



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

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Rebecca Eckler's book, "Blissfully Blended Bullshit," discusses personal stories about her experiences with blending families with her now ex-boyfriend. Throughout this book, Eckler reveals the uncomfortable truths about blending families, which "so-called-experts" seem to leave out. In this book, Eckler and her daughter Rowan move in with her boyfriend, who also has two biological daughters of his own, and they end up having a son together, Holt. Eckler and her boyfriend were blindly in love and rushed to move in together, hoping their lives would adjust and become more normal. A relationship, which started as a one-night stand, quickly formed into a blended family with no prior preparation for what was about to come. Eckler stresses common themes throughout the book, such as relationship planning/setting guidelines, the uncomfortable emotions and stressors which arise in blending families, and how different blended families are compared to nuclear families.

Eckler and her ex-boyfriend did not plan how their families would blend or set guidelines which describe what each partner expects from the other throughout the relationship. This may have been the seed that caused their relationship's downfall. She admits that "there was no sitting down and talking about the logistics, no discussion of how it would affect the kids, no dialogue

for who would pay for what, no talk of disciplining each other's children..." (p. 29). Their relationship seemed to rely on their love, and they expected everything else to fall into place if they just tried hard enough. However, the above quotation perfectly explains the ongoing problems Eckler dealt with in her relationship; these problems could have been addressed before blending. This book showcases the importance of setting guidelines in relationships which help both partners understand what is expected of them. She initially loved her boyfriend unconditionally and hoped his daughters and Rowan would bond and become like sisters. Still, as time passed, the blended family members became distant from one another because of substandard relationship planning. For example, Eckler wanted her boyfriend's daughters and Rowan to attend camp together to bond and form friendships with children who lived in Eckler's neighbourhood (pp. 189-190). However, the boyfriend's ex-wife "adamantly disagreed and didn't even bother to entertain the thought of her two daughters going to the overnight camp [her] daughter had attended for a couple of years" (p. 189). The approval of both biological parents is essential in blended families because both parents must agree to all travel-related activities. Poor relationship planning blinded Eckler from realising some difficulties that would arise while blending families. The boyfriend's ex-wife has power in a relationship she did not partake in, similar to how Eckler's ex-husband has influence over Rowan. Eckler has experience with co-parenting, but she was blinded by love, which in return caused a significant setback in the bonding of their children.

Eckler faced some of the most significant relationship problems due to poor planning. Issues such as money, the division of chores, or differing parental styles could have been addressed in the beginning stages of the relationship. The most prominent problem in their relationship

revolves around money because Eckler owns all of the properties, and she paid most of the utility bills (pp. 138-139). She also loans her boyfriend twenty thousand dollars to help him pay off lawyer fees, which ends up causing a lot of resentment for Eckler (p. 44). Eckler knew she would be the breadwinner in their relationship because she made much more money than her boyfriend. She was aware of this predicament, but it didn't matter to her at the beginning of the relationship, and by the end, she felt like she was being taken advantage of. Her boyfriend's financial status did not worsen throughout their relationship; she just blindly expected it to improve.

Parenting styles or discipline measures were not discussed in their relationship, which led to more problems. In one paragraph, Eckler states, "... boyfriend's children are not biologically mine - and again, I've never attempted to parent them over the years and have never once disciplined them..." (p. 213). Eckler never acted like a mother figure to the boyfriend's daughters because that role was never established while planning to blend families. Parenting styles are essential because boundaries can be set, and respect can be earned between family members. Nevertheless, Eckler and her boyfriend didn't consider these critical family concepts, which were reflected in their time as a blended family.

Another theme throughout the book focuses on emotions like loneliness or being left out in their own home. Issues such as the Hi/Bye fight started early on in the blending process, and this fight was primarily concerned with who takes the initiative to greet the other family members when they come home (pp. 64-65). The Hi/Bye fight is common in blended families, and it is caused because blended family members are trying to understand their new roles in the family. In one of the chapters, the boyfriend's children felt insulted because Eckler didn't greet them when

they got home (p. 64). Eckler didn't intentionally ignore them, but her boyfriend insisted that she apologise to his children to be the bigger person (p. 67). Eckler began questioning how much respect she was being given in her home because she was being asked to apologise for something she deemed insignificant. She eventually apologised, but it felt forced because she believed that his children should greet her; she should not have to take full initiative every time (p. 67). In another instance, Eckler's boyfriend changed his screen saver to his two biological daughters and Holt, excluding Rowan and Eckler (p. 88). In one paragraph, she explains, "If he indeed just chose it without a second thought, that means that my daughter and I weren't the first thoughts, or thoughts at all. Which stings" (p. 88). This quote exemplifies the uncomfortable emotions which come up in blended families. The boyfriend's actions were not intentional, but members of blended families are insecure about their relationships, so some actions cause unintended consequences, like making one feel left out.

Blended families function differently than nuclear families, so family members find it much more difficult to understand their roles. At one family gathering, the boyfriend's mother accidentally implied that she loves her biological grandchildren more than her bonus grandchild, Rowan (p. 74). Blended families are complicated for all members of the extended family. Of course, grandparents will be more concerned about their biological grandchildren; there is a direct blood relationship. However, bonus children are unfairly subjected to this harsh reality; they didn't ask to be part of a blended family, but here they are. Eckler admits, "Love is confusing at best in blended families. Love isn't equal" (p. 77). Grandparents from both sides of the family have their favourite grandchildren, and both parents treat their biological children differently than their bonus

children. Holidays like Mother's Day are another way blended and nuclear families diverge. As expected, Eckler's boyfriend's daughters spent the day with their mother, but Eckler felt hurt because she thought the girls would wish her a happy Mother's Day, even if it was just a text (pp. 166-167). Having expectations in blended families can cause feelings to get hurt. Eckler wanted to feel appreciated by her boyfriend's children, but she was constantly being let down because they never met her expectations; sometimes, they didn't even try.

Overall, this book incorporates good information for people looking to blend their families. The academic audience that would benefit from reading this book most would be single parents with children looking to blend families and sociologists or researchers exploring the many definitions of the term family. As Eckler states, "Just as when you marry your partner, you marry their family, when you un-blend, you lose part of your family, the one you gained when blending" (p. 265). Many issues come up in blending families, like the chance of divorce, which people may not think of because other factors, such as love, blind them. Rebecca Eckler's book explains how being part of a blended family feels. It showcases the good and the bad, bringing uncomfortable truths about blended families to the forefront of the conversation. However, this book is heavily biased because it only incorporates Eckler's point of view. The book depicts Eckler and her friends' experiences, who willingly shared their stories. This book would only help fix some of the problems of integrating families. Eckler offers anecdotal evidence, which is stained by her negative experiences. The book provides good suggestions, such as the importance of long-term relationship planning, but it isn't exactly a guide to creating the perfect blended family. It should be pointed out that not all blended families deal with the issues presented in this book. Eckler

offers suggestions about specific circumstances that apply to her life; readers should stay open-minded; nothing in this book is generalizable to all blended families.