

Gaslighting

Manipulation whose purpose is to create doubt
in a person or a group of people



Leaders Guide

Designed for and Presented in December 2017
Oregon Association for Family and Community Education
Contemporaries Study Group
Klamath Falls, Oregon

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Gaslighting - Manipulation whose purpose is to create doubt in a person or a group of people

Agenda:

- Welcome and Introduction 1 minute
- Review Agenda 1 minutes
- Review Goals and Objectives 2 minutes
- Bio of Presenters 1 minute
- Handout #1 – Gaslighting Quiz 4 minutes
- Gaslighting Definition 4 minutes
- Origins of the term “Gaslighting” 4 minutes
- Why is Gaslighting so damaging? 5 minutes
- What situations is Gaslighting done? 3 minutes
- 12 Signs of Gaslighting? 10 minutes
- What do Gaslighters want? 2 minutes
- Coping with the effects of Gaslighting 5 minutes
- Group share of personal Gaslighting Stories 10 minutes
- Conclusion 2 minutes
- Questions and Answers 5 minutes
- Hand Outs #2 and #3 1 minute

60 total minutes

Goals and Objectives

- Participants will gain an understanding what Gaslighting is and the history of the term.
- Participants will gain an understanding of how Gaslighting is used, how they can identify it, how it can affect people and how they can help either themselves or others recover from Gaslighting.
- Participants will be able to use the information from this lesson in their everyday life.

Items needed for Presentation

- Gaslighting Leaders Guide
- Various Activities and Handouts
- Pencils or pens for each attendee
- Blank paper for each attendee
- *PowerPoint Presentation on Gaslighting (if needed)
- *Computer
- *PowerPoint projector
- *Screen or wall to project presentation on
- *Computer/projector table
- *Electrical cords/power bars as needed
 - *only needed if PowerPoint presentatio



References and Credit Given to:

- Psychology Today – www.psychologytoday.com
- Gaslighting: What It Is and Why It's So Destructive -By Darius Cikanavicius
- wikiHow to Recover from Gaslighting – www.wikihow.com

Gaslighting

****Do Activity # 1 Handout – Gaslighting Quiz**

Gaslighting Definition

Gaslighting is a tactic in which a person or entity, in order to gain more power, makes a victim question their reality. It works much better than you may think. Anyone is susceptible to gaslighting, and it is a common technique of abusers, dictators, narcissists, and cult leaders. It is done slowly, so the victim doesn't realize how much they've been brainwashed. For example, in the movie *Gaslight* (1944), a man manipulates his wife to the point where she thinks she is losing her mind. (Psychology Today)

Gaslighting is a term used in psychology and common speech that refers to manipulation whose purpose is to create doubt in a person or a group of people. It includes but is not limited to denial, lying, deflection, and contradiction to make the target question their perception of reality. (Gaslighting: What It Is and Why It's So Destructive -By Darius Cikanavicius)

Origins of the term “Gaslighting”

The term *gaslighting* originates from a 1938 stage play and its later film adaptations (1940 and 1944). It has been used colloquially since the 1960s. In the story, the husband tries to convince his wife and other people that she is insane. He is doing so by manipulating certain elements of their environment and by continuously insisting that she doesn't remember things correctly and that she's delusional when she notices the changes he made.

The title comes from the husband dimming the gas lights in the house and then denying that there was a change in illumination when his wife notices a difference. (Gaslighting: What It Is and Why It's So Destructive - By Darius Cikanavicius)

Why Gaslighting is so damaging

Gaslighting makes you doubt your own perception, your feelings, and your memory. It makes you doubt reality itself, and therefore your own sanity. When you doubt your perception of reality and you don't know if you are sane, then you can become *insane*, to the degree that you are detached from reality.

The levels of sanity and insanity varies in different areas of life and in different situations because all of us have certain blind spots, lapses, or lack in knowledge or perception. However, if you are deliberately and routinely made to doubt your accurate thoughts, feelings, motives, drives, and perceptions, then it damages or even destroys you as a person.

Doubting your sanity is scary ("Is it real?" "Did I make it up?" "Did it really happen?"). This sometimes results in the victim actually becoming detached from reality (in thought and in emotion) or not being able to process certain aspects of reality accurately.

It is more damaging the younger the person is because a child's brain is still developing and they are dependent on their caregiver. (Gaslighting: What It Is and Why It's So Destructive - By Darius Cikanavicius)

In what situations is Gaslighting done?

