

FREE
EBOOK

What is
GASLIGHTING

What is gaslighting?

Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation in which the abuser makes the victim question their own reality, memory and perception. The abuser does this by denying reality, lying, and making the victim feel like they are crazy. Gaslighting can be very damaging to the victim's mental health, and it can be difficult to escape from.

The term 'Gaslighting' originated from the 1944 film "Gaslight," in which a husband manipulates his wife into believing she is going insane.

Examples of gaslighting:

Gaslighting can take many forms and can occur in a variety of relationships including romantic partnerships, family relationships, friendships, and professional environments. Examples may include:

- Denying reality: The abuser may deny things that happened, or they may claim that the victim is misremembering things. For example, the abuser might say "I never said that" or "You're making that up." even when presented with facts.
- Blatantly lying: The abuser may lie to the victim about their intentions, their feelings, or their actions. For example, the abuser might say "I love you" when they don't, or they might say "I'm not angry" when they are,
- Making the victim feel crazy: The abuser may make the victim feel like they are crazy by making them doubt their own perceptions and memories. For example, the abuser might say "You're too sensitive" or "You're imagining things." They may use confusing language or complex logic to disorient the victim, belittling the victim's feelings or thoughts, and manipulate others to side with them against the victim.

How to identify gaslighting:

If you are wondering if you are being gaslit, there are a few things you can look for:

- Do you feel like you are constantly questioning your own sanity?
- Do you feel like you can't trust your own memories?
- Do you feel like you are always walking on eggshells around the abuser?
- Do you feel like you are always apologising for things that aren't your fault?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, it is possible that you are being gaslit.

How to deal with gaslighting:

If you are being gaslit, it is important to remember that you are not crazy. The abuser is trying to manipulate you, and you don't deserve to be treated this way.

Here are a few things you can do to deal with gaslighting:

- **Document the abuse:** Keep a record of the things that the abuser says and does. This will help you to remember what happened, and it will also be helpful if you decide to seek help from a therapist or counsellor.
- **Talk to someone you trust:** Talk to a friend, family member, therapist, or counsellor about what you are going through. They can offer support and advice.
- **Set boundaries:** Set boundaries with the abuser and let them know what you will and will not tolerate. For example, you might tell them that you will not talk to them if they deny reality or lie to you.
- **Get away from the abuser:** If the gaslighting is severe, it may be necessary to get away from the abuser. This may mean leaving the relationship, changing jobs, or moving to a new location.

Gaslighting is a serious form of abuse, and it can be very damaging to the victim's mental health. If you are being gaslit, it is important to remember that you are not alone, and there are people who can help you.

Prevention:

- **Education and Awareness:** Education is the first step towards prevention. This includes understanding what gaslighting is, recognising its signs, and understanding the impact on mental health. This knowledge should be widespread, reaching not only potential victims but also friends, family, and professionals who might be in a position to intervene or support victims.
- **Promoting Healthy Relationships:** Teaching and learning about healthy relationships can also help. This includes understanding respect, open communication, boundaries, and mutual understanding. Knowing what a healthy relationship looks like makes it easier to spot when a relationship becomes unhealthy or abusive.
- **Building Self-Esteem and Assertiveness:** Helping individuals develop a strong sense of self and assertiveness skills can also act as prevention. When individuals have high self-esteem and know how to assert their rights and boundaries, they are less likely to fall victim to gaslighting tactics.

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Recovery:

- **Rebuilding Confidence:** Confidence may be significantly damaged after being subjected to gaslighting. Recovery involves rebuilding this sense of self-belief. This could involve therapy, self-affirming activities, or joining supportive groups that help validate the person's experiences and feelings.
- **Relearning Trust:** Gaslighting often leads to doubt in one's perceptions and judgments. Victims will need to relearn to trust their own experiences and instincts. This can be a slow process and may require professional help.
- **Establishing Healthy Relationships:** Establishing new, healthy relationships is part of recovery. This could mean finding new friends, supportive groups, or even establishing healthier dynamics in existing relationships. It's important to learn from past experiences and apply this knowledge to form relationships that are respectful and supportive.
- **Professional Help:** Psychologists, therapists, or counsellors who are knowledgeable about gaslighting can provide the necessary tools and strategies to cope with and recover from the effects of gaslighting. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), for instance, is one approach that might be helpful.

Legal Considerations:

In many legal jurisdictions, gaslighting itself is not explicitly identified as a crime. However, many actions that can accompany gaslighting could potentially fall under existing laws related to abuse, harassment, stalking, or coercive control. For example:

- **Coercive Control:** In some jurisdictions, such as the UK, 'coercive or controlling behaviour' within an intimate or family relationship is recognised as a criminal offense. This includes acts designed to isolate, exploit, regulate, or create dependence, many of which are common in gaslighting.
- **Harassment and Stalking:** Gaslighting behaviours might be considered harassment or stalking, especially if they involve threats, repeated unwanted contact, or causing fear.
- **Domestic Violence and Abuse Laws:** In many places, domestic violence laws encompass not just physical violence, but also emotional and psychological abuse, under which gaslighting might fall.

Remember, the law varies widely between different regions, and legal remedies may not always be available or effective.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethically, gaslighting is considered unacceptable because it infringes upon several important principles:

- **Autonomy:** Gaslighting manipulates and undermines a person's perception of reality, which can severely limit their ability to make informed decisions and exercise autonomy.
- **Honesty and Truthfulness:** Gaslighting often involves blatant lying and distortion of reality, which is a clear violation of the principle of honesty and truthfulness.
- **Respect for Persons:** Gaslighting devalues and disrespects the person being gaslighted, violating their dignity and worth as an individual.
- **Nonmaleficence:** This principle, often stated as "do no harm," is blatantly violated by gaslighting, which can cause severe emotional and psychological harm.