



## Book Discussion: Here and There



### Here and There

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Illustrated by Evelyn Daviddi

Published by Barefoot Books

This gentle story follows Ivan as he adjusts to the separation of his parents and from going from "Here" to "There" to spend time with each of them. Although this is a difficult transition for Ivan, the book reinforces that home can be both "Here" and "There" when both parents are attentive and loving. After observing Ivan's behavior changes, Ivan's mother and father each engage Ivan in activities that make him feel more connected to them, to himself, and to his two homes.

**If your family is experiencing a separation or divorce**, this guide will help you explore this period of change and adjustment through the lens of Ivan's experiences in the book. Reading and discussing **Here and There** (Barefoot Books) will be most helpful *after* the decision for a separation or divorce has been announced to your child. The book could be beneficial in explaining future living arrangements or negotiating the adjustment of your child's current homes both "Here" and "There."

You and your child may want to read the book one or two times together before using it as a topic of discussion. What's important is talking together, not forcing a conversation or expecting that reading the book will explain everything your child needs. You are what your child needs. The book and this guide are simply a starting point for crucial conversations.

Below are some helpful notes you can use or paraphrase when reading the book together. *If the note is written in italics, it is for you to read and potentially use to observe a behavior in your child.* If the note is written in "quotations," it is a statement or question you could address to your child. Wherever there is a "\_\_\_\_\_" you may insert the name of your co-parent. There's no need to use all the notes; just use what feels natural or most beneficial for your family.

## Discussion

### Pages 1 & 2 "Like the birds he loved..."

*Ivan is very curious about birds. While birds may not be your child's fascination, observing birds together or "birding" is one activity that could help your child discover connections between their "Here" and "There."*

"Ivan knows a lot about the way different birds sing! Would you like to listen to some of these songs together?"

**RESOURCE FROM THE HEALING LIBRARY:** You can listen to and learn about bird song at The Cornell Lab of Ornithology: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/search> and <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/page.aspx%3Fpid%3D1059>

*Ivan is shown in the home he grew up in on these pages. He's feeling relaxed and comfortable and is engaging in a favorite pastime. Does your child have a favorite pastime they love to do where they grew up?*

"What's something you love to do at our home? Can you also do that at \_\_\_\_\_'s home?"

*Your child may not be able to imagine doing this activity at your co-parent's home. Being positive and brainstorming ways to make the activity possible will help them during this early adjustment phase.*

### Pages 3 & 4 "Ivan wanted to stay here..."

*Ivan is about to go to his dad's new home. Observe how Ivan's body language and facial expression both change. Consider pointing this out to your child and talking to your child about their own feelings regarding your co-parent's home.*

"Ivan looks different on this page. How do you think he's feeling?"

*Your child's answer may be brief, or they may want to talk about this in more detail. Some children will even note how they feel going to the other parent's home. This can be challenging for some parents to hear, whether the child has positive or negative things to say about it. If you're able, listen to your child's response and carry on with the book and discussion guide. You can return to any discussion points later as needed.*

**Pages 5 - 8 "When he got there..." "While he was There, Ivan didn't drum..."**

*The lack of swooping, singing birds on these pages is symbolic of Ivan's lack of movement, singing, and animated conversation. Your child's own body language can help you understand what they need. If they appear still but are able to talk, you can continue your conversation. If they appear "checked out," however, it's probably a good time to take a break and care for them.*

"Ivan is happy to see his Dad, but he is also frowning, still, and quiet. Do you ever feel a little sad or uncomfortable when you first arrive at \_\_\_\_\_ or this place?"

"Moving between our two homes is very stressful, I know. Let's think of some things we can do to make it feel a little more comfortable."

**RESOURCE FROM THE HEALING LIBRARY:** Custodial exchanges can be challenging and tiring for children even when they love both homes and parents equally. By the time the actual exchange has occurred, the child has dealt with such issues as: packing their bags, possibly leaving behind favorite clothing or toys that must stay at that parent's home; saying goodbye to any pets there; emotionally preparing to say goodbye to one parent, anticipating seeing the other parent; and switching gears to the routine, rules, and schedule at the other home.