- Elder abuse
- Spousal abuse
- Family member abuse
- Child abuse
- Work place
- Church
- School
- Almost anywhere

12 Signs of Gaslighting

People who gaslight typically use the following techniques:

1. They tell blatant lies.

You know it's an outright lie. Yet they are telling you this lie with a straight face. Why are they so blatant? Because they're setting up a precedent. Once they tell you a huge lie, you're not sure if anything they say is true. Keeping you unsteady and off-kilter is the goal.

2. They deny they ever said something, even though you have proof.

You know they said they would do something; you know you heard it. But they out and out deny it. It makes you start questioning your reality—maybe they never said that thing. And the more they do this, the more you question your reality and start accepting theirs.

3. They use what is near and dear to you as ammunition.

They know how important your kids are to you, and they know how important your identity is to you. So those may be one of the first things they attack. If you have kids, they tell you that you should not have had those children. They will tell you'd be a worthy person if only you didn't have a long list of negative traits. They attack the foundation of your being.

4. They wear you down over time.

This is one of the insidious things about gaslighting—it is done gradually, over time. A lie here, a lie there, a snide comment every so often...and then it starts ramping up. Even the brightest, most self-aware people can be sucked into gaslighting—it is that effective. It's the "frog in the frying pan" analogy: The heat is turned up slowly, so the frog never realizes what's happening to it.

5. Their actions do not match their words.

When dealing with a person or entity that gaslights, look at what they are doing rather than what they are saying. What they are saying means nothing; it is just talk. What they are doing is the issue.

6. They throw in positive reinforcement to confuse you.

This person or entity that is cutting you down, telling you that you don't have value, is now praising you for something you did. This adds an additional sense of uneasiness. You think, "Well maybe they aren't so bad." Yes, they are. This is a calculated attempt to keep you off-kilter—and again, to question your reality. Also look at what you were praised for; it is probably something that served the gaslighter.

7. They know confusion weakens people.

Gaslighters know that people like having a sense of stability and normalcy. Their goal is to uproot this and make you constantly question everything. And humans' natural tendency is to look to the person or entity that will help you feel more stable—and that happens to be the gaslighter.

8. They project.

They are a drug user or a cheater, yet they are constantly accusing you of that. This is done so often that you start trying to defend yourself, and are distracted from the gaslighter's own behavior.

9. They try to align people against you.

Gaslighters are masters at manipulating and finding the people they know will stand by them no matter what—and they use these people against you. They will make comments such as, "This person knows that you're not right," or "This person knows you're useless too." Keep in mind it does not mean that these people actually said these things. A gaslighter is a constant liar. When the gaslighter uses this tactic it makes you feel like you don't know who to trust or turn to—and that

leads you right back to the gaslighter. And that's exactly what they want: Isolation gives them more control.

10. They tell you or others that you are crazy.

This is one of the most effective tools of the gaslighter, because it's dismissive. The gaslighter knows if they question your sanity, people will not believe you when you tell them the gaslighter is abusive or out-of-control. It's a master technique.

11. They tell you everyone else is a liar.

By telling you that everyone else (your family, the media) is a liar, it again makes you question your reality. You've never known someone with the audacity to do this, so they must be telling the truth, right? No. It's a manipulation technique. It makes people turn to the gaslighter for the "correct" information—which isn't correct information at all. The more you are aware of these techniques, the quicker you can identify them and avoid falling into the gaslighter's trap.

12. The Silent Treatment

Another method is the Silent Treatment. Getting the silent treatment can be unbearable, however a very effective tool for the Gaslighter. You'd think you would enjoy not having to listen to your abuser but the truth is, receiving the silent treatment can lead to severe emotional problems and extreme anger.

What do Gaslighters Want?

CONTROL, CONTROL, CONTROL

- Control of you
- Control of your money
- Control of your property
- Control of everything you do

Control gives the Gaslighter an advantage over others!

Coping with the Effects of Gaslighting

(wikiHow to Recover from Gaslighting)

1. Recognize the signs of gaslighting.

If you suspect that your partner is gaslighting you, you should learn all of the different ways that gaslighting can manifest. This can help you recognize the ways in which you were manipulated so that you can recover. Some common signs include:

- Accusing you of remembering wrong or making up things that happened.
- Diverting or avoiding talking about certain topics.
- Claiming that you overreact or that you are too sensitive.
- Acting as if they do not understand what you are saying.
- Refusing to talk about their behavior.

