



9 Common Gaslighting Phrases Abusers Use

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So what is gaslighting you might ask? When someone gaslights you, they talk to you, or act towards you in ways that get you to think you are crazy. They challenge and invalidate your thoughts and emotions to the point where you wonder if you are sane. Gaslighting is used by malignant narcissists, sociopaths and psychopaths to confuse and exhaust you to the point where you are too tired and traumatised to fight back. It is a deliberate attempt to erode your sense of reality, and thereby get you to doubt your sanity. It is manipulative and cruel.

The term gaslighting originated in a play where a husband drove his wife to insanity by causing her to question her experiences. In the movie *Gaslight*, the husband causes his wife to believe she is seeing and hearing things that are not real, so she can be institutionalized. He rearranges items in the house, uses flickering gas lights, and makes noises in the attic, and convinces her that she is imagining things so she feels no longer able to discern whether or not what she is seeing is real. Typical with gaslighting, he isolates her as well, so that she has no one to discuss her experiences with and validate them.

Gaslighting can take many forms from challenging your thoughts to challenging your lived experiences. The most common users are abusers who use gaslighting to try and avoid responsibility for their abuse. If they can get you and others to doubt your sanity, then you cannot accuse them of abusive actions because you are insane, and they can get away with their actions.

Some of the most commonly used phrases to gaslight victims are the following: They are meant to serve the purpose of demeaning and belittling the victim, as well as distorting their sense of reality.

1. *You are crazy / insane / irrational*

In other words – you are the problem. It is definitely not me. I will get you to question your own sanity so that you believe you are the one who needs help. Then no one will believe your accusations of abuse, and so I will not need to take responsibility for what I have done.

2. *You are so insecure*

Abusers enjoy planting doubt and insecurity in your mind. And they know that if something is said often enough, we take it in and we believe it. So, instead of questioning the abusers actions as being wrong, we start questioning ourselves as being not good enough.

3. *You are too sensitive / you are overreacting*

It's not that you are too sensitive, it is that the abuser is insensitive, unempathic, uncaring and cruel. And in fact the abuser enjoys putting you down to justify the abuse. Often victims of gaslighting ask themselves over and over every day if they are too sensitive. Once again, this is to take the focus off the abusers behaviour and get you to think you are the problem.



4. *It was just a joke / You have no sense of humour.*

I have had male and female clients relate to this. I have had clients told they are stupid, ugly, smell, etc, and then being told the person was just joking. Often “just jokes” happen early on in a relationship to test boundaries. Some statements are definitely not jokes. They are downright demeaning, especially as they are often said in the company of others.

5. *You need to let go. Why are you bringing this up?*

It is normal in a healthy relationship to bring up issues and things you are unhappy about. On the other hand, it is not such a good thing to keep bringing up things from the past that have been dealt with. This phrase is an example of how subtle gaslighters can be in undermining you. When you raise something that has upset you, they once again proceed to invalidate your feelings and experience and get you to think that something is abnormal about you.

6. *You are the one with all the problems.*

Narcissists and abusers will often try and make out that you are the narcissist or abuser. They are masters of projection and instead of acknowledging their own problems, they love to project them onto others. Instead of owning their issues, they dump their own qualities and behaviours onto their victims. And so the victim often comes to believe they are the ones at fault.

7. *I never said that. You are imagining things.*

They do this to get you to cast doubts on your experience of the abuse. If they can get you to doubt what happened, then they won't have to deal with it. This is one of the reasons why documenting evidence can be very helpful in situations of gaslighting. After being worn down by continual gaslighting, it can be quite easy for victims to start doubting what they hear and see.

8. *You will never find someone who loves you like I do.*

Just in case you should wise up and see what is really going on, and leave, the abuser wants to make sure you don't go. If you get out of this relationship and into another you may very clearly see just how abusive this relationship was. By convincing you that no one else could be as loving to you as they are, should you start to think about leaving, you will have second thoughts. You start thinking this is as good as it gets, and nothing else will be any different.

9. *If you leave me you won't find someone else because you are too old / emotional / unstable / difficult / unattractive*

I also have clients who have been told this. The abuser works on their belief system, feeding them thoughts to get them to believe if they end this relationship they will never find another one. And so once again, the victim stays, thinking this is all they can have.

If you are a victim of gaslighting you can suffer a wide variety of symptoms including flashbacks, anxiety, intrusive thoughts, diminished self-esteem, and in severe cases self-harm and suicidal ideation can occur. Get some professional help if you need it. Also surround yourself with supportive people and make sure you do not get too isolated. If you are doubting your experiences then discuss it with another person. Abusers usually try and isolate you so that you don't talk to others. In this way they can tell you what to think and believe. Outsiders can get you to see that what you think, and feel, and experience is true, and abusers don't like this.