

TOGETHER WITHIN

TherapyTalk



What your therapist means when they talk about.....

“Gaslighting”

What is it?

The word gaslighting is used a lot, especially online, but many people don't fully understand what it really means. These days, people sometimes call any kind of disagreement or emotional discomfort “gaslighting.” For example, if someone says “That’s not how I remember it,” or doesn’t respond the way you hoped, it might feel frustrating—but that’s not the same as gaslighting.

Using the word gaslighting too often can take away from how serious real gaslighting is. It can also make it harder for people who are truly being emotionally abused to get the help they need. It’s important to learn the difference between normal relationship struggles and true psychological manipulation. It could just be a misunderstanding or a sign that the person struggles with communication. That doesn’t mean they are trying to harm you on purpose. But true gaslighting is not just someone disagreeing with you or hurting your feelings.



So what is it really?

It’s when a person intentionally and repeatedly tries to make someone else doubt their own memory, thoughts, or sense of reality. This usually happens in abusive relationships, where one person wants to control the other. They might deny things that really happened, blame the other person unfairly, or twist the truth over and over until the victim starts to question themselves.

Gaslighting can make you feel confused, anxious, or unsure of yourself. You might start to doubt your memory, your feelings, or even your sanity. Over time, it can affect your self-esteem and make you feel powerless or isolated

Here comes the science.....

Over time, gaslighting can cause stress in your brain, especially in areas that handle fear and memory, like the **amygdala** and **hippocampus**. The constant stress creates **brain fog**, and can make you feel anxious, scared, or even depressed, and it can be harder to trust yourself or remember things clearly. Since our brains use memories and what we see and hear to figure out what’s true, gaslighting slowly changes how your brain understands reality—sometimes making you believe things that aren’t true or forget things that really happened.



“He didn’t have to yell to make me feel small—he just kept telling me I was too sensitive, too forgetful, too emotional. After a while, I stopped trusting my own thoughts and started believing his version of me instead.”

Marc, Domestic Abuse Survivor



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Common Signs of Gaslighting:

- Denying things you remember clearly (“That never happened.”)
- Twisting your words or making you feel like you said something you didn’t
- Dismissing your feelings (“You’re too sensitive.” or “You’re overreacting.”)
- Making you feel like you’re imagining things
- Projecting their actions onto you (blaming you for things they did)
- Isolating you from friends or family
- Changing the subject to avoid taking responsibility



In relationships:

- “I never said that.” (even if you remember it clearly)
- “You’re making things up for attention.”
- “Everyone agrees with me, not you.”
- “You’re remembering that wrong.”

At Work:

- “You’re overreacting.” (when you bring up a real problem)
- “I already told you that.” (when they didn’t)
- “You can’t take a joke”
- “You’re so forgetful!”

In families:

- “That never happened when you were a kid.”
- “You are always make things difficult.”
- “You seemed happy back then. I don’t know why you are so upset it about it now.”
- “We were a normal family. You just want something to complain about.”

In Friendships:

- “You’re crazy for thinking that.”
- “I was just joking, don’t be so dramatic.”
- “Everyone thinks you overreact, but I’m the only one honest enough to say it.”
- “You’re just being cold. I was only trying to help.”



“Gaslighting, brainwashing, cults, hostage situations, and totalitarian propaganda have a common basis. They use similar techniques to confuse, intimidate, and disempower people”

Linda Hatch, PhD, Psychologist



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What to do if you think you are being gaslighted?

Trust your instincts: If something feels wrong, pay attention to that feeling.

Keep a record: Write down or save messages about things that happen. This helps you remember what's real and can be useful if you need to talk to someone about it.

Set boundaries: You have the right to protect yourself. Limit conversations or walk away if someone tries to make you doubt yourself, if you are able to.

Seek support: Talk to people you trust, like friends, family, or a therapist. Getting another perspective can help you feel less alone and more confident in your reality.

Practice self-care: Take care of your mind and body. Do things that make you feel good and safe, like hobbies, exercise, or spending time with supportive people



Why support is important

If you think you are being gaslighted, getting support is really important. Gaslighting can make you question your memory, your feelings, and even your sense of reality. Over time, it can make you feel confused, powerless, or like everything is your fault. Talking to someone you trust — like a friend, family member, teacher, or therapist — can help you feel less alone and remind you that what you're feeling is valid. Support can also help you see the situation more clearly and decide what steps to take to protect your well-being. You deserve to feel safe, heard, and respected.

Long term impacts

Gaslighting, when it happens over and over, can seriously damage a person's confidence and mental health. It makes someone question their own thoughts, feelings, and memories, which can lead to confusion and low self-esteem. The brain gets stuck in a stress response, making it harder to make decisions or trust yourself. Over time, this can cause anxiety, depression, and a feeling of being lost or powerless.

People may even feel like they need the gaslighter to tell them what's real. That's why support from trusted people is so important. Talking to a friend, family member, teacher, or therapist can help you feel less alone and remind you that your thoughts and feelings matter.



“ When an accusation is thrown at you that does not fit you, when it doesn't capture what you know to be true about yourself or your behavior, mentally flip it back on your partner. **”**

Dr Ramani Durvasula, Clinical Psychologist





“ People use gaslighting when they feel threatened in some way. It's their go-to when things get too real for them. What you need to know is that they are never going to admit to using this strategy. As soon as it starts, they are locked in to their denial of reality so hard that there's no turning back. ”

Dr Ramani Durvasula, Clinical Psychologist

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Healing and rebuilding self-esteem

Reaffirm Your Reality

- Remind yourself regularly of your strengths, values, and what you know to be true.
- Use positive affirmations to rebuild confidence.

Challenge Negative Self-Talk

- Notice when you start to doubt yourself or blame yourself for the gaslighter's actions.
- Replace negative thoughts with supportive, realistic ones.

Therapy and Professional Help

- A therapist can help you process your experiences, rebuild trust in yourself, and develop healthy coping strategies.
- Therapy is a safe space to explore your feelings and regain your sense of reality.

Reconnect with Your Support System

- Spend time with people who respect and believe you.
- Healthy relationships can help restore your sense of self-worth.



Rebuilding trust in yourself

Practice Self-Compassion: Be gentle with yourself and recognize that rebuilding trust takes time. Remind yourself that the gaslighting was not your fault and that it's okay to make mistakes as you heal.

Start Small and Celebrate Decisions: Begin by making small, everyday choices for yourself—such as what to eat or what activity to do—and acknowledge these as acts of self-trust. Each decision, no matter how minor, helps rebuild your confidence in your own judgment.

Practice saying affirming phrases: like, “I know what I felt,” or “My feelings matter,” and “I’m allowed to believe my own experience.” Allow yourself to experience your emotions without judgment or second-guessing.

Healing is possible

Be gentle and patient with yourself, knowing that regaining trust in your feelings is a process that takes time and self-compassion. Each time you choose to believe yourself, you show yourself that you are worth listening to and that your truth matters.



“The point about disengaging with gaslighting is not meant to feel like defeat, rather it is about empowering yourself to walk away and not get caught in “proving” your truth. You know your truth, even if they deny it. ”