2. Leave the situation.

Gaslighting is a form of mental and emotional abuse. It is a way to have power over you and control you. If you have not yet ended this relationship, you should strongly consider it in order to recover from the gaslighting.

- For instance, if you have recently realized that your partner has been purposely doing things to make you second guess yourself, you should try to leave the relationship.

- Talk to someone close to you about helping you leave. For example, you might tell your sibling, “Could you help me. I’m being gaslighted and I need to get out of the situation.”
- Ask a counselor, therapist, or other professional to help you get out of the situation.
- Contact a crisis hotline for assistance with leaving your situation. They can connect you with other resources.

3. Reduce your stress.

Because it is a form of abuse, gaslighting can be very stressful on you. You may constantly feel nervous, tense, or tired. You can recover from gaslighting if you make an effort to reduce the overall stress in your life. Try stress reduction techniques like meditation, deep breathing, or visualization.

- There are several different types of meditation that you can use to relieve you stress. You might try mindfulness, yoga, concentration or another type.
- Practice visualizing yourself some place peaceful. Picture yourself in detail. For example, picture your relaxed forehead and chin. Visualize the smile on your face and the happiness in your eyes.

4. Address your anxiety.

When you are gaslighted, you may end up feeling anxious or nervous. You might feel like you need to be always on alert because you don’t know when the person will accuse you of something you didn’t do. In order to recover from gaslighting, you should explore ways to calm yourself and manage any anxiety you may feel.

- For instance, if you notice that you are feeling nervous about how you look because your partner used to always critique your outfit choices, you should address your feelings.
- When you find yourself feeling anxious try calming yourself by using mindfulness techniques. Be present in the moment.

Acknowledge and accept what you are feeling without judgment.

- Focus on your breathing by thinking ‘in’ when you inhale and ‘out’ when you exhale, if you are in the middle of an anxiety attack.

5. Handle any depression.

It is not uncommon for people that are being gaslighted to experience depression. You don’t have to let the depression overcome you, though. You can recover from gaslighting if you make sure that you address any depressive symptoms that you may be having.

- For example, you may notice that during your relationship, and now, that you are having trouble completing daily tasks, feeling fatigued, or you like you don’t have energy or interest in anything.
- Learn about the symptoms of depression that you may not be aware of like unexplained physical problems, trouble concentrating, changes in appetite, or changes in sleeping habits.
- Consider seeking professional help for treatment options that can help you cope with depression. A professional can help you determine if you might want to try medication, therapy, or another treatment.
- Develop ways to cope with your depression in everyday life. For example, create a schedule or routine for yourself and stick to it. You should also avoid drinking alcohol or using other substances to help you cope.

6. Keep yourself safe.

It can be difficult leaving an abusive relationship, and your abuser may try to prevent you from leaving for good. It is a good idea to create a safety plan so that you can remain safe after you leave.

- Get a new phone number, and ask the phone company to keep it unlisted, so that your name does not show up on caller ID.
- If you're worried that they will hurt you, you can get a restraining order. Let your neighbors and work know about the order.
- You may need to move to a new home. If you decide not to move, you should at least change the locks.

Group Sharing of Personal Stories of Gaslighting

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Conclusion

- Remember, Gaslighting is usually done by those that are narcissists, have borderline personality disorders and even psychopaths. They know EXACTLY what they're doing. Their main goal is to keep their victims off balance and unsure so they can easily be controlled.
- Gaslighting is NOT an indication of weakness! Anybody can begin to doubt themselves and their perceptions when they are subjected to these mind games for months or years on end. You are not chosen because you are weak.
- A Gaslighter will sacrifice ANYBODY to reach their goals! They want you to "Set yourself on fire to keep them warm." You say, "I'm dying! I'm burning to death!" and they say, "But I'm cold. Why don't you care that I'm cold?"
- Never say never... This can happen to anyone. If it happened to me ... it can to you or someone you love as well.



Questions, Answers and Comments



Handout #1 – Gaslighting Quiz

1. What is Gaslighting?
2. Where did the term “Gaslighting” originate?
3. What type of a person could be a Gaslighter?
4. Why is Gaslighting so damaging?
5. Where and in what types of situations can Gaslighting happen?
6. What are at least 3 signs of Gaslighting?
7. What do Gaslighters want?
8. What are at least 3 methods of coping with Gaslighting?
9. Could you be Gaslighted?

Handout #2 - 12 Signs of Gaslighting

People who gaslight typically use the following techniques:

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Handout #3 - Coping with the Effects of Gaslighting

(wikiHow to Recover from Gaslighting)

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