By the time the actual moment arrives for the child to say goodbye to one parent and hello to the other, it's no wonder some will feel exhausted and/or emotional. In **Here and There** (Barefoot Books), we can see in Ivan's face and body language that the custodial exchange has an impact on him. Alternatively, some children will seem completely unaffected. Each child is unique and will respond in their own way.

However, here are some ways to help your child through the custodial exchange. Talk to your child ahead of time about ways to make the transition easier. Ask your child what s/he needs before, during, and after an exchange.

Considerations include:

- Is there a stuffed animal or other "security object" that can go freely back and forth with the child?
- Does the child need or want help packing?
- If driving to the other parent's, is there something calming you can do in the vehicle, like listening to an audio book or certain music?

- How does your child want to say goodbye to you? A hug? A funny phrase? A secret handshake?
- When it's time to pick up your child, how does your child want to be greeted?
- At pick up, is there anything the child needs for the ride home? A snack or drink? A cozy blanket? A quiet ride without questions? Or lots of discussion and catching up?

Be respectful: When you are all together during the exchange, keep communication between you and the other parent respectful -- including body language. Being respectful also includes being on time.

—LCSW Bonnie Thomas, The Healing Library

### **Pages 9 & 10 "Ivan roosted all by himself..."**

*These pages describe Ivan trying to find a place in his father's new home that feels comfortable. Does your child have a space in their new home that feels like their own yet? Can you coordinate with your co-parent to create such a space together in advance of their first visit?*

"What is your favorite place to hang out at \_\_\_\_\_'s home? What makes it the best part of their home? Is there anything in our home you think would help make your new home more comfortable?"

*When Ivan goes outside, his body language shows he feels more comfortable. Even though he doesn't engage with the birds he loves, Ivan seems more relaxed now that they're around. This page can be a good place to start a conversation about your child beginning to feel more comfortable in their new home.*

"Look at Ivan's face. Is his mood changing? I wonder why? Could it be seeing the birds that he loves?"

*Your child's answer may be brief, or they may want to talk about this in more detail. Some children will even note how they feel going to the other parent's home. This can be challenging for some parents to hear, whether the child has positive or negative things to say about it. If you're able, listen to your child's response and carry on with the book and discussion guide. You can return to any discussion points later as needed.*

*A reminder: If your child cries when talking about any of this, you can reassure them by saying something like, “It’s okay to cry, especially when you’re sad. You may feel sad for a little while or a long time. Both are okay, and if you need hugs I’m here for you.”*

**RESOURCE FROM THE HEALING LIBRARY:** Once you’ve informed your children about the separation/divorce, they will likely have follow up questions. Answer their questions, but keep information simple and “titrate” what you tell them. Titration means you give smaller chunks of information to your child and allow them to process it at their own pace. You can do this by checking in now and then to see how they’re handling the information. While you talk to your child about separation/divorce, observe their body language — if your child is upset but still able to carry on a conversation and their body language is relatively calm, then the child is more likely to be in an okay frame of mind to continue.

Provide reassurance as needed. Here are some common things children need and want reassurance about after they’ve been told their parents are separating:

- That they are loved.
- That this is not their fault.
- That you and the other parent will be okay.
- That you and the other parent will have your own feelings about this as well; that the child may see either parent angry, quiet, tearful etc., and that it’s okay, and normal, for parents to have these feelings.
- That there are things you and the other parent can do to get help if needed.
- That even if you are upset at times, you will get through this. (This is a good time to point out the positive things you’re looking forward to as a result of the separation/divorce, e.g. “Change can be upsetting, but I’m looking forward to ...”).

Also, reassure your child that you want to answer their questions, but there may be things you cannot answer if it involves grown up situations. If that occurs, you can respond with statements like:

- “That’s for the grown ups to worry about and take care of.”
- “This is one of those things that is for grown ups to worry about—but I can hear and see that you’re worried about it too. We are working on this. You can trust that I am/we are taking your worries seriously.”

