is often hypocritical in many situations when it is not to her benefit. Still, this book is an excellent read for parents in a similar situation or even children experiencing a blended family. The academic audience that could benefit from this book does come from a sociological perspective as well as a psychological perspective. This book gives great insight into how many modern families are operating on the inside and gives an even greater look into how it individually affects the people in and around the family. I found “Blissfully Blended Bullshit: The Uncomfortable Truth of Blending Families” an enlightening read and would recommend it to others who find themselves in a similar situation and need some insight.