

# A Quick Guide to Recognizing and Responding to Gaslighting

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*Gaslighting is terrible because it is a planned, plotted, and intentional abusive behavior on the part of a cheater or emotional abuser. Here's a quick guide to recognizing and responding to gaslighting.*



**WARNING!  
GASLIGHTING  
DETECTED**

**By Sarah P.**

The number one thing that cheaters do is gaslight their betrayed spouse. They will often gaslight their betrayed spouse as soon as an affair begins, while the affair is happening, and even after D-Day.

While being cheated on is often the largest trauma of a person's life, being gas-lit by a cheating spouse after D-Day will cause the trauma that you are already experiencing feel one hundred times worse.

I have written a quick guide to help you with recognizing and responding to gaslighting. Being armed with information that can protect you emotionally is extremely important.

Hopefully, you can print this post off and carry it around in your purse or briefcase. Carry it with you everywhere you go, because my intention is to give you strength, clarity, and tactics to shut down a cheater who is gas-lighting you.

## What is Gaslighting?

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Gaslighting is a specific form of emotional abuse that is planned and intentional on the part of the cheater. Gaslighting is specifically used by an abuser or cheater to:

- Make a betrayed spouse feel crazy
- Make a betrayed spouse lose emotional balance
- To control a betrayed spouse
- To intimidate a betrayed spouse
- To alienate a betrayed spouse from people who could serve as “reality checkers.”
- To cause a betrayed spouse to stop asking questions about the affair
- To make the betrayed spouse feel worthless and unlovable
- To blame-shift the actions of the cheater onto the betrayed spouse.
- To cause the cheater to have absolute power and control over their victim or betrayed spouse.

## Why is Gaslighting so Terrible?

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In case it is not obvious, gaslighting is terrible because it is a planned, plotted, and intentional abusive behavior on the part of a cheater or emotional abuser. A cheater who is gaslighting his or her betrayed spouse is knowingly abusing his or her spouse. A cheater knowingly uses this form of abuse to keep total control of a betrayed spouse and life after D-Day.

A gaslighter knows that both cheating and gaslighting is wrong, but they do it to intentionally wear down their spouse and take away a betrayed spouse’s confidence. Gaslighting will create an invisible cage around a victim. The victim could leave the metaphorical cage at any point, but they will be a prisoner of their own mind and they will see no other options but to stay. In a sense, they have been brainwashed to feel as if staying in an abusive marriage is the only option and as if they will fail if they leave their marriage.

I am aware of people in my personal (off-line) circles who have enough money to leave a marriage and who would have the ability to live the life most people dream of. But, their spouse gaslights them so often, that they cannot even imagine life on the outside.



## Signs of Gaslighting

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***Gaslighting is intentionally unpredictable; it happens in situation where a victim least expects it.***

A gaslighter will instigate planned arguments or verbal attacks that are completely out of context and have no truth to them. A gaslighter will do this so that his or her victim will be caught off guard and stunned. Gaslighters will often instigate an attack when their victim least expects it.

*Here is an example of gaslighting:*

Dick (a cheater) had planned to take Jane out for date night. They had decided to repair their marriage after D-Day and they decided to do weekly date-nights. Jane put on her most beautiful clothing and make-up because she had hoped to remind Dick that she was a beautiful woman. As soon as Jane grabbed her coat, Dick scowled at Jane and looked disapprovingly at her outfit.

Even though Jane looked beautiful, Dick said, "You are wearing too much make-up and you look like a hooker. You are a wife and a mother and I refuse to take a hooker out to dinner. The way you look reflects terribly on our family."

Dick stomped away and Jane cried herself to sleep that night because she had been completely taken off-guard. Dick had hooked up with strippers and knew that calling his wife a whore would make her question her reality and lower her self-esteem.

***Gas-lighters constantly undermine the reality of their victim, even when a victim presents a gas-lighter with proof.***

Susan spends \$10,000 a month on clothing, make-up, accessories, manicures, and jewelry. Susan's husband Jeff makes a great income, but he often has to work 60 hours a week to keep up with Jane's spending habits.

When Jeff asks Susan if she could cut her spending to \$3,000 a month, Jeff is met with tears, Jeff is told that she doesn't care for Susan's well-being or hobbies, and that Jeff doesn't know that a man is supposed to provide for someone of her caliber. (Susan is a stay at home mom). These periods are followed with Susan kicking Jeff out of the bedroom because Susan has told Jeff he wants to deny her basic needs. Susan tells Jeff he is a terrible husband and provider who doesn't meet her needs.

