When it comes to children of divorce, one thing that has changed in recent years is the number of books available for and about children of divorce. In many ways, this is a step in the right direction, but with more availability comes more need for discernment about good vs. bad resources. At Divorce Ministry 4 Kids, we are committed to helping you to sort out the good from the bad. With that in mind, we continue review these resources to give you our thoughts and opinions.

Introduction

I have been looking forward to reading this book since I first heard about it. Let’s face it, the title and cover art are catchy. Plus, as someone who works with kids, I can almost imagine a child, in a timid voice, asking “Was it the chocolate pudding?” So, I was curious to see how chocolate pudding relates to divorce and hopeful that I could add another book to my list of recommended reading for children experiencing their parents’ divorce. Was It the Chocolate Pudding?: A Story for Little Kids About Divorce was written by Sandra Levins and Illustrated by Bryan Langdo. It was published in 2006 by Magination Press and addresses a serious concern for many children of divorce – whether or not they did something that caused the divorce of their parents. Check out this review, and make sure to read our interview with Sandra Levins at the end of this article.

About the Author

The author page at Amazon.com explains:

When Sandra Levins began writing children’s books she fell in love with the message behind the stories and the notion that they can make a positive difference in the lives of children and families.

Sandra lives in Burlington, Iowa, with her husband Jim, and stepson Kevin. Kevin and his brother are the inspiration for her stories for little kids about divorce, “Was it the Chocolate Pudding?” and “Do You Sing Twinkle?”
Brief Synopsis of the Book

This book is written from the perspective of an older brother who lives with his younger brother and father. The boy recalls an incident when he and his younger brother made a mess with chocolate pudding. That mess led to a fight between mom and dad, and mom eventually moved out. Like many children, the boy in this story assumed mom had to leave because of him and the chocolate pudding incident. He explains,

They didn't tell my brother and me why, but I figured it out. It was because I smeared chocolate pudding all over my brother.

One day, later in the story, they are with their mom and stop chocolate ice cream. The little boy remembers the chocolate pudding incident and apologizes to the mother for causing her to move out and the family to have to get a divorce. The mom reassures the boy that the divorce was not his fault.

Who Is This Book For?

This book is mainly for elementary aged kids to help them to understand that divorce is a grown-up issue and not their fault. It is an awesome resource for parents and others who work with children and are interested in giving them an avenue to open up about what they are feeling.

Review of the Book

I am always a little leery when it comes to children’s books about divorce. Don’t misunderstand me – there are some very good ones out there. But, for every good one there are several whose main objective seems to be to tell kids they should just get over it with time and lots of other kids go through the same thing. I am happy to say that Was It the Chocolate Pudding? is one of those books that I find very helpful and would not hesitate to recommend children of divorce read. This book addresses one of the single most consistent responses of children of divorce - a sense that it is their fault. In addition to that, though, it is just a well written and illustrated children’s books I’ve read in a long while.

More Detailed Information About the Book

A Different Perspective

One of the first things that might surprise you when you pick up this book is the perspective from which it is written. In this story, the children are not living with mom and seeing dad every couple of weeks. Instead, the two kids live with their dad and mom moves out after they tell the kids about the divorce. Although still not the
norm, this happens more frequently than you might think, and it is good to see a book written from that perspective. That said, kids who live with mom after the divorce will still be able to relate well to this book.

### Kid Friendly Definitions

The book is chocked full of kid-friendly definitions, and it is one of my favorite features of the book. In the very beginning, the book explains:

*Divorce is the grown-up word for when mommies and daddies decide not to live together anymore. They tell the kids they're sorry, and one of them moves somewhere else.*

There are also a series of charming definitions wherein the main character explains various grown-up words. For example,

*New arrangement is the grown-up word for changing lots of things you used to do.*

*Ideal situation is the grown-up word for having both a mommy and a daddy at home, I think.*

*Differences is the grown-up word for everybody not liking the same thing and not always getting their own way.*

*Relief is the grown-up word for feeling like you're carrying a big, heavy book bag and someone takes it off your back.*

*Explaining is when you talk to somebody about something so they can understand it, even if that somebody is a little kid.*

*And the second word, adjusting-to-our-new-arrangement, is what you do when you don't have an ideal situation, and it's still okay.*

I love the author’s attempt to take away some of the mystery surrounding what is going on by simply defining words. As the main character explains,

*I know grown-ups don’t think kids can understand a lot of stuff, but big stuff like divorce needs some explaining.*

### The Afterwards
Another top notched feature of this book is the Afterword written by Jane Annuziata, Psy.D. called simply “Note to Parents.” This 3 page Afterword is meant to help parents understand, and help with, the emotions many children experience after divorce. It covers explaining the separation/divorce to the child, helping your child cope and a variety of different emotions experience by children including confusion, anxiety, Loss, Sadness, loss of control, anger, loyalty conflicts and acting out. As helpful of the story will be for kids, this Afterword will be helpful to parents.

An Interview With the Author

In writing this review, I knew I wanted to reach out to the author to get some additional insight into her thought process behind the book. I was very excited when Sandra Levins agreed to an interview. The following are my questions, and her answers, about the book, children of divorce and other issues. I hope you enjoy reading them as much I did.

