

BASED ON 20 YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL COACHING EXPERIENCE

How to Successfully Handle Gaslighters



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Eight Signs You're in a Relationship with a Gaslighter

“If you repeat a lie often enough, it becomes accepted as the truth.”

— Famous quotation, attributed to various sources

“Some people try to be tall by cutting off the heads of others.”

— Paramahansa Yogananda

Gaslighting is a form of persistent manipulation and brainwashing that causes the victim to doubt her or himself, and to ultimately lose one’s own sense of perception, identity, and self-worth. Gaslighting statements and accusations are usually based on blatant lies, or exaggeration of the truth. The term gaslighting is derived from the 1944 film “Gaslight”, where a husband tries to convince his wife that she’s insane by causing her to question herself and her reality.

In its milder forms, gaslighting creates a subtle but inequitable power dynamic in a relationship, where the gaslightee is subjected to the gaslighter’s unreasonable, rather than fact-based scrutiny, judgment, and/or micro-aggression. At its worst, pathological gaslighting constitutes a severe form of mind-control and psychological abuse. Gaslighting can

occur in personal relationships, such as verbal, emotional, and/or physical hostility from one partner to another; at the workplace when a supervisor regularly and unfairly berates his or her employees; or over an entire nation when commercial advertising or public figures make pronouncements that are clearly contrary to the good of society.

It should be noted that not all gaslighters are intentionally malicious, or conscious of their harmful conduct. Some gaslighters bought into the negative social norms and prejudices of their family, peer groups, community, or society at large. They may not be fully cognizant of the harmfulness (and hurtfulness) of their word and actions, and their painful impact on others. Other gaslighters, however, are perfectly aware of their coercive tactics, as they deliberately seek to establish power and imbalance over other people's lives.

Multiple studies and writings have focused on the phenomenon of gaslighting and its destructive impact. How do you know when you may be dealing with a pathological gaslighter? The following are eight telltale signs. While some relationships may occasionally encounter one of these issues, which might not be a major concern, a pathological gaslighter will routinely subject his or her victim(s) to several of the following experiences, while remaining largely unaware of (or unconcerned with) how his machinations affect others.

1. Constantly Reminds You of Your Flaws

One of the clearest signs of gaslighting occurs when, in a personal relationship or at the workplace, you're regularly subjected to reminders of your shortcomings, weaknesses, and/or undesirability. You feel like there's always something wrong with you and what you do, and that you're never good enough.

Many gaslighting charges are generalized disparaging remarks and negative stereotypes ("You're stupid," "You're worthless," "You're a crazy," "You people are so..."). The gaslighter makes these accusations not to discuss issues or solve problems, but to put the victim on the defensive. By attacking you at a personal level, and causing you to feel vulnerable, the gaslighter creates a power disparity in the relationship, from which you can then be exploited to his or her advantage.

2. You Often Feel Insecure and Uncertain

In a gaslighting relationship, you frequently feel anxious and unsure of yourself. You may feel insecure about how you should behave, uncertainty regarding what is expected of you, and anxiety over when the gaslighter will act up again. You might even question your worth as an individual; that somehow you're not good enough as a partner, or an offspring, or an employee, or someone of your particular background.

3. You Feel Like You're Walking on Egg Shells

“These picture frames in the living room are crooked. I TOLD YOU to check when you clean the house. Come-on! Don’t be stupid!!”

— Anonymous husband to wife

Another sign of gaslighting is when you feel like you can’t freely express yourself in front of the gaslighter. Anything you say or do is not right. In his or her presence, you feel nervous and tense, never knowing when he will begin to pick on you, target your flaws, or launch another accusation. You may experience symptoms of elevated stress, anxiety, depression or trauma. You may begin to develop obsessive-compulsive symptoms – the need to check and correct yourself repeatedly – for fear of saying or doing the wrong thing, and being ridiculed by the gaslighter. You might even feel like you’re going out of your mind (“driven crazy”).

Significantly, you feel more confident, happier, and freer when you’re away from the gaslighter’s coercive influence.

4. The Gaslighter Rarely Admits Flaws. Is Highly Aggressive When Criticized

The dynamic of a gaslighting relationship is one where the gaslighter is frequently on the attack, and the gaslightee is constantly on the defensive. The gaslighter rarely, if ever talks about his or her own flaws and

shortcomings. If criticized even moderately, the pathological gaslighter will quickly use blame, excuse-making, and/or victimhood to cover up his own inadequacies, while creating misdirection by launching a new round of accusations and false claims.

With this tactic, the gaslighter is able to take the focus off of oneself, avoid serious scrutiny, and get away with his own trespasses and inadequacies.

5. You Make Self-Disparaging Remarks

Since the pathological gaslighter's aim is to distort your perception and your identity, after a time of persistent ridicule you may begin to question yourself, and wonder if some of the gaslighter's negative comments and accusations about you are true. You might begin to think and feel negatively of yourself, make self-depreciating remarks, and reject your own qualities, values, and background.

"I lived in a household where women were routinely treated as second class. For a long time, I bought into the negative stereotype, and would make sexist and racist remarks about myself and other women. Only after I moved out did I realize that I had been bamboozled."

— Anonymous

One of the most common types of self-disparaging remarks is saying “I’m sorry,” even when you’re clearly on the receiving end of mistreatment. It is a classic example of being gaslit.

6. Despite Poor Treatment, You Look to the Gaslighter For Acceptance, Approval, and Validation

Some gaslighters manipulate the gaslightee with frequent negative hostility, combined with occasional positive bribery. The gaslightee, wishing to avoid tension and hoping for better treatment, may become ever more compliant to the manipulator. In this way, a codependent relationship is formed. The Oxford Dictionary defines codependency as: “Excessive emotional or psychological reliance on a partner.” In a gaslighting relationship, the gaslighter has the power to grant acceptance, approval, respect, safety, and security. He or she also has the power (and often threatens to) take them away. With this tactic, the gaslighter retains power, privilege, and entitlement.

7. You Hide and Excuse the Gaslighter’s Coercion

In a typical example of the psychology of the abused, some victims of gaslighting feel ashamed about being overwhelmed or powerless in the presence of the gaslighter. They either cover up the psychological abuse/suffering by putting on a brave face, or go into denial and pretend that everything’s okay. When concerned family or friends inquire, the

gaslightee may come up with a multitude of excuses. Saying, for example: “it’s really not THAT bad,” “my husband is going through a lot of stress lately,” “it’s my fault, I made her angry,” “he doesn’t really mean it,” “I can help her, it will get better,” “I’m too sensitive, ” or “at least I have what I have.”

8. You Feel Stuck and/or Alone

For all of the reasons described above, victims of gaslighting often feel stuck and/or alone. Some gaslightees isolate themselves under the duress of the gaslighter, while others, even with social contacts, may feel apprehensive about fully revealing their hardship, or pessimistic that things will change for the better. Many victims of gaslighting swallow silent tears within — knowing that, deep down, they **DESERVE BETTER**.

There's more to this excerpt!

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