Susan's behavior is absolutely outrageous, but she has convinced Jeff he is the problem, which undermines Jeff's reality.

***A victim of a gaslighter apologizes for everything and to everyone, even if they have nothing to apologize for.***

For example, if someone has been a victim of long-term gaslighting, they might start to think about if they even have a right to take up space on this planet. They often feel like they have to apologize for the fact that they even exist. They probably will not actually apologize for existing, but they will feel like they need to. Some long-term victims of gaslighters will apologize if it rains on the day they planned a picnic.

These thoughts seem ridiculous to people who have not been gas-lit and these thoughts *are irrational on the part of the victim*. However, if a victim feels this way, the feelings are very real to them and these thoughts and feelings that the victim experiences were caused by a very skilled gaslighter.

***A victim of gaslighting often does not know what a healthy relationship looks like, especially if their gaslighter was their first partner in life. What would be unacceptable behavior to a non-victim is acceptable behavior to a victim of gaslighting.***

Someone who is a victim of gaslighting will think it is totally normal for their spouse to verbally put them down in public, to verbally put them down at dinner parties, to embarrass them and shame them in front of others, and a victim will be grateful if their

gaslighter offers them one compliment a year. Sadly, these people often form trauma bonds with their gaslighters. Even the smallest amount of positive reinforcement from a gaslighter will keep a victim bound to them.

***Someone who is gas-lit will constantly wonder if they are good enough and walk on eggshells around a gaslighter.***

A victim of a gaslighter will always wonder what is wrong with them. They will find themselves thinking constantly about how to please a gas-lighter and how to be loveable.

If someone is truly married to a gas-lighter, they can spend 60 years jumping through hoops that a gaslighter gives them. They will still never be accepted and told they are “good enough” no matter how many hoops they jump through. A victim of a gaslighter could be a saint, but the more saintly a victim becomes, the more a gaslighter will constantly point out flaws.

A gas-lighter intentionally withholds approval and causes a victim to believe they are inferior.

## **An Example of Gaslighter**

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I have used this video in an older post about narcissism. This fellow who refers to himself as *Social Repose* made a video about his narcissism. But, instead of focusing on the narcissism part, pay close attention to how he confidently explains the process through which he “breaks” his girlfriends. He knows exactly what he is doing, he does it intentionally, and quite frankly he brags about his process. He is an excellent example of the intentionality of people who gas-light others. Gas-lighters want to destroy another person and they do so intentionally and in a calculated manner.



<https://youtu.be/yvBbfZzVBn0>

The one thing I admire about this video is his candid honesty. Do I admire him? NO.

But, I do admire that he is being candidly honest about what goes on inside the mind of someone who emotionally abuses another. He is telling people WHO he is. He is giving those of us who don't understand this way of thinking a peek into the mind of the motivating factors of a gaslighter: his own insecurity, desire for total and complete control of his victim, and the desire to take his own self-hatred out on his victim instead of seeing a therapist.

I am middle-aged and I have come to realize that I prefer brutal honesty from others because at least I know WHO I am dealing with. The world would be a better place if people were brutally honest about their flaws, so that people could decide if they want to stay or walk away.

Paradoxically, I know there will be young women out there who see Social Repose's video and still want to be his girlfriend. Some women want "bad boys." I am not one of them. But, it would certainly be wonderful to truly know WHO you are dealing with. For those of us who wish for monogamous people.

## **Recognizing and Responding to Gaslighting...What to Do About It**

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It is imperative that you are alert to the idea that a cheater will most likely be gaslighting you. Here is what I recommend:

- Send a short email to yourself – in a password protected account – describing each incident
- Create a password protected journal detailing your thoughts
- Tell trusted friends and family members that you believe your spouse is playing “mind games.” Ask them to serve as reality-checkers for you.
- Do NOT isolate yourself, even if you feel like curling up into a ball and laying in bed
- Join an online support group such as “[Out of the Fog.](#)”
- Create an exit strategy if your gaslighter becomes verbally aggressive.
- Become a volunteer at a place that you feel passionate about and make friends with like-minded people. If you do not feel up to facing people, there are thousands and dogs and cats that could use your care via the [Humane Society of the United States](#). Local branches need someone to walk dogs and play with cats. They also need photographers to take photos of pets and create adoption profiles for them.
- Remind yourself that no matter how much it hurts, you must NOT take in the message of a gaslighter.
- Reframe the way you view a gaslighter. If you think about it, people who use gaslighting as a strategy are often very pathetic human beings who have poor self-control, poor self-regulation, and who must project their faults onto others. However, do not have sympathy for them because they are trying to victimize you.
- If a gaslighter cannot stop twisting your reality, buy a body camera for \$20 and tell the gaslighter you will be wearing it all the time to record and review conversations. Tell the gas-lighter that you will record all interactions and then you will bring these recorded interactions to a marriage and family therapist. Gaslighters thrive when they can hide; if you record all interactions and show them to a professional, a gaslighter will know the game is over.
- Avoid people who reinforce the narrative of a gaslighter. For example, a cheater/gaslighter might say: “If you gained/lost 20 pounds I would not have cheated.” If you confide this in a friend or family member and they say, “He has a point,” that person is not someone you can trust to help you stay in factual reality. Remember, cheating is a choice. There is nothing you can do to cause someone cheat on you since this behavior comes from within them.