1. What inspired you to write Was It The Chocolate Pudding?

   *When I met my husband he was a single dad with two young boys. Initially I wrote this story about their life together and called it, “My Dad, My Brother and Me”. I illustrated the little book with computer graphics and pictures of his boys. Of course, since they were the stars, they loved it! But when I tried to find actual books about little kids with divorce in their family, I learned that few were available. I decided to try to get published and my story morphed into “Was It the Chocolate Pudding? A Story for Little Kids about Divorce”.***

2. I have to ask, where did you get the idea for the chocolate pudding incident?

   *In “Was It the Chocolate Pudding?” the kids make a mess by smearing chocolate pudding on each other and on the wall while Mom is outside and Dad is asleep. My husband’s boys actually had a very similar chocolate pudding incident. It was a favorite tale of their little family, and I decided to use it as a springboard for my message of “divorce is not the child’s fault.”*

3. What were you hoping would come out of the book?

   *The message of “Was It the Chocolate Pudding?” is about both parents coming together for the good of the children. My hope is that, when parents read this story to their little ones, they will realize that their children are in the middle with no choice in the matter.

   Parents need to help ease the hurt, pain and confusion their children experience as the result of the divorce in their family.*
4. What do you hope kids take away from the book?

I want children know that grown-up problems are grown-up problems and that children are not to blame. It’s not their fault! That message needs to be spoken and reiterated no matter what the age of the child.

5. What has the response been to your book? Specifically, how has it been received, first by children whose parents have been divorced, and secondly by parents?

Parents have told me that “Chocolate Pudding” is their child’s favorite book; that they ask for it over and over. I believe that children identify with the boys in the story. They see the children in the story doing things with Mom and doing things with Dad; things that they do also like building blanket tents in the living room, going to the library, reading books and singing songs together. Then they hear the words, “It isn’t MY fault!” Adults have said to me, “Where was this book when I was a kid?”

Parents and counselors alike appreciate this book because it helps to open the dialog with their little ones. It gives parents the opportunity to reiterate that divorce is never the child’s fault.

6. Can you tell us a little about your own experiences and how that factored into writing this book?

As I mentioned earlier my husband was a single dad with two young boys when I met him. According to the 2000 US census report, three million single dads have physical custody of their children. So while sometimes people are surprised that in my book Mom is the one who moves away, I wanted to show that at times that is the case, and that many fathers are totally capable single parents.

Secondly, my own son was 14 when his father and I divorced. Even at that age, he blamed himself, and that came as a surprise to me. It had never occurred to me that my children would wrongfully assume that blame. Our divorce certainly was NOT their fault. No divorce is the child’s fault!

7. Why do you think so many kids blame themselves when their parents divorce?

By nature children are self-centered individuals. Their world truly revolves around them! They don’t have the ability to see the bigger picture. So, when something like this happens, they may assume it is because of something they did.

8. Part of the issue in this book seems to arise because of how/when the parents chose to tell the kids what was going on. What advice would you give to parents about how to break this news to their kids?
Jane Annunziata, Psy.D, who wrote the Note to Parents in the back of the book, states that whenever possible both parents should sit down and talk to the children in simple and honest terms. Start out in small doses – “We have a lot of grown-up problems, and we can’t seem to fix them by living together in the same house.” In the beginning talk about a parental separation, rather than divorce, and use language that children can understand. Don’t drag the children into the adult reasons for the separation, but continually reassure them that they will always have a mom and dad who love them.

9. What advice would you give to a “third party” who is trying to help a child of divorce adjust and heal?

Bibliotherapy is a wonderful tool! Read books like “Was It the Chocolate Pudding?” and begin a dialog. Let the child know he or she is safe with you and ask if they have any questions or specific worries. They may be confused, and they may wonder what is going to happen to them. They may be angry with one or both parents. Children often worry that if they feel close to one parent, they are being disloyal to the other. Encourage children to talk about their feelings and reassure them that it is okay to express those feelings.

10. One of my favorite things about your book is the explanations of "grown-up words for" different things. How much do you think a lack of understanding of what is really going on plays into the difficulty that children have in adjusting to divorce?

I think it is a huge problem! How many 4-year-olds understand the word “divorce” or “custody”? It’s like an adult with a medical problem – we search the internet, read all we can, look at diagrams, and learn the words and terminology pertaining to that problem. Only then do we begin to understand what the doctors are talking about. I had never heard the term “meniscus” until my husband injured his knee!

11. At Divorce Ministry 4 Kids, part of our goal is to get the local church to step up and minister to children of divorce. What advice or words of wisdom would you offer to church leaders about why and how they should serve the children of divorce?

I think it is vital that all children feel safe, loved and accepted in a house of worship. It might be helpful for a small group of kids with divorce in their families to get together to discuss topics important to them, as long as the adult facilitator is truly supportive and not judgmental (like in the case of a child expressing anger toward a parent). The last thing these children need is to be scolded for feelings that they are trying to sort out!

In addition, these children should be included in all children’s ministry programs whenever possible. It seems like a small thing, but church school leaders and organizers need to understand that children with divorce in their family may not be able to participate in weekly events through no fault of their own.
When other children get a prize of some sort for perfect attendance, the child who shuttles between parents feels like he or she is being punished for something beyond his or her control.

12. If you could say one thing to a child whose parents are currently getting divorced, what would it be?

Divorce is a grown-up problem! It is absolutely NOT your fault!

13. I understand you've written another book to help kids adjust to living in a blended family. Can you tell us a little about that book?

Also published by the American Psychological Association’s Magination Press, “Do You Sing Twinkle? A Story about Remarriage and New Family” is a sequel to “Was It the Chocolate Pudding?” It had been a while since the divorce in their family, and the Chocolate Pudding boys had adjusted to the situation. However, everything changes when Mom gets remarried, has stepdaughters and moves out of town! At bedtime Little Buddy worries that Mom is singing Twinkle to those girls. “She shouldn’t sing Twinkle to anybody but my brother and me!” This story addresses many feelings and questions that children may have while adjusting to remarriage and a blended family after their parents' divorce. The book offers suggestions on ways for parents to stay connected with their children and talk about common but difficult emotions that can come with divorce, remarriage, or blended families.


You can find this book, and many others, in our Divorce Ministry 4 Kids Bookstore.