

## A male victim's experience of gaslighting and his legal fight to see his son

This is the story of a man who experienced domestic abuse, as written by himself, hoping that other men with similar experiences will recognise the signs and get help.

The names of the people involved have been changed.

## The beginning of the relationship

During the start of the relationship with Jenny, she portrayed herself as a loving mother and girlfriend. She had made huge statements about abuse from the father of her children and I formed a strong bond with them very quickly.

## Jenny starts to manipulate James

Jenny was very public about how amazing I was with her kids and made a huge deal about me being a great stepfather. What I didn't realise at the time was she was completely love-bombing me; she had also already started chipping away and undermining me. However, due to my naivety and trying to see the good in someone, I went along with it.

When she was pregnant with my son there were several isolated incidents of abuse. I naively put this down to the pregnancy and to the horrific experiences from her past relationship she had told me about. In hindsight, Jenny undermined me, put me down, used gaslighting and emotionally and financially abused me. She used these small isolated incidents with love-bombing, so at first the abuse was bearable, as I was naive to this type of behaviour.

## Gaslighting

Jenny started changing the way I was thinking. When her behaviour was wrong, she would convince me that it was me who needed to change. She used one of her friends to help this process too. I started to question myself about decisions that used to be clear cut. Again, this process included cycles of love-bombing, so the highs were high, but the lows were very low.

Her behaviour was subtle to start with. In the abuse cycle, however, she would give me the silent treatment at home, but would then harass me at work, to disrupt my day.

Before Thomas was born, I bought a house in my own name (she told me that she had bad credit, so couldn't go on the mortgage). The abuse dramatically increased in the weeks after Thomas was born. Jenny tried to isolate me from my friends and family, and the gaslighting hit a new level. She made accusations about me and spent hardly any time with her own children.

The abuse was affecting the kids now, as she was swearing and shouting at me in front of them. I never reacted but I used to talk to her and explain that this was not right.

## James gets help

As time went on, I spoke to my friends and family about the abuse. By this point Jenny was harassing me when I was at work and the emotional and financial abuse was at an all-time high.

I decided to go to a counsellor to discuss the relationship; Jenny chose not to go. I tried to downplay it to the counsellor, stating that it could just be post-natal depression. The counsellor said that this was far from the case, and that Jenny was an abusive woman. She said that I had to set a date and give Jenny an ultimatum; if things didn't change by then, I had to end the relationship, as the kids were going to be affected by witnessing the abuse.

I also got in touch with the Men's Advice Line, they advised me that I must end the relationship too. Once Jenny realised I had been speaking to a friend or my family, she tried to isolate me from them, making them out to be the ones in the wrong.

## Ending the relationship

Things didn't change by the date I set, so I finished the relationship. I tried to sort the childcare and house arrangements with Jenny, but nothing was agreed. I found out that due to county court debts, she could not gain a mortgage and she refused to accept any payouts to move out of my house.

She also offered me minimal contact with Thomas, but I could not accept this as she was not good with the kids at all. With all this in mind, I contacted my solicitor to get the ball rolling with the childcare and house situation.

## Abuse escalating

Jenny and I lived together but separately for a few weeks. She made my life hell; I would not know when I would see Thomas, as sometimes they were not there when I came home from work. She tried to manipulate friends and family again.

After a few weeks she got the father of her older children to threaten me; clearly the story she told me at the start of the relationship was not all true. When I tried to get hold of the police on a non-emergency number, she rang the police herself and told them that my parents were about to abduct Thomas. It was clear for the Police that this allegation was unsubstantiated, so nothing happened to my parents. However, it became clear to me that it was unsafe being in the same house, as Jenny was a dangerous woman.

## The aftermath of abuse

I spent the next six months living in hotels, and it took ten months in total to get my own house back. Within weeks, a new guy was regularly staying in my house and introduced to Thomas. Different men have come and gone since, and there have been further incidents with the police and social services involving them and her.

Jenny continued controlling when I could see Thomas and subjecting me to regular abuse. When she found out that I was taking her to court for a child arrangements order, she got signed off from work for six months and claimed several mental health conditions. In court, she made up allegations about me, but before all the evidence coming out and the final hearing, she accepted joint custody.

The abuse continued towards me, but I was persistent with the police and they helped me by speaking to her. I logged with the police and social services every concern I had. The entire process changed me as a person and mentally affected me in terms of confidence, anxiety and questioning my own beliefs and morals.

## James's advice to other male victims

There is still a long way to go to achieve what I want, however gaining the court orders and help from police has been huge. Jenny doesn't always stick to the court order, but if I didn't have it, my life would be unbearable. I would highly recommend anyone with kids coming out of a relationship to get the arrangements in writing. This could be done for a few hundred pounds by a solicitor.

Keep evidence of the abuse you experience and don't be afraid to log it with police and social services. The kids are the most important consideration in all of this; don't stay with someone abusive for the sake of the kids. Don't let them see you frustrated or upset but fight for them legally, in the right way.

Talk to someone close to you about anything in your relationship that feels wrong. Being open and honest to people you trust can help you recognise the signs of abusive behaviour. Once I was isolated, broke, undermined and threatened, the reality really hit home. If I had known what the early signs of this behaviour were beforehand, it would have helped enormously.