



What is Gaslighting

Tami Kiekhaefer

What is gaslighting?

Gaslighting is a term that came from a movie called Gaslight in 1944. It is about a dangerous form of emotional abuse where your partner does things to manipulate you into thinking you are going crazy. The goal of one partner is to make the other person think they see, hear, remember behave and feel aren't really happening. You stop trusting yourself in every manor and feel like you are losing your mind. The more this happens, the more you lose confidence and the more control the partner has over you and the more dependent you are on them.

The first attraction:

Characteristics that are attractive in the beginning are the charm and confidence that exude from him when you met. Complimentary, easily connecting to people who you are close with. Seems to have good friends and everyone on the outside likes him. It's almost like he has a cult-like following. The people closest to him don't notice these behaviors. Maybe they are afraid to go against him because conflict turns into personal attacks or consequences. But they don't have to see him or live with him, so surface maintaining a surface relationship is easy.





10 Signs of Gaslighting

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You constantly question yourself

You wonder if you're too sensitive

You're easily confused

You can't stop apologizing

You think you do everything wrong

You think you're not good enough

You feel like you make bad choices

You think you deserve to be alone

You create excuses for them

You are unhappy for no reason

A woman with brown hair, wearing a white t-shirt, is sitting on a teal couch. She is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression, her hand resting on her chin. The background is a blurred living room with a television and a blue patterned pillow.

How Gaslighting begins

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How gas lighting begins:

Gaslighting begins with subtle, under the radar behavior. Small things come into question. What you thought you saw, he tells you that you didn't. What you thought you understood, he tells you your misunderstood. What you thought you said, you never said. Over time, these subtle statements become clear behaviors. The following are examples of behaviors of gaslighters.

Lies.

The person gaslighting will tell you blatant lies, some small, some huge, but always keeping you wondering if they are being truthful or not keeps you guessing their honesty as well as your own perception. Denial. They will deny when you call them out on what you know is true. Even if you have actual proof, they will deny the action. They are so good at it that you actually question your proof.

Destroy your foundation. Your friends, your family, your kids are easy targets and a gaslighter will use them as ammunition. Telling you that you're a bad parent, putting down your family and friends and telling you they are a bad influence on you. Picking apart your own personal foundation making you believe the list of negative characteristics they describe to you daily. Subtle, but strong and steady. The gaslighter is relentless. The more you question yourself, the more energy they have. It begins with subtle remarks and grows stronger. There are usually positive comments and sweet gestures sprinkled in, which makes the victim question themselves even more.

Using confusion as a tactic.

The more confusing the gaslighter can make a situation, the more your emotions, thoughts and words get twisted into a mess. A story can start out making sense, but adding tangents, misdirection, changing the plot, reorganizing statements, all of this just make it hard to follow. When the gaslighter gets frustrated with you because things aren't making sense, you feel foolish and think there is something wrong with you that you can't keep up. Again, questioning yourself and apologizing for something that isn't your fault. Lack of accountability. A gaslighter is unlikely to own their actions or take responsibility for their bad behavior. Instead, they will manipulate the situation and make it appear that others are at fault.

They are very good at weaseling their way out of negative situations with their charm and confidence. They are very believable, which makes it easier for others to take the blame. These are a few characteristics of people who gaslight. I am hoping that by describing these aspects, you can become more and more aware if you are in a situation similar to some of the examples.





What gaslighting does to you

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What it does to you.

As I've talked about, the longer you are in a situation where you are being manipulated, the faster and harder your self-worth is going to take a hit. When your confidence decreases, your anxiety increases. The more anxiety you have, the more out of control you will feel, making it easier to reach out to others to help you. Who better to help than the charming, most confident person in the room?

Mr. Gaslighter himself. You can see how the cycle starts, how it spins out of control and why it is so difficult to remove yourself from this type of relationship.

