
UNDERSTAND THE DISTINCTION

When you begin to doubt yourself

A four-page guide to examining gaslighting concerns without abandoning evidence, context, or your own judgment.

Start with one interaction. You do not need to decide what the entire relationship means before looking carefully at something that happened.

The concern is the pattern, not a phrase.

Gaslighting concerns manipulation that erodes confidence in your perception, memory, or judgment. A disagreement or an inaccurate recollection does not, by itself, establish that pattern. Being confused deserves attention; the feeling alone does not establish its cause.

Four distinctions worth keeping

Disagreement. Different accounts can be examined. Ask whether relevant information can be considered and errors acknowledged.

Mistaken memory. A detail may be wrong. Mark uncertainty rather than treating recall as an exact recording.

Lying or concealment. Misrepresentation can be serious without a wider attack on your ability to judge reality.

A concerning pattern. Events are repeatedly denied or distorted while your credibility is attacked and the original concern goes unanswered.

Use the guide to ask better questions.

Page 2 separates the event from the explanation. Page 3 examines repetition, consequences, and options. Page 4 shows how the approach works. There is no score, diagnostic cutoff, or verdict about another person.

Privacy and safety: Keep a copy only if doing so is safe. Shared devices, cloud storage, and printed notes may be accessible to others. Do not record identifying details you do not need. If monitoring, threats, or retaliation are concerns, seek confidential, situation-specific support before using or sharing the guide.

SEPARATE THE EVENT FROM THE EXPLANATION

One interaction, carefully recorded

Print and write, or type in the fields using a PDF reader. Blank fields are not transmitted to the Institute. Your PDF app may save or sync completed copies.

When did it happen, and when am I writing this?

Separate the event date from the date of this note. Approximate dates are acceptable.

What was said or done?

Use an exact quote only if you are confident of the wording. Otherwise say "approximately."

What supports my account, and what is uncertain?

Distinguish recollection, a message, a document, and another person's account. Use only information you may access.

What do I think it means?

Label your interpretation as an interpretation. What other explanation deserves consideration?

What information would strengthen or weaken my interpretation?

Be specific. What could lead you to correct your account or change your next step?

A note is a record of your account, not independent proof. Keep the original date if you later add or correct something. You do not need documentation for your concern to deserve support.

EXAMINE THE PATTERN AND CHOOSE A STEP

From uncertainty to a practical choice

You can address conduct or decline a commitment without proving a personality trait or persuading someone to accept a label.

What has happened more than once?

List specific examples if available. An incident and a recurring pattern support different conclusions.

What happens when a specific discrepancy is raised?

Is the information considered? Does the account change? Is the issue replaced by an attack on your credibility?

What is the effect on my functioning and freedom to decide?

Consider sleep, concentration, relationships, access to support, and important decisions.

Who could offer a fair, informed, and confidential perspective?

Choose someone who can consider alternatives rather than simply confirm your conclusion.

What is one proportionate next step, and when will I review it?

For example: clarify an agreement, pause a commitment, obtain independent information, or seek individual support.

Before acting: Could confrontation, taking notes, or showing the record increase risk? If there are threats, monitoring, coercion, or fear of retaliation, prioritize confidential specialist support. This worksheet is not a safety plan. For immediate danger, contact local emergency services.

A WORKED EXAMPLE AND FURTHER READING

Stay specific. Keep room to correct.

The following example is fictional and is not drawn from a patient account.

The event

Two partners agree by message to discuss a substantial purchase. One makes the purchase, then denies the agreement and says the other partner is imagining things.

What is supported

The message records an agreement. It does not establish the purchaser's motives or everything about the relationship.

What remains open

Was the agreement misunderstood? Was an important message missed? Is this an isolated event or part of repeated denial and discrediting?

A possible next step, if safe

"The message records the agreement. I want to discuss what happened to it." Consider the response and the practical consequences. You do not have to win an argument about the label.

Read, reflect, or seek individual assistance

Read the full article at darktriadinstitute.com/gaslighting-in-relationships. If you need assistance with your own circumstances, you are welcome to contact Dr. Dell through drmarkdell.com. The practice website describes services and consultation inquiries.

Research and limits

This original educational guide is not a validated assessment, a diagnosis, or a treatment protocol. Examples and prompts are practical applications, not findings that a study tested this worksheet. Individual circumstances and safety require individual consideration.

Klein, Li & Wood (2023). A qualitative analysis of gaslighting in romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 30, 1316-1340.

Sweet (2019). The sociology of gaslighting. *American Sociological Review*, 84, 851-875.

March et al. (2025; online 2023). "It's all in your head": Personality traits and gaslighting tactics in intimate relationships. *Journal of Family Violence*, 40, 259-268.

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