Gaslighting Warning Signs

When you start doubting your own reality

What this is

Gaslighting is a form of manipulation that makes you doubt your memory, your judgement or even your sanity. It often happens slowly, so it can be hard to notice. It can happen with a partner, family member, friend, colleague, and sometimes in health care. Over time, many people start to feel confused, anxious, and as if they can't trust themselves.

Warning signs

Tactic	What it looks like	Examples
Denying	Says it didn't happen, or not the way you remember.	“I never said that.” “You're making things up.”
Changing the subject	Interrupts or distracts when you raise a concern.	“Let's not start this now. What's for supper?”
Stonewalling	Refuses to discuss it, or goes silent for hours or days.	Turns up the TV; leaves without a word.
Minimising	Makes your concern seem small or silly.	“It was a joke.” “You're overreacting.”
Turning it around	Accuses you of what they're doing.	“Maybe you're the one hiding something.”
Putting you down	Insults your memory, intelligence or sanity.	“You sound crazy.” “No one would believe you.”
Isolating	Tells you others are against you, or can't be trusted.	“Your friends don't really care about you.”
Sabotage and threats	Undermines you, or threatens consequences for not agreeing.	Hides your keys. “If you keep this up, I'll leave and take the kids.”

Medical gaslighting

Being told your symptoms are “just stress”, “normal period pain” or “in your head” without proper investigation is common, especially for women and people with conditions like endometriosis, PCOS, chronic pain and autoimmune illness. You know your body. A symptom diary, bringing a support person and asking for a second opinion are all reasonable.

Based on research on gaslighting (Sweet, 2019) and medical gaslighting (Sebring, 2021).

Is this happening to me?

Tick any that feel familiar.

- ☐ I often doubt my own memory of events
- ☐ I feel confused or "crazy" after talking to this person
- ☐ I've stopped trusting my own judgement
- ☐ I've pulled away from friends or family
- ☐ I apologise a lot, even when I'm not sure what I did wrong
- ☐ I make excuses for their behaviour to others
- ☐ I feel I can't do anything right
- ☐ I check and re-check what I say to avoid upsetting them

Ways to trust yourself again

- **Write it down.** Keep a private, dated record of what happened and what was said, somewhere safe.
- **Reality-check with someone you trust** who isn't involved.
- **Notice your body.** Confusion, dread or walking on eggshells are signals worth listening to.
- **You don't have to win the argument.** "I remember it differently" is enough.

What I've noticed, and what I'd like to talk about in session

If gaslighting comes with fear, control, threats or violence, it may be part of an abusive relationship. Please tell me. See T&W-BND-09 to BND-11. **Help is available, 24 hours, free:** GBV Command Centre 0800 428 428 (or dial *120*7867# for a call back) · Stop Gender Violence Helpline 0800 150 150 · Police 10111 · Emergency from a cellphone 112.

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