



A Family Approach Case Study—The Watson Family

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I've always wanted to be a family man, so when I met Sarah and we fell in love 7 years ago, I felt like the luckiest man alive. I moved in with her and her family a few months later – she'd moved in with her mum when she broke up with her ex, but there was plenty of room for me, and Sarah's mum Mary made me feel really welcome. It made sense financially, as we just had my income coming in. She had a 10 year old son, Paul, from a previous relationship and so was struggling to make ends meet for both of them. She could only work part time, as she had to look after her mum who was getting on a bit and had just been diagnosed with Parkinson's. Paul was always in trouble at school, and she kept having to leave work to go and collect him. His dad wasn't around much, so I thought I could be a bit of a father figure to him. I'd hoped that once the money worries were eased her temper might, too.

She'd always been a bit fiery – passionate we used to say. There were always fights, and sometimes she got physical, but we always made up afterwards and things would go back to normal. She got pregnant a couple of years after we moved in together. I was delighted, and thought things would calm down once we were a proper family. But she started to get more violent after Ben was born. Little things would set her off. The baby was crying, I was late home from work because we had to finish an order, her tea wasn't hot enough, her mum had another fall. She would throw her dinner at me and the plate would smash, or she would slap me round the face. She was always sorry afterwards - it's tough looking after a new baby and her sick mum, she was under a lot of stress. When our little girl Grace was born last year, I was excited but scared. We tried to hide the fights from her – from all of them – but they aren't stupid. I know they're scared when she yells. I know they've seen her slap me. Sometimes Ben goes upstairs and hides with his nan. She turns the TV up to drown out the noise, but the shouting never seems to stop and the baby won't stop crying. I organised a childminder for Grace – she takes her out a few times a week – just to give Sarah a break. She's always so angry and stressed, and it's not good for the baby.

Her son Paul says it's my fault. He definitely gets his temper from his mum. Two peas in a pod. I'm not allowed to discipline him. I used to try at the beginning, but he'd say I'm not his real dad and I can't tell him what to do. He's hit me too. I never used to be scared of him, but he's 17 now, nearly an adult. Laughs at me and call me a coward for not hitting him back. Sarah just laughs. It's like they're a team. Maybe he's just glad that she's not hitting him anymore. I know she used to beat him, but he was always winding her up, skiving off school and getting in fights. I told her it was wrong, but she would turn on me. Now he's left school he just sits round the house all day. He's not even looking for a job. I look forward to going to work so I can get away for a few hours, it's my only escape. My mates at work know there is something up, but I can't bring myself to tell them. I just need to man up.