### **A word recognizing and responding to gaslighting from Psych Central:**

1. Recognize the pattern of undermining behavior. Gaslighting only works when a victim isn’t aware of what’s going on. Once you become alert to the pattern, it will not affect you as much. You may be able to say to yourself, “Here we go again” and shrug it off.
2. Keep in mind that the gaslighting isn’t about you. It’s about the gaslighter’s need for control and power. Often the gaslighter is a very insecure human being. In order to

feel “equal”, they need to feel superior. In order to feel safe, they need to feel they have the upper hand. They have few other coping skills or other ways to negotiate differences. That doesn’t excuse the behavior. But knowing that may help you take it less personally while you decide whether to maintain the relationship.

3. Be aware that you are unlikely to be able to change the gaslighter – at least on your own. Gaslighting behavior is the only way gaslighters know to manage their world. For that reason, they are not likely to respond to rational appeals to change. It usually requires intensive therapy, done willingly, for a gaslighter to give it up.
4. Rethink whether the relationship is worth putting up with the constant attempts to chip away at your self-esteem. If the gaslighter is your boss or supervisor, start looking for another job. If the person is a family member or friend, consider how to put some distance between you. If it’s a significant other and you want to preserve the relationship, you will probably need to insist on couple’s counseling.
5. Develop your own support system. You need other people in your life who can confirm your reality and worth. Gaslighters often try to isolate their victims in order to stay in control. They often further manipulate their victims by repeatedly telling them that they are the only person who really loves and understands them. Don’t buy it. Spend time with friends and family. Check out your perceptions by talking to other people who witnessed what the gaslighter is calling into question.
6. Work on rebuilding your self-esteem. Remind yourself that you are a loveable and capable person, regardless of the opinion of the gaslighter. Help yourself regain perspective by reminding yourself of other times in your life when you have felt grounded, sane, and generally good about yourself. It may be helpful to keep a private journal in which you document events that the gaslighter is likely to contest. Record positive experiences and affirmations of your own worth as well.
7. Get professional help if you need it. Victims often lose confidence in their own thoughts and feelings and find themselves nervously double-checking themselves on a regular basis. Sometimes they sink into the depressive feelings of being helpless and hopeless. If you recognize yourself in this paragraph, you will probably need professional help to dig your way back out of the devastating effects of gaslighting. A therapist can offer you practical advice and support to help you recover.”





## How to Communicate with Gaslighters

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While the Psych Central article provides excellent insight into the mind of the cheating gaslighter and some things for you to do, I believe it's important to have some key phrases to interrupt the cycle of gaslighting. Cheaters who are gaslighting will be solely focused on pointing out your flaws. They will do so to assuage their guilt. But, they will also do so in hope that you don't question their affair.

Cheaters who gaslight will often spray "word bullets" at you and they will do it so quickly that you cannot keep track. They will do this to confuse you and cause you to lose your equilibrium. The phrases below are ONLY to be used to interrupt an incident of gaslighting. If they are used within the wrong context, they could cause you to be further emotionally abused. The goal is to get a gaslighter to stop spraying "word bullets" at you and to question their reality.

Once you question their reality, you can state factual behaviors and events that you do that are contrary to what they are saying. These are a tactic to interrupt gaslighting and I do NOT in any way encourage emotional abuse. Also, if your gas-lighter wants to keep blame-

shifting, keep asking them for examples. Then, be very confident, calm, and factual to show them that what they are saying is not true.

Of course, some of these phrases may cause a gaslighter to huff off. Let them be.

I would also recommend carrying your phone or a recording device with you when you ask these questions.

