



Gaslighting: Recognizing the Patterns, a resource to help in reclaiming reality

This resource discusses patterns of emotional manipulation that can be painful to revisit. Please take time and pause if needed. Engagement with this information is entirely within your control. Safety and well-being are what matter most.

What Is Gaslighting?

Gaslighting is an intentional and ongoing pattern of behavior that causes doubt about the existing reality in a relationship. Over time, it erodes self-trust, creates confusion, anxiety, and a sense of instability. It is a form of psychological abuse and emotional manipulation used to gain power and control.

Common Gaslighting Tactics and Actions

Recognizing the tactics is the first step to breaking free from their hold.

Tactic

What It Looks Like

Denial & Questioning Memory	Events that occurred are denied, leaving the receiver questioning memories, perception and reality.
Minimized & Dismissed Feelings	Feelings & responses are dismissed as overreactions, drama or irrational behavior.
Blame-shifting	Responsibility for the abuser's actions is placed on the receiver.
Triangulation	A third party is added to conversations, events or experiences to create confusion, jealousy, division & self-doubt.
Silent Treatment	Communication is intentionally withheld as a form of punishment, manipulation and control.
Withholding & Stonewalling	Engagement about concerns is refused, shutting down communication and avoiding accountability.

The Emotional Impact

Experiencing gaslighting can lead to:

- Persistent self-doubt and second-guessing.
- Anxiety, confusion, and a constant sense of being "on edge."
- Difficulty trusting personal perceptions and decision-making.
- Disconnection from identity and self-worth.
- Isolation — feeling "too sensitive" or ashamed of the confusion.



These responses are normal reactions to a profoundly destabilizing experience. The confusion is not a character flaw; it is a direct result of the calculated and controlled manipulation.

Why Gaslighting Is Difficult to Recognize

Gaslighting rarely begins with obvious actions. It is a subtle form of manipulation that often goes unnoticed except for the "*feelings*" it leaves behind. The pattern develops gradually, woven into everyday conversations, disagreements and interactions. Small moments of denial, contradiction, or blame-shifting may appear insignificant when viewed individually.

Over time, the moments accumulate. Confidence in personal perceptions begins to erode. That slow erosion creates a pattern of second-guess, questioning the reality of memories, reactions, and decisions. Memories, conversations, situations and events that used to be clear become murky and clouded by uncertainty.

The difficulty in recognizing gaslighting is not a reflection of intelligence, awareness, or strength. The difficulty arises because trust is used against the receiver. Trust is a natural, intrinsic and necessary part of healthy relationships. When trust is repeatedly used against someone, confusion and loss of self are an understandable response.

Those who come out on the other side often describe realizing a significant amount of time was spent trying to understand what was happening, what they were doing wrong, fixing the relationship or explaining their concerns more clearly. There are often bouts of crying for "no apparent reason." Making sense of the experiences, attempting to understand the confusion and trying to regain a semblance of reality becomes a job in and of itself. That job causes the focus to remain on the experience instead of focusing on and recognizing the patterns, actions and manipulation causing them.

A Gentle Reminder in navigating the Path Forward

- The experience is valid. The confusion and self-doubt are not a personal failing; they are the result of psychological manipulation.
- This is not a solitary journey. Many have walked this path and found their way back to themselves. The silence and shame are part of the abuser's design.
- Healing is possible. Rebuilding self-trust is a journey and it begins with recognizing the patterns and validating the truth of what happened. The power to reclaim reality exists within.