Over time, a person who is a victim of gaslighting may start to believe that they cannot trust themselves, or that they have a mental health disorder. This gaslighting may lead to:

- anxiety
- depression
- isolation
- psychological trauma

All of these can have a long-term impact on someone's mental health and self-esteem. They may also make it more difficult for the individual to leave an abusive situation.

If the gaslighting takes place in a relationship, it could become part of a broader pattern of coercive control. Coercive control is emotional abuse that gives the abuser control over their partner's life.

A woman in a plaid shirt and jeans is running away from a giant hand that is reaching out from the right side of the frame. The background is a city skyline. The text "How to get OUT" is centered in a yellow box.

How to get OUT

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How to get out of it.

There are several things to do to gain your freedom again. The first thing is to increase your awareness of this behavior. You can't change anything if you aren't aware that it is going on. Begin keeping a secret journal. Write down your observations. Keep track of the behaviors you see and your emotions that occur. Write down what you have said, actions you have taken. Begin to document everything you do. This will help you reference what has occurred and will help when you question yourself. Learn more about the signs, characteristics and specific examples of what gaslighting is. Getting validation through educating yourself helps clarify questions you have. Find a therapist. Do your research for a therapist that is trained in emotional, verbal, and physical abusive relationships.

I suggest weekly therapy until you really get a hold of your thoughts and increase your confidence. Working on managing anxiety will be helpful too. Check in with yourself. I suggest 5 times a day, reconnecting with you. Ask yourself "How am I doing?", "What do I want right now?", "What is my opinion in this situation?". Checking in will allow you to strengthen your internal sense of self, your intuition. Set boundaries. While it won't be in your best interest to argue with someone who is gaslighting, it is important to know how to set limits. By learning to be assertive, you can respect yourself, make statements that are firm, but with compassion. By being passive, you will get walked on. By being aggressive, you will escalate the situation and it will only lead to anger and more feelings of being out of control. So making statements like, "It's ok that we have differing opinions, but this is how I remember it" or "When you can talk to me with respect, we can continue this conversation, but until then, I am going to walk away (or hang up the phone)".

Another way to set boundaries is to take a time out.

Remove yourself from the situation. Go to another part of the house, take a walk, drive (if you can be safe) to a friend's house. Be aware of the Bait and Switch tactic. The bait and switch happens when you start out with a good sense of focus. You know what you want to talk about, but as you begin, you are interrupted and the topic is turned, blaming you for doing the same behavior, or bringing up a situation that you behaved negatively. As soon as you start to explain yourself, you have taken the bait.

You are now in the spotlight and the other person has successfully changed your focus. You have lost your balance. The topic has shifted and your frustrations are rising. What to do? Catch yourself. Realize that what you wanted to talk about is off the table.

Stop the conversation and say, "Oh, wait, I have lost my focus. We can talk about your opinion in a minute, but I want to go back to the original conversation". When it happens again, simply identify it is going on, say, "We can talk about your opinion in a minute, but I am going to finish discussing how I feel". If the other person is unable to allow you to keep your focus, take a time out. End the conversation because it is not going anywhere anyway.

How to tell if you need to leave the relationship.

I believe people can change, but they have to want to change. They have to see that there is a problem and own their part. I guarantee you that if a person doesn't see that they have a problem, they are not going to do anything to fix it. Why would you fix something if you don't think you are doing anything wrong? Suggest the other person educates themselves on gaslighting behavior and suggest they get help individually.

Couples therapy is an option, but it can be a detriment if the other person isn't willing to change. Therapy requires a vulnerability. If you open up and share your feelings, this can be used against you by a gaslighter.

If you don't see changes occurring, you may need to reevaluate the relationship. The longer you stay in a situation like this, the worse you will feel. As you get stronger, you will notice you feel great around people who are healthy for you and you will realize the gaslighting behavior faster and faster.

Take care of yourself.

Pick up the pieces of you that you know who is self-respecting, deserves to be happy, is capable of being in a loving relationship.