These questions are NOT tactics to help you relate to an abusive spouse; they are suggestions on how to *interrupt someone who is actively gas-lighting you*. If you want tactics on how to relate to an abusive spouse, you are on the wrong path. You don't relate to abusive spouses; you serve concrete consequences.

When you use these phrases, move your body in a way to have an open stance, make direct eye contact, and assume very assertive body language when a cheater is gaslighting you. You must establish yourself as at least an equal using body language. Once you have done that, here are some examples of key phrases to use to interrupt a gaslighter:

- Can you explain to me what you mean by (fill in the blank)?
- What factual information do you have that causes you to believe (fill in the blank)?
- Can you describe (fill in the blank) in concrete terms? We all know that nothing is "always or never." Can you be more specific?
- It's easy to see that I have done something to upset you; can you tell me more about it?
- How would you feel if I were telling you what you are telling me now?
- How would you feel if I called you a (fill in the blank?)
- How would you like to be treated? Can be specific about things I can do to make you happy?
- How can I communicate in ways that are better?
- Give me concrete steps that I need to take to improve. Please walk me through this step-by-step process, so that I can understand your viewpoint. (Then tell them it's a two-way street and tell them things they must stop doing.)
- Can you please make a list of behaviors that you would like for me to display and behaviors that you do not want me to display? It would be great if you could get started on that list now so that I can review it as soon as possible. I will post it on the refrigerator for constant reference. I will also make a list for you.
- Can you describe how you perceive me and can you give me factual behaviors that I do everyday that reinforce your perception of me?
- I am always happy to discuss things constructively and it would be great if you lowered your voice.
- Now is not the time to discuss (fill in the blank) so let's discuss this after (such and such a time).
- You are projecting your own behaviors on to me and I need you to stop now.

- Uh huh. Oh I see. Got it. Okay. Yeah. I was thinking of doing (fill in the blank) on Saturday. Would this interest you?

Finally, there will be times that you need to tell a gaslighter that the conversation is heading nowhere good. Tell the gaslighter that you will get in your car and take a drive for 20 minutes so that each of you have time to clear your head. Or, ask the gaslighter if he or she would like to have some alone time in his or her office/car.



## The Wear and Tear of Gaslighting

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Gaslighting takes a toll on a victim. If anyone is in an abusive relationship, I would ask that you seek a couple's counselor. I would also ask you – the betrayed spouse – to go see several different attorneys. There are always attorneys that give free consults and some that will work for free if you cannot afford steep fees.

If a cheater continues to use gaslighting as a mode of conversation, you must tell him or her upfront that you refuse to be treated this way. You need to take the hard line, be confident, state over and over again that your spouse chose to cheat, and set appropriate boundaries. Any abuser must endure excruciating pain before he or she stops.

I do not recommend staying in abusive relationships. However, if you are in one, you must do things that cause your abuser to feel pain from his or her abuse. Abusers often get a rush of power when they abuse others.

If that rush of power is turned into deep despair, a person will stop doing something. Every creature, whether human or animal, seeks the thing that makes them feel good and attempts to escape what makes them feel bad.

## **In Summary**

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This article only scratches the surface of the topic of recognizing and responding to gaslighting. Whole books have been written on this topic alone. The most important thing about gaslighting is to know it is happening to you and to find many different ways to keep your reality in tact.

Also, some people have told me there is no such thing as objective reality. (That's a gaslighters favorite phrase). You must remember that there is such a thing as objective reality and that it can be seen, measured, and repeated.

If someone breaks into your car and the entire thing is caught on video by a motion-activated camera, that is objective reality.

We can also look to mathematics as objective reality. Two plus two will always equal four. Someone can argue for the next million years that two plus two does not equal four and they will be wrong. They can repeat this delusion as much as they want and it will never be true.

When you are being gas-lit, keep taking yourself back to objective reality, such as: My spouse cheated, I did not. My spouse did something wrong, I did not. I did not do x, y, z, and I refuse to take the blame for actions I never committed.

Surround yourself by people who have your best interests in mind and who will serve as trusted "reality checkers." Don't talk to people who use this as a chance to criticize you or reinforce abuse.

## ***Hey readers....***

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Do you have any stories about being gas-lit?

What were the most outrageous things a gaslighting/cheating spouse said?

How did you stay tethered to reality or did you go through a phase where you believed you were the problem? If so, how did you get out of this mindset?

Does anyone have tips on how they effectively dealt with a gaslighter?

Where is your personal pain this week? What are you struggling with the most?

**Sources:**

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/7-ways-to-extinguish-gaslighting/>