

What is “Gaslighting”?

The concept of “gaslighting” has recently been getting some attention in the national news, with various commentators making the claim that politicians are “gaslighting” America. Some might say that this is a frivolous use of a term typically used to describe psychological abuse. However, these conversations do draw attention to this often less-known abusive behavior.

So, what is gaslighting, and why is it considered abuse? The term comes from a 1938 play, *Gas Light*, in which a man starts to slowly drive his wife crazy by dimming the gas lighting in their house at random times while denying that anything is happening. She begins to mistrust her own experiences. After a while, she has no idea what to believe anymore.

How Gaslighting Harms Victims

In real life, gaslighting happens when abusers repeatedly lie to, mislead, and confuse their partners about events that have clearly occurred. For instance, they may claim that the partner misheard them, or is making things up, confused, misremembering, or overreacting. Gaslighting is a way of gaining power and control over a victim, and it can be very effective. The lies and deceptions are often quite blatant, yet somehow can eventually become convincing. The abusive person may seem so confident and sure of themselves that the other partner feels bewildered and starts to doubt their own reality.

Victims of gaslighting typically feel destabilized, dependent, and confused. Over time, the victim may lose confidence in themselves. They may even feel that they need the abusive partner around to keep them “together,” since the partner has led them to believe that they are incompetent.

Signs of Gaslighting

Gaslighting may occur along with other types of abuse, such as physical, financial, or sexual abuse. However, it can be especially damaging because it is hard to see, confirm, or even understand. Along with feelings of confusion about your partner’s denial of things you believe to be true, some signs that you are being gaslighted may include the new development of the following:

- Loss of joy and enjoyment in life
- Withholding details about your relationship from friends and family (consciously or unconsciously) because it wouldn’t “sound right”
- Loss of confidence and self-esteem
- Constantly wondering if it’s “just you” or if you are being “oversensitive”
- Frequently second-guessing yourself about what you believe to be true
- Feeling like you are no longer adequate or competent
- Giving in to your partner’s version of events to avoid confrontations

If you think you may be a victim of gaslighting, one strategy is to begin writing down or recording incidents so that you can refer back and know for sure what really occurred. Make sure to keep these records in a safe place where your abuser will not find them. These impartial records will help you confirm what did and did not happen.

Where to Get Help

If you are being gaslighted or know someone who is experiencing this type of emotional abuse, there is help. The resources below offer options, information, and assistance.

[Get Help For Yourself](#)—From Love is Respect

Visit this page to chat with, text, or call a trained peer counselor at Love is Respect.

[Get Help](#)—From the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

[Leaving an Emotionally Abusive Relationship](#)—From Break the Cycle

For people experiencing emotional abuse.

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