

What is Gaslighting ?

Gaslighting is a type of domestic/family violence, just like physical and emotional abuse are types of domestic/family violence. Gaslighting is a form of coercive control, where an abuser emotionally and psychologically manipulates and exerts control over someone (see 'Coercive Control' factsheet).



WARNING: SOME OF THE INFORMATION IN THIS FACT SHEET MAY BE DIFFICULT TO READ. PLEASE TAKE YOUR TIME AND FIND ASSISTANCE IF YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO.

Gaslighting Explained

Gaslighting is an especially effective form of emotional abuse that can leave you questioning reality, your feelings, instincts, and sanity, which in turn gives your abusive partner power and control over you. Gaslighting can also be used to make sure that you do not leave the abusive relationship by making it hard for you to trust your own perceptions. Long-term effects of gaslighting can lead people to experience emotional and mental health issues. It can undermine your confidence and ability to trust yourself.

What Does It Sound Like?

Gaslighting examples:

- Telling you that you are making things up, that things did not happen or that you have a bad memory
- Telling you that you are going crazy or that 'its all in your head'
- Saying that you are over-exaggerating situations and abusive behaviours
- Telling other people you are crazy or have mental health and/or substance abuse concerns

If someone is gaslighting you:

- You may be constantly second-guessing yourself
- You feel as if you are 'too sensitive'
- You are always apologising
- You often make excuses for your abusers behaviour
- You feel defeated and that you can't do anything right
- You may feel confused, hopeless and wonder if you are 'good enough for the abuser'
- You feel anxious and find it hard to trust yourself.

How Does Gaslighting Work?

Gaslighting tends to start out slowly with the abuser's actions seeming harmless at first. There are several gaslighting tactics that an abuser may use, including:

- **Withholding:** in this tactic the abuser pretends that they do not understand and/or they refuse to listen. They might say things like "I don't want to hear this again" or "you're just trying to confuse me."
- **Countering:** during this tactic, the abuser will question your memory of events, even when you are remembering correctly. They could say something like "you never remember things properly."
- **Blocking/Diverting:** they will question your thoughts and/or change the topic, saying things like "you're only saying that because your [friend or family member/s] put it in your head" or "you're imagining things."
- **Trivialising:** they will make your feelings and/or needs seem unimportant by saying things like "you're too sensitive" or "are you going to carry on over that?"
- **Forgetting/Denial:** they may deny having made promises to you and/or pretend to have forgotten what occurred by saying things like "you're just making stuff up" or "I don't know what you're talking about."
- **Stereotyping:** abusers may use negative stereotypes of your gender, race, age, ethnicity, sexuality to manipulate you. They could say "you're irrational and crazy because of your hormones" .

When Can Gaslighting Happen?

Gaslighting can occur within many types of relationships. For example, it can occur between intimate partners, family members, friends, at work, with medical professionals, or within groups and communities. However, it is never the responsibility of the person being manipulated. The onus of changing behaviour and the gaslighting itself is the responsibility of the abuser. Intimate and controlling behaviour such as gaslighting is difficult to escape due to the control and dominance an abuser may hold over you.

What Can You Do If You Are Being Gaslit?

Talk To Someone You Trust

This could be a family member, friend, acquaintance, neighbour or health professional. Speaking about your thoughts and experiences can be beneficial to your health and safety.

Collect Evidence to Fact Check

You can keep a diary or take photos of dates, times, events or things. This can help when someone is challenging your memories and making you feel as though you are going crazy.

Create a Safety Plan

Organise a bag of spare clothes, important documents, keys etc (see 'Safety Planning' factsheet) and a safe place to go to if you need to leave suddenly.

Further Information

Yemaya Womens Support Service

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Please note that all information contained within this fact sheet is to be used as a guide only.

If you require further information or assistance please contact Yemaya Women's Support Service.