- “There are some things I cannot answer because the information is not mine to give. You can ask your mom/dad/parent about that.”
- “Sometimes parents have to keep grown up information private until kids are old enough to understand. This is one of those times. I will answer this question when you are older.”
- “I do not know the answer right now, but when I do, I’ll let you know.”

—LCSW Bonnie Thomas, The Healing Library

### **Page 11 & 12 "Dad was sitting on the porch..."**

*If you're the parent who is in a new home, consider things you did at your old home that you can integrate into life in the new home. Having a hard time figuring out what to do? Ask your child!*

“I like how the dad is playing with Ivan at their new home the way they did at their old home! What’s something we can do together that we used to do at our old home?”

### **Pages 13 & 14 "Ivan couldn't be still..."**

*Ivan's happiness on these pages has to do with how he feels when he's bonding with his parents through play. As a parent, you can provide this kind of comfort to your child by engaging in activities with them and letting them know how loved they are despite your separation or divorce from your co-parent. Reassuring your child that these things will always happen no matter where you live may provide them with a sense of comfort.*

“There are things you and I will do together no matter where we live that will always make me feel happy. What are things we do together that make you happy?”

### **Pages 15 -16 "I like that..."**

*The dad describes starting the song at one home and finishing at the other. Your child can also bring projects from one home to the other to work on. A journal is something your child can work on in both places. Look for the “Here and There Journal Activity” on the **Here and There** page of [barefootbooks.com](http://barefootbooks.com).*

"Ivan discovers that his Dad is writing songs. Is there something surprising you discovered about me or \_\_\_\_\_ when we separated?"

“Look! Ivan has bird seed in his pockets! That’s unique! Do you have anything unique in your pockets that we could write a song about?”

Look for the “Pocketful of Birdseed Activity” on the **Here and There** page of [barefootbooks.com](http://barefootbooks.com).

**Pages 17 -18 "Ivan couldn't be quiet..."**

*On this page, you can see the backpack and books that Ivan has brought from "Here" to "There." Reading and writing are great tools to bridge the divide between two homes.*

**RESOURCE FROM THE HEALING LIBRARY:** Here are some ways a parent and child can uphold routines and rituals to foster the parent/child relationship, even when “here” and “there” are far apart:

- **Shared journals:** A shared journal is one that is written by the child and shared with the parent and/or vice versa. These work well for children who do not have as much communication with a parent as they’d like—sometimes a parent and child live hours away or in different time zones. The child can use the journal to write whatever they want to share with the other parent. They can draw pictures about their day, write about what they are interested in, share their feelings about missing the parent, etc. Overall, the journal provides a place for the child to communicate with the parent, even in the parent’s absence. Depending on custodial agreements, the child can personally share that journal with the parent the next time they get together; the journal can be mailed to the other parent (the parent can then also write and draw in it and mail it back to the child); or it can be put aside for an appropriate time to share later in life. Shared journals can be a wonderful resource to have on hand during a separation/divorce. When your child is missing the other parent, it’s nice to have something within your control to offer the child for a way to communicate and connect with the other parent.
- **Read together:** Even when living far apart, parents can still read to their children. Phones, FaceTime, voice recording apps, and videotaping can be ways to read to your child even when you can’t physically be together. If you do not have access to these resources, talk to your local librarian to see if your community library can be of assistance.

—LCSW Bonnie Thomas, The Healing Library

“Do you see the books Ivan brought with him from his mom’s home to his dad’s home? We can make a book you bring to each of our homes if you like!”

"What are you reading right now? Do you like it? Should I read it too? Maybe I can read it while you are at \_\_\_\_\_'s home and we can talk about it when you come back."

*If you look closely, you will see things from their old home that dad has moved to his new home. For example, there is a plant pot on the table that matches plant pots at mom's house. Talking about the moving process as well as what's it's like to pack or unpack can help normalize the transition.*

"What do you think Ivan's dad unpacked first? What do people usually unpack first when they move?"

