

Coping with Gaslighting

Objective

To cope with the emotional abuse and manipulation of gaslighting.

What to Know

Gaslighting refers to someone causing you to question things you know to be true, leading to distress, self-doubt, and confusion. A form of emotional abuse, this manipulative technique can happen in any type of relationship. Sometimes it is hard to tell when you are being gaslit. Typically, the gaslighter will make you feel like you did or said something wrong, or that you cannot trust yourself. If someone is gaslighting you, responding appropriately and setting firm boundaries may help you gain back some control. Here are ten suggestions to cope.

1. Know how to recognize gaslighting. Common gaslighting phrases:

- You're making things up.
- That never happened.
- You're just too sensitive!
- You're being dramatic.
- You're blowing things out of proportion.

If you are being gaslit, you may start to experience lowered self-esteem and increased emotional dependence on the gaslighter. During conflicts, you might experience confusion, frustration, and circular arguments both aloud and in your mind. This can be exhausting and may affect your self-trust. Once you recognize when gaslighting is happening, you can start to break the cycle during conversations.

2. Stand firm and remain calm. Often, the gaslighter's goal is to avoid accountability while causing you to doubt yourself and become emotionally dependent on them. To combat confusion and upset, stand firm in your truth, and remain calm. Believe in yourself, your feelings, and what you know to be true. Own what you saw, heard, and felt. You may say things like, "I know what I saw," or, "Don't tell me how to feel; this is how I feel."

3. Write things down. It can be helpful to take notes as situations are happening. Journal about your experiences and review your notes over time. This will increase your confidence about what you know to be true.

4. Keep it simple. Know your purpose when entering conversations. What do you want to accomplish? Resolve? What are the main points you want to highlight? The gaslighter may lie, shift the story, blame, shame, and minimize how you feel. Remain centered versus being pulled in different directions.

5. Be willing to leave. As the gaslighter deflects, invalidates, and minimizes, practice self-validation and recognize when the conversation is circular and unfair. Give yourself permission to leave the conversation to maintain your perception of events.

6. Avoid trying to "outsmart" the gaslighter. The best option is to disengage. You may present evidence, videos, recordings, and so on, but the gaslighter will find ways to deflect, minimize, or deny. Once this begins, you might say:

- My feelings and reality are valid. I don't appreciate you telling me I'm being too sensitive.
- I'm allowed to explore these topics with you. Don't tell me I'm being dramatic.
- I'm stopping this conversation if you continue to minimize what I'm feeling.

7. Build a support system. Isolation and emotional dependence may be the result of gaslighting. If you remain quiet and minimize what is happening, it is more likely the seeds of doubt will grow. Validation from your support system can build your confidence. Share your experiences with safe people and lean on your support system to ground you into reality. It might be helpful to seek help from a mental health professional.

8. Ask them to explain a snide joke or unkind comment. To undermine confidence, gaslighters make mean comments they brush off as jokes or teasing. Question the gaslighter about why they think these comments are funny. Using a calm tone of voice, you might say, "Why do you joke about ____? What is funny about it?" or "Do you think your comments about ____ help our relationship? What are you hoping will happen?" Let them know you will not tolerate hurtful or unkind comments.

9. Express that you expect to be treated respectfully. Let them know you are aware of what they are doing, and you expect their behavior to improve if they want a relationship with you.

10. Refuse to argue. It is unlikely the gaslighter will admit you are right (even if you have evidence!). So, arguing may not be helpful – and might actually make you feel worse. Explain your side and change the topic. If they start to argue, leave the conversation. You might say, "I can see you're upset about ____, but arguing about it isn't productive. Let's both take a break to collect our thoughts." Withdrawing gives you more power.

This worksheet will help you cope with the emotional abuse and manipulation of gaslighting.

What to Do

Once you are aware of gaslighting, you can change the dynamic using the above ten suggestions. Over the next month, use the following chart to identify gaslighting situations (at work, with your parents or other family members, in your romantic relationship, and so on). Note the date, describe the situation, and write down who was involved. Describe what you did to cope with gaslighting.

Date	Situation	Who was involved?	Technique used

Did this activity help you cope with gaslighting? Why or why not?

If not, what else can you do?

Would you consider ending the relationship with the gaslighter? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
