

Gaslighting

The term gaslighting comes from the old movie “Gaslight”. There are two versions, but I’m partial to the 1944 version starring Ingrid Bergman & Charles Boyer. In the movie, he is a thief who tried to steal her aunt’s famous jewels, but failed, & killed her. He later married her pretty niece in an attempt to gain access to those jewels that she inherited. To be rid of her & have easy access to her property, he tries to drive her insane. He hides her belongings & claims she moved them but forgot. He searched the attic for the jewels at night, & when he turned on the gaslights, the others in the house dimmed. When she mentioned it, he told her she was insane—that never happened. It’s a fantastic movie that shows the insidious & evil nature of gaslighting.

Gaslighting may be the most sinister form of psychological abuse. The purpose of it is to make a victim doubt her perceptions, memories & possibly even sanity in order to accomplish the goal of the abuser.

There are many ways a narcissist gaslights their victim.

Narcissists isolate their victims. The less people around, the better chance the narcissist has at gaining full control of a victim. If no one is around, there is no one to tell the victim that the narcissist is abusive. There also won’t be anyone around to try to stop the narcissist for abusing.

They speak with deep conviction, even when lying, which they do constantly. That conviction makes a person believe the abuser must know what they’re talking about.

Narcissists love to reinvent the past. They may deny things happened completely, say they don’t remember the event or tell you that that isn’t how an event really happened—it happened another way & in their version, they look good.

They also instill doubt in their victims. They ask questions like, “Are you SURE you want to do that?” “Are you SURE that’s how that really happened?” Hearing things like this makes a person stop & think about things, & can instill a great deal of doubt in them.

Narcissists shame victims by saying things like, “You’re imagining things.” “You’re such a drama queen!” “You’re too sensitive”. Shame is a powerful weapon—it makes a victim feel like everything about them, even their presence, is wrong. They lose all self confidence. Toxic shame makes a person want to be invisible, not bothering anyone with even their presence.

They question your mental health or suggest you need psychological help often to make you feel like you’re crazy. I don’t remember a time in my life when my mother didn’t tell me, “You need help”, implying I needed psychological help. And, she said it in such a pitying voice, while looking at me like she was disappointed in me for being so crazy. It really made me wonder about my sanity for most of my life.

If you've been a victim of gaslighting, there are always signs of it. Some signs of gaslighting are:

- Difficulty making decisions due to a lack of trust in your judgment
- Constantly second guessing yourself.
- Often wondering if you're too sensitive.
- Making excuses for the bad behavior of other people.

If you realize you behave this way, you can cope. There are ways.

Spend time with God. Know Him & what He has to say about you. There is a list of positive affirmations on my website. Reading them may help you.

Start listening to your instincts. If something feels right or wrong, pay attention to that feeling. It's there for a reason.

Get to know yourself, so when the narcissist says you did or didn't do something, you have no doubt because you know yourself well.

Write things down. Keep a diary or journal. Writing things down will help you to know for sure what is true.

Trust your memories. If you are unsure, find pictures or talk to others who were there.

Limit your exposure to this abusive person. Or, end the relationship. You have every right to protect yourself from abuse, & make no mistake—gaslighting is abuse!