"Is it exciting or hard to see things from one house appear in another?"

### **Pages 19 -20 "Caw caw..."**

*The last page of this book lists the various bird calls Ivan is singing and the birds that make them.*

"Ivan knows so much about bird calls! Would you like to listen to what some of these bird calls sound like in nature? Would you like to find out what bird calls there are where we live?"

**RESOURCE FROM THE HEALING LIBRARY:** You can listen to and learn about bird song at The Cornell Lab of Ornithology: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/search> and <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/page.aspx%3Fpid%3D1059>

### **Pages 21 & 22 "Ivan sang and swung..."**

*Saying goodbye can feel especially emotional during the early stages of your separation or divorce. Consider asking your child if they prefer to chat about their experience when leaving one home or instead prefer to share some quiet time. Would a snack or drink be a good idea for your child? Perhaps packing would be easier if it was something your child did with a parent instead of alone. These pages can be used to discuss a plan with your child.*

"Do you think this goodbye is hard for Ivan? Do you think it is hard for his Dad? I know it is hard for me when you leave, but I am also happy that you get time with \_\_\_\_\_. It is not easy, but we both love you so much."

"Sometimes you might feel sad like Ivan when we say goodbye to one another, but that's normal. If you want, we can figure out ways to make our goodbyes easier together."



“Would you like to think of ways we can spend time together even if we’re apart? I think it might help us miss one another less.”

**Pages 23 - 26 "Ivan was glad to see Mama..." "Ivan perched..."**

*Back at mom’s home, Ivan appears to feel sad or out of place again. This response is completely normal. The transition from one parent’s home to the other can be tiring physically and emotionally. However, including your child in creating a "transition routine" can be helpful for all involved. Ask your child what you can do to help the transition when he or she returns to your home. Some children may want quiet time in their room to unpack and settle in. Other kids may desire an activity with the parent or time to go out and play. This is a great opportunity to include your child in a plan for something predictable and nurturing in transitioning back to your place with as much ease as possible.*

“Ivan seems sad again. What is he missing? Do you miss \_\_\_\_\_ when you are here?”

"I know there are things about spending time with \_\_\_\_\_ that are very special for both of you. It’s okay to miss \_\_\_\_\_ and the things you do together. I want our home to be filled with happiness and special things for you too. What are some special things we can do together?"

*On page 23 we see that the cups at Ivan’s mom’s home are the same as the cups at Ivan’s dad’s home. If you have a collection of items (such as cups) that your child is accustomed to, consider having part of the collection at each home. Small details like this can make a child feel more at home no matter where they’re staying.*

**Pages 27 - 30 "Then he heard a falcon..." "Mama heard it too..."**

*Ivan’s mother is happy when Ivan remembers the song he created at his dad’s home. Despite what’s going on between her and Ivan’s dad, she encourages Ivan and dances along in order to let him feel joy. If you ever feeling challenged supporting your child’s relationship with the co-parent, remember there are resources to help you through: talk to loved ones; utilize the resources at your community library (there are multiple books on co-parenting to check out); use the internet to collect helpful advice from experts on co-parenting; and/or join a local support group.*

"What makes Ivan happy again? How does Ivan's happiness make his Mama feel?"

"You never need to hide that you have had a good time at \_\_\_\_\_'s house. You never have to hide your sadness either. If you want to keep your time there private, that is okay, but you will not make me jealous or sad by sharing things with me."



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Explore more at [www.thehealinglibraryus.com](http://www.thehealinglibraryus.com).

*"Each kit is acknowledgement and commitment to the fact that books heal and that the guided use of books can heal in a deeper manner." —Founder & Librarian, Megan Emery*

The Healing Library provides PDF packs free to librarians so they can build their own suitcase or backpack of healing or full Healing Library kits for purchase. Current kits include Family Separation and Divorce, Death of a Loved One, Death of a Pet, and Alzheimers and Your Family. Ask your local library about circulating The Healing Library.

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